

PEOPLE'S MOVEMENTS
**Spiritual Sites as Sources of Social Transformation:
Lessons from Svadhyaya**
GUJARAT

Makarand Paranjape

Introduction

I must start with my uneasy relationship with the academy. What are its features and limitations as I see them? The chief feature of the Indian academy is its legacy of colonialism. The chief features of such a legacy are: 1. Our subservience to western knowledge systems; and 2. Our departure from traditional knowledge systems. Even at its best, our academics functions through a disassociation of thought and action, creating ideologues, not exemplars. In a sub-imperial system such as ours academics is often counterproductive and self-serving. The academic system is thus a part of the problem, not a part of the solution. Without exposing and contesting the dominant discourse of Indian academics, therefore, no useful intervention, even in the world of ideas can be made.

To put it simply, I see basically two kinds of academics in India. One is dharmic and the other is adharmic. I am using the terms advisedly, because dharma requires not just the neutrality of liberalism, but a positive allegiance and adherence. A dharmic outlook is one that is informed by a sense of a cosmic moral order, an order that includes the community and the individual. I believe that India is not a secular society but a dharmic society. Therefore, Indian academics cannot be secular; it has to be dharmic. I am willing to concede that a secular outlook can also be conducive to dharma, but that is only possible if the practitioner has exceptional integrity.

So, there are two kinds of academic discourses in India: one accepts and perpetuates the agenda of the West, while the other tries to alter and resist it according to our own needs; one is colonized, the other is anti-colonial; one modern, the other is traditional; one is Euro centric the other indegenist; and so on. To deny the internal struggle in Indian academics between two such discourses, to pretend that all of us belong to the same discourse, or worse, to claim that only one discourse exists in fact, is to shut out dialogue. It also implies that we take neither ourselves nor academics seriously. I am afraid a great change is about to

sweep through Indian academics. If we are unable to prove our utility to society, we will be left behind. The Time Spirit beckons us, once again, to join the national mainstream, to soil our hands if necessary with the concerns and needs of common people. We can no longer afford to remain complacent in our ivory towers, disregarding the daily realities which are staring us in our faces.

Now what is the sum total of this reality that is staring us in our faces? Amazingly, it is a truth accepted by all shades of opinion in the Indian political spectrum. The Left endorses it as does the extreme Right. If the centrist parties, especially the Congress, are tardy in acknowledging it, that is only because of their own complicity and responsibility. Simply speaking, the truth is that there is something terribly amiss in the project of Independent India. In other words, the whole country is gradually but surely rejecting the belief that the gigantic mass movement which culminated with the Independence of India produced the society that it had envisaged and promised. On the contrary, freedom was achieved, but the society which this freedom was meant to produce is yet to be achieved. In a word, we have failed. We have failed not only our forefathers who sacrificed themselves so that this new India would be created, we have failed not only the present generations whose lives have not improved as much as they should have, but we will also have failed our descendents if we don't do something about the sorry state of affairs.

The first one to realize this failure of our dreams was the so-called founder of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi himself. On the very day that India was keeping its tryst with destiny in a glittering ceremony at the Viceroy's Palace in New Delhi, Gandhi was keeping another tryst with destiny at Calcutta. While Nehru and his descendants became the symbols and beneficiaries of the transfer of power, the lonely Mahatma was continuing the other struggle to bring about Purna Svaraj. In a sense, as Rajiv Vohra, so eloquently put it in a conversation with me, at the very dawn of Independence, we thus see two Indias, one centred in Delhi, representing the power and authority of the state, the other in every little village and locality of India, representing the unfinished agenda of the independence movement.

This struggle of the other India will never cease, because it is not merely a political or social struggle, but a moral and spiritual one. It is the struggle, in a sense, of the human race itself to perfect itself and the world it inhabits. That is the quest of the metaphysical India, the India which, to use Raja Rao's wise saw, is not just a *desa*, but a *darsana*. However, we must always remember that the *desa* depends on the *darsana*; the former may or may not always reflect the latter, but without the latter, the former has no meaningful existence.

The struggle to free India is not yet over. It is an ongoing one. In fact, it is a struggle to which the time has come to dedicate ourselves in large numbers. Every society will find ways and means of preserving itself. If the official and available channels of finding satisfaction--the state, the political system, the bureaucracy, and so on--fail, then they will look elsewhere. They will find alternatives. They will raise new leaders who will intervene directly. Therefore, as we prepare to enter the 21st century, I see before this country a renewed challenge to assert its nation soul, to put out its powers, not only for its preservation, but for the creation of a society which is in consonance with its nature.

This is where the topic I have chosen becomes relevant. It is my belief that the impetus for social transformation in India comes from its religious and spiritual traditions. Swami Vivekananda said this a hundred years back when he said that if you want to act on India, to change it, you have to act on its religion. Religion is the keynote. This idea is repeated by Gandhi and Aurobindo too. In fact, almost all the major reform movements of the nineteenth century drew their inspiration from religion or acted on religion. Raja Rammohun Roy, Dayanand Saraswati, Sri Ramakrishna--were all religious leaders. Even the Indian National Congress was an offshoot of the Theosophical Movement. Further back in Indian history, again and again we see that religion is the source of social transformation. The whole Bhakti movement is an example. To the challenge of Islam, India responded with a new religion--Sikhism. To the challenge of the West, India responded with modern Hinduism. Both Islam and Christianity have found a unique opportunity in India to preserve their spiritual heritage. Their coming to India was necessary for their own survival. Similarly, if modern science has a hope anywhere, it is in India, where it can be spiritualized and tamed of its inherent violence. Only a science wedded to ahimsa can serve and save the world.

What I have been suggesting throughout is that it is Sanatana Dharma, that reservoir of infinite capacity, which furnishes us the wherewithal to alter our social and political institutions. Needless to say, Sanatana Dharma is not to be equated with any sect or religion, but is the source of them all. It consists of sruti and smriti, the revelations and scriptures of all races and peoples of this earth. Even secular enlightenment, preaching the gospel of liberty, equality, and fraternity, only embellishes Sanatana dharma. I would not like to enter into a long discussion on the problems of defining Sanatana Dharma. I consider it to be a non-dual category, without an other. It is, in fact, the way to the Absolute, which is nothing other than the Reality, the ground of all Being. It is my belief that it is Sanatana Dharma which must be tapped if we wish to bring

about social transformation. Mahatma Gandhi's was the prime example in this century of how Sanatana Dharma could be used to bring about a political and social revolution.

The rest of my paper is an attempt to illustrate this with reference to Svadhyaya, a mass movement inspired by the teachings of Pandurang Sastri Athavle. I will focus on how Svadhyaya tackles three of our most intractable social problems: caste, religion, and gender inequality. The empowerment that results from Svadhyaya is both real and radical, yet it is qualitatively different from what is expected or produced by modern methods.

The Challenge of Svadhyaya

I must admit at the outset that, for somewhat self-contradictory reasons, it is not easy for me to write about Svadhyaya. I experience this difficulty because, on the one hand, I have so much to say and on the other hand, because the experience has been so overpowering that I have been silenced.

Let me address the first difficulty briefly. I went with a large group of distinguished people on a Prayog Darshan from 6-11 August 1996. This was the Ahmedabad-Veraval-Rajkot-Bombay circuit, with trips to Bhangi and Vaghri chawls, to two Amritalayam villages, to a fisherfolks' basti, to a Shri Darshanam, Nirmal Neer, Vruksh Mandir, to Bhav Nirjhar and Tatvajanana Vidyapeeth, and finally to Dadaji's pravachan at Madhav Bagh, Khetwadi. Because all of us went through a similar experience, our observations and conclusions are bound to be similar. So, there is the danger of repeating what several others have already said and written; conversely, there is the fear of leaving out important insights which one may have had. Like others, I have taken copious notes, accumulating quite a bit of material. There is thus an additional organizational problem: what to include, what to leave out; what to emphasize, what to overlook; how to structure this account; and so on. The second difficulty is a bit harder to tackle. It does not have to do only with my responses and reactions to the Prayog Darshan alone, but with the entire process of my understanding of Svadhyaya. I shall have to speak about this process briefly in order to clarify my point.

Though I had heard about it earlier, I was formally introduced to Svadhyaya in seminar which Rajiv Vohra had organized in Rajendra Bhavan, on 17 February 1996. Subsequently, I organized two meetings on Svadhyaya at IIT, Delhi, where I teach. The first was a showing of Shyam Benegal's Antarnad, followed by a discussion which Rajiv Vohra led. The second was a Bhakti Pheri meeting in which a small group of IITians was addressed by Ramdas Bhai, Shri Mehra, and Dr. Raman

Srivastava. Finally, on the 20th of March, I had the good fortune of travelling to Kurukshetra to witness the historical Svadhyaya abhinandan gathering, which culminated in Dadaji's address to a crowd of over nearly 1 lakh people.

I must clarify that contrary to what the above chronology may suggest, my immersion in Svadhyaya was not gradual and incremental. Frankly, from the very first meeting at Rajendra Bhavan, I felt that I was no stranger to the principles, premises, or objectives of Svadhyaya. Without knowing anything about Svadhyaya, I was already, to use a recently coined phrase, a "co-Svadhyayi." I shared the cultural, civilizational, philosophical outlook of Svadhyaya. I was in agreement with its aims and objectives. And I was also attracted to its methods. I quickly realized that one of the things that made Svadhyaya so unique and so effective was that it offered a way of translating theory into practice. Kriti-bhakti, by its very definition implied a devotion, which was expressed through action. Without such a translation, there could be no Svadhyaya movement.

During the discussions at Rajendra Bhavan it became clear to me that reducing Svadhyaya to a topic of academic debate was futile and counterproductive. It was better to become a Svadhyayi-at whatever level--or to keep quiet. Mere intellectual analysis would be self-serving, adding yet another topic to the endless chain of ideas with which we have been habituated to playing. Thus, cocooned and separated from society, our intellectual class perpetuates its irrelevance to the burning problems of our society. Itself unable to act, it mesmerises its adherents into a similar state of turpitude and inactivity. What became clear was that there was something wrong with us, the Indian intellectuals, not with Svadhyaya. If so, I become even more self-conscious as I write this. What is the use of this essay? Is it merely to praise Svadhyaya, to express my admiration for its amazing results? I am sure others have done so and will continue to do so equally effectively. If, on the other hand, I indulge in some armchair criticism without any actual practice either of Svadhyaya itself or of a similar creative devotion, of what use is my criticism? I am reminded of a story that I once heard about Mahatma Gandhi. A lady came to him, requesting him to tell her son not to eat too much sugar. Gandhiji paused for a moment and asked her to return after a few days. When she came back with her son, Gandhiji told the latter not to eat sugar. The mother was taken aback. She had expected the Mahatma to say something more profound. "If this is what you wanted to say, why didn't you say it the first time itself?" she asked. Gandhiji replied, "But then I used to eat sugar myself. In the intervening days, I have given it up. So now I can tell your son not to eat sugar." I

think it was Gandhiji who emphasized the well-known proverb, "An ounce of practice is worth more than a ton of precept."

We intellectuals have been totally divorced from any practice. We preach one thing and practice something else. There is no consistency in our *achar*, *vichar*, and *anubhav*. If so, then of what use is our praise or criticism of *Svadhya*, which is built upon the solid foundations of silent, devoted, and disciplined work? I think it is best to be silent, best to say nothing at all-but, for a change, to do something. I still suffer from this sense of guilt and anxiety, but I am consoling myself by thinking that even writing is doing something. If I can write this article as an act of faith, by giving my time and talent to a good cause, perhaps it will give some benefit both to myself and to my readers. Without this spirit of self-inquiry and self-giving, I know full well that this article itself will be wasteful and useless. This, then, is my first lesson and I do hope I have learnt it well. The rest of the essay will focus on lessons learned from specific encounters with *Svadhya*.

The Rajendra Bhavan Discussion

What impressed me most that day was the brief presentation by Dr. Gopal Krishna. Here was a man steeped in the Western traditions, educated abroad, living in Oxford, a self-confessed agnostic, finally admitting that using one's native cultural resources was the only way to bring about social change. When it comes to the most important job of self-recovery and self-renewal, scientific, secular, and rationalistic modernity become silent. They have no answers. They are, in fact, totally hostile to our civilizational orientation. We believe that (wo)man is a spiritual being; they believe that (s)he is a primarily a body. Their psychology may concede other levels, such as the emotional, the intellectual, even the unconscious, but when it comes to the spiritual, they are quiet. *Svadhya*, thus, is nothing but a process of self-acknowledgement. We must understand and accept who we are; we must undertake the journey to discover our own nature.

The problem with the intellectual class is that it looks upon all relationships in terms of power. But the renewal of India needs all kinds of people--farmers, shopkeepers, carpenters, fisherfolk, sweepers, vegetable sellers, domestic servants, daily wage earners, blue collar workers--and the intellectuals, the masters of the word. That which binds all these by a common thread of self-renewal is *Svadhya*. *Svadhya* is a way of bringing diverse people together in such a manner that they learn from each other and share each others' talents. They also relate to one another in an affectionate, familial manner, thereby giving them a sense of belonging, togetherness, and community. Where political processes fail and where *Svadhya* succeeds is precisely this: the

former concentrate on external changes, while Svadhyaya brings about inner transformation. What human beings need is dignity and recognition which can only come from genuine mutuality and caring, not just from some political programmes of social justice.

The Kurukshetra Trip

Never in my life had I seen such a large group of people assembled together for a spiritual cause. I have never been to the Kumbh Mela nor to a very large political rally. The closest I had come to this kind of crowd was at Satya Sai Baba's birthday celebrations in Puttaparthi. But here, from near the dias, one could see an undivided and unhindered sea of humanity. What is more they were totally disciplined. The total numbers must have been close to one lakh. All of them had come on their own, spending their own money, paying for their own tickets. On the way, I would see families from distant places enjoying the outing. There was a carnivalesque atmosphere. The sheer efficiency of Svadhyaya is stupendous. This I have noticed time and time again. The people in charge are superb managers. Because the whole task force consists of volunteers, there is no motivation problem. The communication systems are incredible; the speed with which orders are conveyed and obeyed is amazing. Management schools ought to teach the Svadhyaya method of cooperation. Indeed, I would encounter this efficiency again and again. The way the Prayog Darshan was organized only confirmed my initial observation. Efficiency, moreover, enhances pride and self-esteem especially in an otherwise totally inefficient system like ours.

On the way back, sitting in the bus with Professor Narayan Seth, former Director of IIM-Ahmedabad, I suddenly understood how the great social movements in the past--things that I had merely read about in books--must have happened. This very land had been blessed with so many such movements; how many great men and women had trodden this path before. What my textbooks had mentioned had never seemed as real as today, where before my very eyes I had seen a large mass of people mobilised for a Divine cause. I felt deeply moved and privileged. My life would have been so much the poorer if I hadn't witnessed the magic of Svadhyaya in action. I now felt a sense of relief and confidence: yes, anything is possible. God has not turned his back on humanity. We can still save ourselves. This must have been how Gandhi-ji had brought people together, how the Buddha must have functioned. And before, between, and after them so many thousands upon thousands of social, spiritual, and political movements must have worked along similar lines. All my life I had been seeking the flowing river of enlightenment, not just within myself, but outside too. I had thought that it could only be found within. But now I know that I could also run outward, bringing people together, creating a new social order.

The Prayog Darshan: Arrival

It was raining when we reached Ahmedabad. My co-passenger said that when he had called home from Delhi, they told him to postpone his arrival. There was practically no transport available. But the Svadhyayis were well prepared. A series of cars and jeeps had lined up to await our arrival. We were shepherded through the dark and wet streets of Ahmedabad to a comfortable country club. I was impressed not just by the unfailing courtesy and cordiality of these volunteers, but by their unassuming friendliness. Later, we were taken to one of our hosts' houses for dinner. We ate there throughout our stay. What delicious food! The whole family looked after us, including the children. Svadhyaya knits families together.

Bhavlakshis and Others

The next morning, we went to Ramdev Pura, a chawl near Jawahar Chowk. This was a settlement of the Bhangis, the outcastes among the outcastes. In Svadhyayi parlance, they are not known as Harijans but as bhavlakshis--those who wish to be esteemed. We sat together in the house of Ramesh Bhai before reassembling at their community centre. The house was clean, full of shining brass utensils. The old father of Ramesh Bhai had tears in his eyes as Samdhong Rimpoche-ji, a senior Buddhist Lama, the Head of the Tibetan Parliament in Exile, and the Director of the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, stepped into his home. It was the miracle of Svadhyaya that had brought all these distinguished people to his home.

We heard what was to become a familiar refrain. Before Svadhyaya, this used to be like most other untouchable colonies--filthy, impoverished, neglected; the residents had a low self esteem; drinking, gambling, wife-beating were rampant; very few children went to school; though the reservation policy had ensured jobs for some, there was terrible social discrimination and contempt for these people. After Svadhyaya, everything changed. The drinking and wife-beating stopped, as did the petty quarrels. Marriage customs were reformed; superstitions which cost a lot of money were abandoned; children started going to school; the houses become clean and tidy; every child in the basti learned Sanskrit shlokas. In the community centre, I found a very high degree of awareness. Ramesh bhai said that after becoming Svadhyayis all of them had got a lot of respect. The savarna Svadhyayis had visited their homes, invited them to their own houses, fed them, treated them with respect. It is this attention, caring, and respect that had reintegrated them into society. Earlier they were filled with hatred and anguish, now they were loving and happy. What is more, they felt sorry for those who still treated them like untouchables, those savarnas who had not yet been touched

by social reform. "I know I am better off than such people," Ramesh Bhai said simply, "I can only feel pity for them."

For the first time in my life I heard a man call himself a Bhangi (scavenger) with unselfconscious pride. "I am a Bhangi, but I also do the work of a Brahmin. A Brahmin is one who spreads knowledge, sanskars; so I too am a Brahmin. I go on Bhakti pheris to spread the liberating message of Svadhyaya. So I am a Bhangi-Brahmin." Later, an untouchable Doctor told us how he had vowed to kill at least ten upper-caste Hindus. That, he thought, would be the only way to take revenge on those who had oppressed them for so long. But now, after the enlightening touch of Svadhyaya, the same man said that he would not claim any reservation for his son because he did not feel the need for any special privileges or protections. "Dadaji has taught us not to beg, not to accept anyone's leftovers, not to take what doesn't belong to us, what we haven't earned. I no longer need handouts."

Svadhyayis feel that such a change should come voluntarily. They feel that reservations, though necessary, are not enough. What the Dalits need is warmth, human sympathy, attention, love, respect--not just economic or political sops. It is only in Svadhyaya that I saw the solution to one of our most intractable problems: the continued oppression of the Dalits and the counter-casteism unleashed in their name by the politicians. Both extremes mirror each other; both divide society and threaten to rend the national fabric. Only in Svadhyaya did I see a Bhangi without the least trace of an inferiority complex, calling himself as such. Only in Svadhyaya did I see a Dalit declare that he was a Brahmin. Only in Svadhyaya did I see a Scheduled Caste man declaring that he no longer needed reservations. Only Svadhyaya can help us preserve our cultural diversity without giving up our desire for upward mobility. The cultural traditions of an untouchable enrich our society as much as that of a Brahmin. Such, after all, was Gandhiji's idea of varna: diversity, occupational security, self-respect, without stratification or inequality. In fact, in Svadhyaya we see a combination of the Ambedkarite drive for self-respect combined with a Gandhian respect compassion even for one's oppressors.

The two standard ways of opposing caste discriminations are through the counter-violence and hatred of caste-based politics or through a politics of reservations and compensations. But the method of Svadhyaya, without succumbing to either pitfall, achieves greater results. We found a similar experience in a Vaghri village on the outskirts of Ahmedabad. The Vaghris or Devi-Pujaks are another despised tribe of India. Again, we found a similar uprising among them. Ranjit Bhai, of Jawahar Nagar, summed up the impact of Svadhyaya:

"Earlier we were like animals, living outside the village, drinking, fighting, cursing; but now we are flowing in the current of prem bhav. Today, far from being a nuisance to society, we have become its leaders and sustainers." Later, in Veraval, we went to a community of fisher-folk, where again, we witnessed a self-reliant, proud society being built up. Svadhyaya, by emphasizing the indwelling Divinity in every human being gives a message of hope and strength to the most despised and abandoned sections of our society. The empowerment that comes with Svadhyaya is not external; it is not brought about by economic or social props. It is not based on doles and subsidies given by the Government. Svadhyaya transforms a person's self-concept: from seeing himself as helpless and weak, a person begins to see himself as self-sufficient and strong. Communities which have been alienated from society are reintegrated. People who could not read or write today recite Vedic hymns. Their faces shine with pride as they intone these mantras; they wish to tell the world that they too are children of the Rishis and the Seers of Aryavrata. In Kajli village, near Veraval, we saw how Svadhyaya had tackled another one of our almost intractable problems: the communal canker. This village had 250 harijan families, 100 muslim families, and 100 Karari Rajput families, all living together in harmony. This village was an Amritalayam, which means that more than 80% of its inhabitants were Svadhyayis. What was the secret of their communal harmony? It was, we discovered, not just sarva dharma samabhav, Vinoba's message, but sarva dharma sveekar--the acceptance of all faiths. Whensupporters of the Ramjanmabhoomi movement came to this village to collect money and volunteers, they were politely told that the villagers would built both a Ram temple and a mosque in the village itself. There was no need to get involved in a temple-mosque conflict far away. The co-existence of a temple and mosque in Kajli was the best defence against the communal violence unleashed in the wake of the destruction of the Babri Masjid.

Salim Bhai, the Secretary of the Muslim amaat, offered his views on how to ensure peace and amity between the two communities: "No conversion; mutual respect, tolerance; and the Loknath Amritalayam, where people of all faiths can gather together." Before Svadhyaya, the two communities were separate, neither eating nor drinking for each other's houses; now they even worshipped together. We asked Salim Bhai if he, as a Muslim, minded coming to the Amritalayam which had photographs of Hindu gods and of Dadaji. Wasn't idolatory prohibited in Islam? He did not wish to get involved in doctrinal controversies, but insisted instead that there should be mutual tolerance and that the core of both faiths was similar: both stressed a belief in God and the living of a virtuous life. In effect, the Muslims of Kajli had openly accepted that Hindus would, unlike them, continue to worship idols, but that did not

mean that the latter were non-believers or Kafirs. There need be no conflict between members of different communities; after all the basis of Indian culture was pluralism.

Maulana Wahiduddin got up to speak at the end of this session. He said that Svadhyaya was the hope for the new India, an India whose foundations had been laid by the freedom struggle, but whose promise had been belied by the post-Independence developments. He felt that he was a Svadhyayi himself. Later, he worshipped in the mosque at Kajli, while many of us, heads covered, watched silently. What was most astounding was how, later, Maulana Saheb did his namaz in one of the Svadhyayi temples during our tour. True, he did not face the photographs of the Hindu Gods, but instead faced Mecca like a true Muslim; yet this was the first time I had ever seen a Muslim offer prayers in a Hindu house of worship. This was one of the miracles that I had seen during my trip. Now, whenever anyone told me that Muslims were fanatical and intolerant, I would point out how I had seen, with my own eyes, a learned and pious Muslim Maulana offering prayers in a Hindu temple. Not only has Svadhyaya succeeded in empowering Dalits and in tackling the so-called minority problem, wherever it has spread, it has also raised the status of women. I felt this most keenly at Shanti Para, a village in Saurashtra. At the Amritalayam, the whole village had gathered. There, in front of over 500 people, Rudi Ben, an illiterate, rustic housewife stood up to demonstrate the extent of her empowerment and emancipation. She spoke out clearly and fearlessly, explaining exactly how Svadhyaya had changed her life, reformed her family. Earlier, women from the village were more or less confined to the house. They were not educated. Their functions were confined to domestic chores. After Svadhyaya, the village women have become community leaders, with an equal voice in determining how they want their lives to be run. As one rural woman summed it up, "Svadhyaya nahin, to gaurav nahin"--there is no respect without Svadhyaya.

True, Svadhyaya, is not like Western feminism, or its desi versions. It preaches neither the equality of woman, nor the upliftment of women per se. Rather, it emphasizes the value of cooperation in every family and in the whole community itself. It has special programmes for women which raise their consciousness without being problem or issue based. Because of Svadhyaya, the status of women has not only risen greatly within the family and in society, but women also go out on Bhakti pheris. They accompany their husbands in most of the important activities. They have learned not only to read and write, but also to teach, to spread the message of Svadhyaya. The evil of dowry have been eradicated in Svadhyayi families. Mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, considered natural enemies, have learned to not just to coexist, but to

love and support each other. These changes have come about through innovative programmes such as saas-bahu ka milan or sakhi milan. All the conventional relationships are idealised; Svadhyaya builds up communities by revitalizing relationships.

Svadhyaya has not only succeeded in empowering Dalits, minorities, and women, but it has helped rebuild entire communities. The best example of this was Shanti Para itself. It felt like heaven--a self-reliant, highly enlightened village, made up of upright, responsible, and caring individuals. It was a village which used to be plagued with politics earlier; now, there was no need here even for elections. The leader was chosen by common consent. The man in question told us that it was with great reluctance that he had accepted the charge of Sarpanch. He knew it would be a thankless job, but he had agreed only out of a sense of serving the community. How did the change in him come about? He said that when Krishna (God) was his hriday samrat (the emperor of his heart), he felt no need to seek power. After all, we seek external recognition only when we feel impoverished inside. Svadhyaya makes each person feel wealth within, thus reducing his or her craving from external rewards. In fact, the trikal sandhya, the triurnal prayer, is based precisely on such a notion of self-renewal. One becomes by renewing one's contact with the in-dwelling God.

There was no poverty in this village. The standard of the health care was quite high. After Svadhyaya, the village had been cleaned up, the open drains sealed; malaria, which had earlier been a killer, had been nearly eradicated. The local doctor spoke of how impressed he was with the community spirit. In fact, he himself became a Svadhyayi after seeing how progressive these villagers were. Wells had been recharged, old water bodies repaired. Nearly every house had a soak-pit. When a cyclone had devastated the power lines, the villagers put up the poles and wires themselves, merely requesting the Electricity Board to switch the current on. This was the kind of village in which a farmer would have an M.A. in Philosophy. The villagers had planted over 16,000 trees--not just planted them, but nurtured them. The method was simple: each person adopted a certain number of trees and took full responsibility for raising them. Krishna broke the pots of butter and milk so that produce of Gokul did not go the Mathura. The local youth could eat it and become strong. Similarly, Shanti Para had a Gorus Kendra, another brilliant idea of Dadaji's, whereby the farmer sold his milk to a cooperative in the village from which all the other villagers could get pure and unadulterated milk. This enhances the status of the cow, which was earlier thought of merely as a source of money and thus tortured. It also ensures that the profit from the centre was the prasad of God. Such a village, to my mind, was exactly what Gandhi might have had in mind

when he had spoken of Gram Svaraj: It will have cottages with sufficient light and ventilation, built of a material obtainable within a radius of five miles of it. The cottages will have courtyards enabling householders to plant vegetables for domestic use and to free of all avoidable dust. It will have wells according to its needs and accessible to all. It will have house of worship for all, also a common meeting place, a village common for grazing its cattle, a co-operative dairy, primary and secondary schools in which industrial education will be the central fact, and it will have Panchayats for settling disputes. It will produce its own grains, vegetables and fruit, and its own Khadi. This is roughly my idea of a model village.... (Harijan 9 January 1937). Perhaps, Shanti Para is far more urban and modern than Gandhi imagined an Indian village to be, but has the kind of ideal community that he envisaged.

Notable Svadhyayi Experiments: Bhav Nirjhar

Located in a spacious campus on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, Bhav Nirjhar was an educational institution with a difference. Here boys from reasonable well-off rural families were trained to become farmer-philosophers. They came here after schooling in similar, Svadhyayi institutions, and after "graduation," would return to the villages. No degrees would be awarded. With one stroke, the whole lure of salaried jobs in the city was eliminated, as was the problem of the drain of human resources from our villages. Dadaji started these institutions so that a different kind of human being could be created, someone who is not a slave of degrees and diplomas, someone who hasn't received a lopsided and practically irrelevant education. What a radical break it is from the competitive, examination-oriented, colonial education system in which we are all trapped. All the ills of the present system--the false disciplinary hierarchies, the soul-denying, culturally alienation kind of knowledge, the obsession with marks and grades, cheating and copying, tutorial colleges, tuitions, and so on--have been eliminated in this alternative system. Here students get a rounded, integrated, vocational education. Besides agricultural sciences and training in cottage industries, they also do yoga and philosophy. The emphasis is on sanskar more than shiksha. Those who wish to study further, can go to Tatvajnana Vidyapeeth in Thane, where Dadaji himself supervises the teaching of Comparative Philosophy, Indian Culture and Civilization, and other such topics.

Yogeshwar Krishi, Shri Darshanam, Vruksh Mandir, etc. All these are ways of creating apaurushiya Lakshmi or impersonal wealth. Cooperative farming in which volunteers from one or several villages participate, not as farmers, but as pujaris, or worshippers, helps create wealth which belongs to the entire community. This wealth is then used to help and support those who are most needy, yet it is not seen as

charity or dole. It is the *prasad* of the worshipful work of the whole community and can therefore be given and accepted in a manner as impersonal as it was created. *Yogeshwar Krishi* is confined to one village; *Shri Darshanam* is the combined effort of 15-20 villages; while a *Vruksh Mandir* involves an even greater number. The sizes of the communes vary, ranging from two or three acres in a *Yogeshwar Krishi*, to dozens of acres in *Shri Darshanams* and *Vruksh Mandirs*.

The idea behind these experiments is not just to produce wealth and profits; in fact, during our visit to the *Vruksh Mandir* near *Rajkot*, we were told that the costs almost equal the proceeds. The main purpose behind these schemes is to bring people together. Several families work on these farms turn by turn. They stay there for two or three nights, work together, study together, and listen to each other. People of different villages come closer together through such meetings. There are spin-offs like *Gaon Milans*, in which entire villages visit each other. The first village may go during *Dassara*, while the hosts may return the visit during *Diwali*. In this manner, whole communities get to know each other.

Underlying *Svadhyaya* is the notion that all human beings are related by the indwelling God within each of us. There is a repeated experience and reinforcement of this deeply felt truth in these meetings. During our visit to the *Dhoraji Shri Darshanam*, a lady told us how the whole *Svadhyayi* family help in solemnising and celebrating the marriage of her daughter. Her own financial resources were strained, but without asking for help even once, the whole village came to her rescue. Similarly, we had earlier been told how the highest Brahmins had helped in arranging for the weddings of their *Bhavalakshi* bretheren. *Svadhyayi* makes unselfish love and giving both personally and socially rewarding.

The same idea of creating impersonal wealth and building communities informs projects like *Matsya Gandha*. Here, instead of community farming we have community fishing. Likewise, there are community vegetable carts, where the same concept of cooperative volunteerism is employed. Other experiments include recharging wells, building or rebuilding tanks and water bodies, organic farming, etc. All these are meant to redress the ecological damage caused by over-exploitation of the earth. The image given to us was that we have drunk too much milk from mother-earth; now her breasts are withered and she has been reduced to a skeleton. We must replenish her and nourish her so to save her life; otherwise, future generations will call us murderers and never forgive us. Indeed, water management is the key to sustainable agriculture and rural reconstruction. *Dadaji's* emphasis on *Rishi Krishi*

or Divine Farming reflects the urgency of eco-friendly means of self-sustenance.

Dadaji

The greatest soul-lifting moment during the Kurukshetra trip was Dadaji's pravachan. He had just come out of a heart surgery; it had been touch and go for days. He was speaking against the doctors' advice. He said, "How could I not come to meet you and talk to you after all the trouble you have taken to assemble here from distant parts of the country?" I remembered how the meeting itself had been in doubt because of the unseasonably heavy rains. Yet, now, listening to the great man, all the fatigue and hardships were forgotten. What was the gist of Dadaji's talk? It was very inspiring, no doubt, but what I remember most is how Dadaji had interpreted the message of the Geeta. I too had read the Geeta, but I had never felt its inner truth the manner in which Dadaji had expounded it. He declared: "In the Geeta, the Lord has assured us that he is always with us, within us, to guide us, to help us live our lives. He will never let his bhakta down. This is a promise. God always keeps his promises." What power the words had. They entered right into my soul, giving me a great sense of confidence and peace. Then Dadaji added: "What does the Geeta say? It says, 'Stand up. Don't give up. Do. Act. Don't despair. You are not alone. I am with you. Come on, face life.'" Dadaji taught me that the Geeta is not just an abstruse or esoteric philosophical text, but an assurance of help and hope. It preaches a positive, affirmative attitude to life. It uplifts and encourages. That is how the Geeta is to be read. Later, we met Dadaji briefly. He greeted us as if he knew each of us individually. When someone said something to him, he listened with genuine interest and attention. I had seen that unhurried self-confidence before, but not that sense of curiosity. He really was keen to know us, to find out who we were. I was struck by that. Most of us had absolutely no curiosity or interest in others. We normally tend to look upon them with suspicion, if not hostility. When we meet anyone, we are guarded, cautious. We even avoid people, not wanting to deal with other people's problems. We are simply not interested in their realities. In contrast, here was a man who actually saw divinity in all of us. It was not just a slogan that God resides within each of us. He actually saw people as embodiments of Divinity.

The simplicity and sureness of this attitude were totally disarming. When we met him again in Bombay, my earlier impressions of him were confirmed. He was simple and totally unassuming. There was a straightforwardness and clarity in his vision. At the same time, he had a sharp grasp of human beings and the ability to avoid useless discussions. The man we saw before us, however, was certainly not at

the peak of his powers. His movements were slow and speech slurred. He was also wont to forget names, even of his close associates. Yet, he was by no means a man who had given up. On the contrary, though his greatest achievements were behind him, he still had the ability to plan ahead, to dream. When we gathered around him in a group, Dadaji asked Maulana Wahiduddin only one question: "Do we have your blessings?" There was no attempt to engage in polite conversation; Dadaji had got to the root of the matter. When the Maulana had given his assent, Dadaji was very pleased. He said, "It is my belief that the communal problem in India will be solved if we accept Jesus Christ and Paigambar Mohammad as avatars of God."

This was *sarva dharma sveetkriti* taken to its limit. I wanted to ask Dadaji if the Muslims and Christians would reciprocate. As if guessing my thoughts he added, "In the Gulf, *Svadhya*is donate blood on the birthday of Prophet Mohammed. The laboratories are usually closed on this day, but the Sheikh specially had them opened to receive our blood. After all, that holy day has significance; we are not interested in donating blood on any other day. So you see, we have such notions about others. If we try to go to them, to talk to them, most of the problems will be solved. Our sincerity will overcome all resistance." That, then, was the secret of *Svadhya*: to sincere love and devoted fellow-feeling we cannot but help responding.

Later, the Rev. Samdhong Rinpoche-ji spoke. "I cannot consider myself a *Svadhya*," he said, "though I am in full sympathy with its aims and objectives. This is because as a Buddhist I do not believe in God. Yet, I believe that this is the kind of movement that I had been looking for for years. We believe that the world will only be saved if India, *Arya Bhoomi*, provides a spiritual leadership to it in these troubled times. I had almost despaired of finding something like *Svadhya* which has the capacity to raise a new society on the basis of our ancient spiritual principles. Now that I have found it, I wish it every success."

The next day, after his lecture, I asked Dadaji to comment on what Rinpoche had said. We spoke of other ideological differences which tend to incommensurable. Dadaji smiled and told me, "I have yet to come across an *athiest*." The *theism* of *Svadhya* is, thus, not to be taken as a dogmatic creed. Dadaji believes that only a creator could have created this universe, but those who don't believe in an *Ishwara* or God need not feel left out. *Svadhya* is for everyone who believes in human brotherhood and a higher cosmic law to which we all must submit. Yes, the spirit of *Svadhya* does militate against the modern notion of man as the supreme arbiter of his own destiny, as an autonomous being responsible only to himself for his choices.

In his lecture Dadaji had stressed nisvarth prem or selfless love. He had praised actions performed without an ulterior motive and with purity of heart. I asked him, "What about the desire or wish to attain moksha? Isn't that also a desire? And the desire to help others? The desire not to have any desire? And so on?" He smiled and replied cryptically, "But these don't harm you." Once again, his ability to cut through theoretical quibbling to get to the heart of the matter was evident. Dadaji's altruism was, ultimately, only a programme of self-realization and inner development. Changing the topic, he told us how the District Commissioner of Rajkot had once appealed to him to help make the district 100% literate. Dadaji told him, "This is your job; we have nothing to do with such missions. But, yes, now that you've asked me to help you, I will. Let's divide the district into two zones. You take one, we'll take the other. It's your responsibility to make everyone literate in your zone and it's ours in our zone. But note, we'll make them literate by teaching them mantras and shlokas; you do what you like." The result was predictable: while the Svadhyayi zone become literate in six months, the other zone is yet to achieve its target. Dadaji concluded, "Voluntary work done in the spirit of worship is far more effective than all sorts of expensive Government schemes. Material incentives do not encourage us. Instead, they corrupt us and enfeeble us. They make us lazy and dishonest." Finally, Dadaji spoke against the condemnation of missionaries by Hindu political parties. "We criticise them for spreading their religion among our tribes and schedule castes, but what have we done for these neglected and backward brethren of ours? We don't go to them, work among them, but are quick to criticize others who do so. The way to stop prosetysation is to give them all the riches of their own culture and heritage. Svadhyaya has taken the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Geeta, the works of Shankaracharya to some of these people; now I challenge any missionary to put a cross around their necks." According to Dadaji, it's no use bemoaning the decline of Hinduism if we are willing to do nothing to stop it. Make yourself strong; why blame your adversary for taking advantage of your weakness?--that seems to be the gist of Dadaji's message. Dadaji was also critical of those who mixed religion with politics. "We don't allow any politics to enter into Svadhyaya. No politics is permitted on the Svadhyaya platform. Those who wish to capture power should be honest about it; why pretend that they are working for Dharma?"

All this leads me to conclude that Dadaji is a religious genius. He is a specially endowed human being, who has shown us a new way to renew and reactivate our inner strength. This special power was acknowledged wherever we went. Repeatedly, we were told how lives were changed after people had received "Dadaji's thought." But I am convinced that there is

nothing fundamentally new in Dadaji's thought. The newness is basically in the method of realizing the thoughts. Yet the thoughts themselves have a strange, almost mystical power, like the Guru-mantra. When someone else utters it, it loses its power, but when given by the Guru it ignites the spirit.

Behind the entire locomotion of Svadhyaya is the engine that is Dadaji. Dadaji, to use Buddhist terminology, is a Bodhisattva, a self-realized being who takes birth to alleviate the sorrows of others. Even if one does not believe in such divinely ordained births, simple facts of heredity and environment bear this out. Dadaji's father, too, was a religious teacher, a pravachan-kar. It was he who had started the Geeta Pathashala in Madhav Bagh in the 1928. What was Dada's contribution? He really lived up to the ideals of a pravachan-kar's life. He idealized his own vocation, thereby becoming a figure of inspiration to a whole society. What that means is that each of us must idealize our lives, our professions, our multiple roles. If the intellectuals, warriors, merchants, and farmers had all done their jobs well, India would never have fallen. To restore the glory of India, we must, each of us, do our own job properly wherever we are. This is the most basic lesson of Dadaji's life. The other lessons are equally important. Never give up; be patient: to bring any lasting change one has to work silently for three generations. Therefore, work to improve your inner reality, the appearance will take care of itself.

I have said that Dadaji is a religious genius. That is because he gave a new mantra to us, a mantra best suited for post-Independence India. Dadaji has given a new meaning to bhakti. A bhakt is someone who is not vibhakt, that is someone who is not separated from himself and his fellow human beings. To show gratitude to God it is not necessary to offer flowers, but it is necessary to offer your time and talent to a Godly cause. What is a Godly cause? Anything which you do not for personal gain but for the benefit of others, anything done with a pure heart, anything done with the view to one's spiritual development through the service of others is bhakti.

On this deceptively simple premise, the whole edifice of Svadhyaya is built. Today, over 3 lakh volunteers are fanning outwards, going from village to village, town to town on their bhakti pheri, the devotional tour, bringing the message of brother and sisterhood to every home in India. In a world based on selfishness, any act of genuine and unconditional giving touches the heart. "We want nothing from you, not even a cup of tea. We have not come to collect donations or to convert you. We only wish to talk to you, to make your acquaintance, to establish a human relationship with you." This is the watchword of Svadhyaya.

All their great achievements, the experiments in community making and community wealth, in recharging wells, rebuilding tanks, alternative education and farming, social reform and social upliftment--all these have been born out of this seemingly simple and obvious idea of the bhakti pheri. The man who is the author of this novel idea, Dadaji, has to be a genius.

In the museum at Tatvajnana Vidyapeeth, I was arrested by a representation of a human hand restraining the Lord's sudarshan chakra. There was nothing else in the picture--just these two hands, almost touching. The guide explained the significance: "Man is telling God, give me one more chance. Let me try to do my best. Please don't destroy the world." The lesson for me was clear: before we invoke God, we must do what we can as human beings. Have we done enough to change ourselves and to change the world? No, not by a long shot. So let's get down to it and do our job. We have made the world what it today is; we can save it or at least give our lives in the attempt. This is the positive religion that Dadaji preaches and practices.

What Makes Svadhyaya Work?

This is a question that I have often asked myself, especially when confronted with the living proof of the tremendous transformation that it has wrought on the lives of its practitioners. What makes a rich industrialist from Bombay give up all his comforts, sacrifice so much time and money, only to visit some distant village which even lacks a flush toilet? What makes a poor beedi maker from Andhra Pradesh save for six months in order to afford the ticket to go on a bhakti pheri in Haryana? People undertake hardships if they are convinced that what they are getting is greater than what they are giving up. What are these people getting? I think they get what people who have undertaken successful pilgrimages get: peace of mind, inner contentment, the joy of service, spiritual growth. Once they experience the ecstasy that comes from such self-sharing, they realize that that is the most important thing in their lives.

One can, indeed, understand why certain individuals might be attracted to Svadhyaya, but how does it succeed at the community level? What is the secret? How has the latter miracle occurred? I think the answer is that this is how the Indian villages must have been traditionally. That is, every Indian village was conceived of as precisely such a kind of ideal sub-system. In other words, Svadhyaya does not impose anything new but merely idealizes, realizes the potentiation of what already is. Similarly, Svadhyaya has succeeded in Saurashtra because Saurashtra itself is a very special region, replete with the traces of earlier such experiments, the memories of which are still fresh enough to be revived. Whether it is

Dadaji or Annasaheb Hazare, what these great men are doing is already inherent in the soil of the land. The seeds of the subtle karmas of our great bhaktas, sages, reformers, and saints have been broadcast to the farthest corners of our land. They have fertilized better in some areas than in others. Saurashtra has a history of independent, fearless people. Given that Gandhi himself came from here it is natural that Svadhyaya flourishes in this soil.

Similarly, when it comes to the other programmes of Svadhyaya, the success comes from a combination of factors. There is something for everyone in Svadhyaya. There is a bit of the Rotary Club in it, a social aspect, wherein people meet, exchange ideas, get to know each other. The bhakti pheri is a combination of a pilgrimage and a vacation. The stress on the family means that the husband and the wife get to do things together. Children are involved in the process from an early age. There is a special programme for youth and for women. Thus, everyone is involved. What time might have been wasted in trivial socializing or gossip is now channelized for a higher cause. Everyone is constantly learning; this adds to the participants' self-esteem. The participants feel ennobled by the productive work that they are doing. Thus, to sum up, Svadhyaya works because of the unique religious genius and authority of Dadaji, because of the utter dedication and sincerity of its workers, because of the extraordinary organizational and entrepreneurial skills of its managers, because of innovative planning and vision, but also because it offers a holistic and total approach to the needs of its practitioners, nourishing their physical, vital, mental, and spiritual being. Svadhyaya works because it is practical and pragmatic, not unrealistic and otherworldly. It does not make impossible or unreasonable demands on its adherents. The extent of the involvement is left

The extent of the involvement is left entirely to each individual. Its structure may be hierarchical, but it is totally egalitarian in its approach to problem-solving. The changes brought about by it are gradual and self-motivated, not sudden and externally imposed. Svadhyaya provides a meaningful orientation to life, an orientation based on our own cultural patterns and resources.

Ultimately, what makes Svadhyaya work is the yearning within each of us to improve our lives and to contribute our mite to the betterment of the world. Each of us has this desire, but doesn't know how to fructify it. Svadhyaya shows the way.

Critiquing Svadhyaya

Today, it is considered both the duty and the pastime of academics to mount an attack on anything that smacks of tradition. That is not my intention in this brief section. Indeed, I don't even think that mere scholars and academicians, those who have done little to understand or better the society they live in, even have a right to criticise a genuine, far-reaching, and transforming movement like Svadhyaya. It is wiser far for us to keep quiet than to indulge in any destructive criticism. However, if some of our observations can be of help, they should be offered in a spirit of friendship and humility. That is how the following remarks are intended.

First of all, it seems to me that Svadhyaya has much in common with evangelical movements. It offers tremendous emotional and intellectual security to its adherents. It involves a conversion, albeit slow and non-violent, a change of lifestyle and attitude, public confessions of previous wrongdoing, plus unlimited opportunities for further proselytizing. I am aware that the choice of words that I have used may be seen as unfair or unfortunate, so I must hasten to add that Svadhyaya is not at all narrow-minded, fanatical, oppositional, cultist, or even violent like many of the evangelical movements. Yet, one cannot get away from the fact that most of its energy is horizontal, not vertical. In other words, once a person becomes a Svadhyayi, the next thing for him to do is to spread the message amongst people who haven't heard of it. Bhakti pheri is thus the best possible method of broadcasting the Svadhyayi creed.

The other thought that came up again and again was, "What after Dadaji?" Dadaji himself believes that whatever has to happen in the future will happen; why worry oneself about it? Why not do what is our nearest task instead? Truly, it does not matter if the movement declines-like several such movements have in the past. Something else will emerge. Society is never static. There are tendencies latent in it which can either uplift it or cause its downfall. Svadhyaya belongs to the former category. Afterwards, something else will take on a similar responsibility. Svadhyaya does derive its strength from the ideas and inspiration of one individual; this must be understood and acknowledged. His photograph is found in all the Svadhyayi temples along with those of Yogeshwar Krishna, Amba and Parvati, and Shiva. Whether or not his adopted daughter, Didiji, will be an able successor, only time will tell.

Finally, I must also admit that though what I have heard and seen during my entire experience of Svadhyaya has been very inspiring and encouraging, I feel as if my soul is thirsting for something more, if not something else. Even after going through the Prayog Darshan, I have to say that my response has not changed fundamentally. That is, I was and

remain a supporter of Svadhyaya, yet I still thirst for something more. This latter point is very personal. It does not mean that I find Svadhyaya inadequate, but that I know that what I need and crave for cannot be found outside myself, that to seek it I must not only go within, but stop expecting anyone else to give it to me. In a way, this realization might be taken as the culmination of Dadaji's idea of strengthening oneself. The ultimate point of any self culture is moral and spiritual perfection which can only come from personal endeavour, not from any external guidance and method. I myself am the problem and I myself am the solution. If so, whether or not I participate in Dadaji's Svadhyaya is not as important as whether or not I undertake my own, utterly uncompromising and dedicated Svadhyaya. Or, to put it in a different way, the external Svadhyaya of Dadaji cannot be a substitute for the inner svadhyaya which I must undertake for my own upliftment. And if I am doing the internal svadhyaya, then I am automatically a Svadhyayi, whether I participate in this movement or not.

Perhaps, the silence that I mentioned earlier has also to do with this realization. When judged from the standpoint of the Absolute, everything in this world is found wanting. Even an extraordinary and inspiring movement such as Svadhyaya itself seems insufficient and inadequate. Svadhyaya is but a path, a direction. It cannot liberate me; I must walk the path, undertake the journey myself if I really seek liberation. Svadhyaya may help me, but I must help myself. It may fill me with hope; it may inspire me; it may give my life a direction; it may teach me how to help others. All this is very important. But, in the ultimate analysis, I myself must seek my own freedom, my own liberation, my own self-realization. To those who are walking on the path, Svadhyaya is thus the beginning, not the end of the road.

Postscript: Manushya Gaurav Diwas 19 October 1996, Mumbai. Dadaji's birthday, also celebrated as the Manushya Gaurav Diwas. Over 3.5 lakh Svadhyayis from all over India came to Chaupati beach to felicitate Dadaji. It was also the day when the first Svahayayi cargo ship, Jayashree, was to be launched. This ship had been built entirely out of voluntary labour, without the loss of a single day's wages. After a full day's work, the volunteers worked from 7-11 PM each day for months to realize this ambitious dream. In fact, the whole ship was built with entirely out of bhakti, perhaps for the first time in human history. The ship, whose carrying capacity was about 600 tones, was worth more than a hundred Crore rupees.

When we entered the city, we saw large processions of Svadhyayis moving towards Chaupati. The parking lots from Marine Drive to Nariman Point were crowded with Svadhyayi buses and vehicles. Later, from the stage, we saw a sea of humanity which almost rivaled the

Arabian sea itself. But what was remarkable was the total discipline and orderliness of the assembled people. They were divided into manageable lots, each with a leader. Each lot was identified by the special caps or clothes. The arrangements, as usual, were flawless. Different groups of Svadhyayis had assumed various responsibilities; some had erected the stage, other took care of lighting, still others of crowd control, and so on. What was remarkable was that as soon as people sat down, they were offered water to drink by a group of Svadhyayi ladies. The logistics of providing drinking water to over 3.5 lakh people were mind boggling, to say the least. But that was just one example of Svadhyaya in action.

There were several speakers that evening, all of whom felicitated Dadaji. The VIP enclosure near the stage was full of various dignitaries, including the Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Shri L. K. Advani, two of the Hinduja brothers, and several other important people. An unforgettable sight was Maulana Wahiduddin Khan's offering his Namaz while Dadaji's pravachan was going on. What better demonstration could one get of the communal harmony so aptly depicted in the large, all-religious symbol on stage?

There were several notable speakers including Rahul Dev, Rev. Samdhung Rinpoche, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, a senior Catholic priest, Shri Ved Prakash Vaidik, and so on. Some even likened Dadaji to an avatar. The process of deification was quite obvious in the evening's proceedings. Yet, it was Dadaji himself, who struck a different note. Turning away the attention from himself and his achievements, he spoke about human dignity. When all of us had gathered there to celebrate Human Dignity Day, surely the question arose as to what the source of human dignity was. Dadaji said that it was conventionally thought that human dignity came from wealth, education, social status, and so on, all of which were conferred from the outside. However, he asked, if this were so, then about 80% of Indians could never hope to have any dignity. Dignity, he said, came not from wealth, education, or power, but from character. Alas, no one was interested today in character building. Even the present day education system was ignoring this prime need.

Character, said Dadaji, came from kritagnata, namrata, tejasvita, and asmita--from gratitude, humility, integrity, and identity. When we are no longer grateful to our Creator, how can we be grateful to any one else? Thus, We are bound to neglect our obligations to our parents, to our friends, to our community, and to the nation too. Similarly, namrata, or humility, though a hallmark of Indian culture, is disappearing from our midst. We have become rude, aggressive, and violent. Given the prevailing predominance of corruption, we tend to lose our integrity quite easily. Finally, we have forgotten who we are, what our identities are.

Without these four virtues we lose our character and when character is lost, we also lose wealth, prestige, honour, and independence.

Dadaji's speech was rivetting. It went into the very heart of the matter. While the other speakers, however inspiring, could only offer praise or best wishes, Dadaji was actually pointing the way to self-transformation. Without Dadaji's speech, the whole evening would have remained incomplete. Even the massive crowds, the impressive fireworks, the large turnout of VIPs, the cargo ship--all these would have paled into relative insignificance. After all, the latter were material achievements which could be duplicated, even bettered. But what Dadaji offered was far greater. It was the very stuff that could connect the human with the Divine. It was that for which I thirsted, I realized instantly, nothing less.

Once again, I understood that the essential core of Svadhaya, was this tremendous, transformative energy which Dadaji generated from within himself. Without it, it would be like any other movement, more innovative perhaps, but not fundamentally different. My original intuition was now doubly confirmed: Svadhyaya, whatever be its external manifestation, implied going inwards, tapping that perennial source of spiritual power which comes to us directly from our Creator. Svadhyaya helps us activate and awaken that inner power. Without such a deep transformation and awakening, all our efforts will be wasted. In more ways than one, this great event on 19 October 1996, brought to a completion my introduction to Svadhyaya.

PEOPLE'S MOVEMENTS
Science For Social Revolution
"The K.S.S.P. Experience"
KERALA

M.P. Parameshwaran

The Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad, popularly known as the KSSP, is a unique kind of movement evolved in Kerala, the small southwestern state in India. Technically it can be called as an NGO. But since even political parties, trade unions, and youth, student and women organizations too are non-governmental in nature the term NGO is incapable of defining anything properly. KSSP is neither a political party, nor a trade union, neither a youth, student or women organization, nor a cultural society. It calls itself a People's Science Movement or PSM. While KSSP was formed in 1962 with the aims of science popularization and spreading of scientific temper the term PSM was not in vogue. In fact it was coined to designate a national workshop of "like minded organizations" held in Trivandrum 16 years later, in 1978. The "likeness of mind" consisted in the understanding: That the Indian society is divided into two objectively antagonistic groups, a majority that is continuously getting impoverished or face the threat of impoverishment and the minority that is getting continuously enriched at the expense of the majority that the gap between this minority and the majority, between the rich and the poor is continuously increasing and this is true even between rich and poor countries, that science and technology had been and continue to be, instruments in the hands of the minority to exploit the majority and that the PSM takes a partisan stand in favour of the majority and against the minority and shall strive to arm the majority with the weapon of science and technology in their struggle against the exploiting minority.

It is this partisanship which makes it a "people's" movement. Reliance on scientific knowledge and scientific method makes it a "science" movement and continuous expansion in membership and activities makes it a "movement" and not an institution. Its' forty thousand plus members come from, literally, every walk of life and there is no field of human endeavor which is alien to it. Being partisan to the impoverished majority in essence it is a revolutionary movement and as such it has accepted the slogan "Science for Social Revolution", since 1973.

The story of the KSSP is, in one sense, the story of the experiences of a movement which learns continuously, which is not restricted by fossilized objectives or concepts. Its growth during the past 30 years has been from abstract to concrete, on the one hand and from particular to general on the other hand. This is a seeming contradiction. It started with the general understanding that knowledge about the laws of nature and society will be useful to the society. In the course of three decades this developed into a concrete analysis of the society, of the role of science and technology (S&T) in it, of the problems of development, of the changing world situation and of the concrete manner in which the have-nots can use scientific and technical knowledge as a weapon in their fight against immiserization. On the other hand it started with particular activities like lectures publications, exhibitions for dissemination of scientific information, activities like science clubs, teacher training etc and gradually grew into discussions on the general aspects of development, environment, health, education etc

Rarely it was handicapped by a mechanical understanding of the past, present or future. Nor did it restrict its scope to any particular field- say education or health, environment or development. It assimilated newer and newer ideas and also the proponents of these ideas. The chronological history of the KSSP will reveal a step-by-step expansion of the scope of its activities as well as absorption of those persons who came up with new ideas into its core. Many unique features of KSSP, most important of them being a total absence of “power struggle” spring from its capacity to change, to learn and to change again.

Genesis of the Kerala Sastra Sahithya Parishad

The genesis of a movement for popularization of science through Malayalam language can be traced to the formation of a “Science Literacy Forum” (Sastra Sahitya Samithi) in 1957 by a group of concerned social activists and science writers. Despite the best intentions this pioneering attempt proved to be uneventful but for the publication of a book: ‘Modern Science’ in Malayalam modeled after the Penguin Science News Series. Later in 1962, a group of science writers in Kozhikode, not aware of the earlier efforts took initiative to organize a “Forum for Science Writers”. They were able to win the cooperation of most of the leading science writers in the state and finally in September 1962 the Kerala Sastra Sahithya Parishad (Subtitled in English as “Science Writers’ Forum of Kerala) was launched with a one-day seminar and a five day exhibition on science and science books. Occasional symposia and seminars mostly organized in and around Kozhikode constituted the main activity of the group for the next two years.

Meanwhile, in 1966, some of the Malayali scientists in Bombay had begun to actively consider the possibilities of producing science literature in Malayalam. The contact between the Bombay scientists and the organizers of the Kerala Sastra Sahithya Parishad led to the formation of the Sastra Sahithya Parishad (Malayalam), Bombay in January 1966. Similar organizations were formed for other regional languages and they were sought to be coordinated through a “Federation of Indian Languages Science Associations” (FILSA). SSP (Malayalam), Bombay was the most active among these groups, with regular monthly discussion meetings on various science subjects in Malayalam. The group also produced four books in Malayalam for a publishing firm in Bombay.

The Three Streams

We can find three distinct streams of people coming together in the evolution of the Kerala Sastra Sahithya Parishad. The first were social reformers and activists who saw in science a useful ally in their struggle against the outmoded past. Secondly, there were science writers who were mainly concerned with their professional problems and saw in the organization a means to redress them. The Kerala Sastra Sahithya Parishad at its time of formation at Kozhikode in 1962 was more in the nature of a professional organization of science writers. This spirit is evident in the introductory statement of K.G. Adiyodi, the chief organizer of the group: “The problems of science writers are such that they can be solved only through organized efforts.” Solving problems relating to scientific terminology and publication and the preparation of a ‘who is who’ of the science writers in Malayalam constituted the main burden of the programme of work. The membership was restricted to science writers. In the first annual conference, the restriction was relaxed. Others were allowed to take associate membership in the organization. In comparison, the group which was formed in 1957 seems to have had a wider perspective. P.T. Bhaskara Panikkar, the chief organizer of the group was then a schoolteacher and, more importantly, an active participant in the left movement in Malabar. He succeeded K.G. Adiyodi as the Secretary of the Kerala Sastra Sahithya Parishad and in 1966 the membership of the Kerala Sastra Sahithya Parishad was opened to anyone interested in science.

The third stream of people who contributed to the formation of the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad was the Malayalee scientists working in various scientific institutions in India. Though Kerala was well endowed with a widespread school education system, it severely lagged behind in centers of higher learning. Therefore the number of practicing scientists whom the organization could call upon was very much limited. The active collaboration of the KSSP with non-resident Malayalee scientists helped to an extent to remove this deficiency. The SSP (Malayalam),

Bombay, had a membership of one hundred to begin with. Almost all of them were employed in the BARC and other scientific institutions. At least, a few among them were beginning to question the relevance of their scientific practice which they found to have very little relation to the genuine and pressing needs of the common man. Though no one challenged the needs for research in frontier areas and building up of indigenous technological capability, the neglect of problems that weighed down the common man in the present appalled them. Many of them worked in the Department of Atomic Energy which together with Departments of Space and Defence cornered most of the research funds. Some had even started to move towards critique of the directions in which their own advanced research was moving. The author of the present paper finally left his research career to go to Kerala to participate more actively in the science movement.

Another affiliated group was formed in Bangalore in February 1968. It consisted of Malayalee scientists who were working in various Departments of the Indian Institute of Science. A few months later, a similar group was organized in Calcutta consisting mostly of scientists working in the Botanical Survey of India and Zoological Survey of India.

The fourth annual conference of the KSSP held at Thrissur in 1967 was an important milestone in its history. The conference which included representatives from the Bombay group considered and approved a constitution for the organization and in July 1968 KSSP was registered under the Charitable Societies Act. The KSSP has now become a well-defined organization.

Making of a Mass Movement

The decade, 1967-77, saw the growth of the organization into a mass movement. All the basic contours of its present activities, its organizational structure and style of functioning evolved during this period. Firstly the concept of “science” underwent a change from natural sciences to include social sciences, humanities and art. Secondly the membership was opened to all interested in science, not only to science writers or scientists alone. Thirdly from “mere” information broadcast mode it changed to expose, oppose, propose and counterpose mode, from mere education to agitation, provocation and construction. Fourthly from spontaneous, small scale, local activities to planned, statewide massive activities; and fifthly, from a grouping of people to a well-defined structure consisting of state, district, region (block) and unit level bodies.

During this period the membership increased from 40 to 42,705 (2000). Three more journals besides *Sastragathi* began to be published. KSSP entered the book publication field in a large way with the publication of the gift box of 11 books. Massive lecture campaigns on Nature, Science

and Society (1000 in 1973, 12000 in 1976) Wealth of Kerala (5000 in 1977), Agriculture in Kerala, etc. were organized. The precursor of the *Kalajatha*, the *Sasthra Samskarika Jatha* was initiated from Kooveri in Kannur district to Poovachal in Trivandrum district.

It is also during this period KSSP became active in the fields of education, environment, energy, health, development, women, culture, communication and research. It has made distinctive contributions to each of these areas, in some cases more, others less.

Education

Teachers constitute the largest single category of activists of the KSSP, all the more so in leadership (activists of KSSP are employed elsewhere, there are only very few full-timers and that too for one or two years on deputation). It was natural for the KSSP to get involved in education. The adoption of the new NCERT curriculum by the State Government in 1965 and the necessity for teacher retraining initiated the process. Since then for the past 35 years KSSP has been involved in all aspects of education- curriculum, pedagogy, evaluation, finance management, structure etc. etc. Education is a big business in Kerala. The Education Minister of the first Communist Ministry in Kerala (1957-59), Prof. Joseph Mundassery was forced to resign because of an education bill he introduced in the Assembly. The bill sought to arrest the growing tendency of communalization (Hindu, Christian and Muslim) and commercialization in education. Since then for the past four decades neither of the two major parties in Kerala, the Communists or the Congress has dared to touch education portfolio. Under the control of commercial interests (Kerala Congress, Muslim League and RSP) today education has become an almost unassailable commercial empire. It is also becoming virtually communal, thanks to the BJP, to the Muslim League and the Kerala Congress. The KSSP had fought consistently for the past 35 years against these tendencies. It saw the growing degeneration of the common school system and the growth of public (private) school system. It has instituted major public enquiries on education- the Public Enquiry Commission on Corruption in Education, 1985 under the chairmanship of late Dr. N.P. Pillai and the Kerala Education Commission (1996-98) under the chairmanship of Dr. Ashok Mitra. It had to organize innumerable number of protests, demonstrations, hunger strikes, *dharnas*, *Kalajatha*, etc. to expose vested interests and wrong policies leading to commercialization on the one hand and distortion of values as well as reduction in competencies on the other hand.

In the meantime, KSSP teachers were getting more and more influenced by educationists like Paulo Friere, Noam Chomsky, Vygotsky etc. and

also experiments of groups like Kishore Bharathi, Ekalavya, Diganthar, etc. KSSP recognized the cardinal role of the teacher in the process of education and always helped its member teachers to enjoy teaching and to become models. The general philosophy guiding them was the understanding: that education should not only enrich the knowledge content (cognitive aspects) but also should affect the attitude of children towards nature and society (affective domain) that cognitive enrichment is not possible without improving psycho-motor skills (learning by doing-both by hand and head) that together these make a unity of the head, heart and hand that in the real life situation we do not find chemistry or physics, history or politics, biology or sociology, that the compartmentalization process must be reversed leading to integration that the true principle of teaching is that nothing can be 'taught', that creation of a multitude of learning opportunities for the child to learn is the best teaching and finally, that education should be an agent for change and not for maintaining the status quo i.e. resisting change. Based on this understanding it had been conducting a variety of experiments, each in large numbers, for the past 2-3 decades:

Bridge or pretaste courses for SSLC plus students since 1969.

Eureka, *Sastrakeralam* and *Sastragathi* talent tests since 1974-75.

Children's Science Festivals or 'Balotsavs'

Living with Science, Nature, Stars etc. Camps

Integrated Science Teaching

Mass Campaign for Literacy.

Operation Class Room

All these were done as extra curricular and outside the school activities. Access to mainstream was diligently denied by the vested interests. It was only in 1996, a break through could be made. The new curriculum, text books, pedagogy and evaluation introduced in 1997 first in Classes I to IV and now up to class VIII were created by teachers involved in and exposed to the experiments of the KSSP. The new system, which makes the segregation of the ordinary from the elite more difficult, which encourages and empowers the ordinary, which demands not only memory but also skills became the object of vituperative criticism both from the right and the ultra left- the elites. Since the programme was implemented from the platform of DPEP, it was declared as heinous conspiracy of the World Bank to destroy Kerala education. In the process they had to depict Paulo Freire and Noam Chomsky as agents of World Bank and imperialism. The main target of attack was the KSSP, which has weathered it well. KSSP has been acknowledged by the citizens of Kerala in the field of education, as it was acknowledged in the fields of environment, energy and development even earlier.

Environment

The KSSP was known, for a long time, outside Kerala and outside India as a major environmental organization especially due to the role it played in saving the Silent Valley forests from total destruction. Some of the very early activists of the KSSP influenced by Raechel Carson's book *Silent Spring* were very much interested in environmental issues. They were aware of the first Stockholm Conference and had organized pre and post Stockholm discussions. Even by that time the Alwaye-Ernakulam area had become notorious for chemical pollution of both air and water. The very first issues to be taken up by the KSSP were of surface and ground water pollution caused by industrial effluents. This struggle came to a peak in the Gwalior Rayons factory at Mavoor, Calicut and Moti Chemicals at Kannur. The Birla management of Mavoor factory, whose motto is "profit over people" consistently refused to carry out pollution control measures in their factory. The affected persons with the help of KSSP managed to get a legal victory over them. But through a lockout they blackmailed the government and the people and after liberalization they began importing fibre and closed down the factory for ever. The Moti Chemicals in Kannur, designed to make electrolytic manganese dioxide was not even commissioned. Instances of chemical pollution are innumerable and at any instant of time there will be dozens of agitations going on.

The Silent Valley issue was quite different in character. No citizen is immediately affected. In fact many will be benefited- employment, profit, local development and real estate business etc. It will produce badly needed electricity and irrigate parched lands. Superficially, for ordinary people, it was all plus- nothing minus. They could not comprehend the extraordinarily rich genetic diversity, its value, the pristine nature of forest etc. For them any forest is similar to another one. They did not, at that point of time, understand the role forests play in the hydrological cycle. Not even the Marxists have read Engel's warning, given in the essay "The Role Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man", that destruction of forests on hill slops will cause increased floods and intensified droughts. The role of the four year long Silent Valley Debate was to bring the science of ecology into the consciousness of the people, for the first time. The debate started in 1977 and continued up to the end of 1981. It took roughly one year for the KSSP to fully internalize the issues. Silent Valley Hydro Electric Project was a multi purpose project on the small river called *Kunthippuzha*. It could generate about 500 million units of energy per annum and would (it is claimed) irrigate 25000 Ha of land. However, the project would inundate 800 Ha of extremely rich forestland. Several organizations, the Zoological Survey of India, the Botanical Survey of India, Kerala Forest Research Institute, etc. and the Impact Assessment Committee headed by Zafar Fateh Ali-

all advised against the destruction of this rich eco-system. KSSP came out with a study document "A Techno-Ecological and Socio -Economic Study of the Silent Valley Project". It proposed more cost and time effective alternatives for power generation and employment. It urged the government to suspend the project till all other ecologically safe sites are exhausted. It also pointed out the weakness of a hundred per cent hydro based system and indicated the unavailability of coal or gas-based thermal stations.

However, all the political parties, the State Electricity Board and the contractors (Hindustan Construction Corporation) were for the project and a long drawn out polemics ensued. KSSP initiated a very massive programme for ecological education of citizens. In every village debates were organized in which KSSP, Electricity Board and political parties participated. In schools and colleges this became a favorite topic for debating clubs. Within two years in every political party there occurred a vertical division of opinion, for and against the project. The support given by the international organizations and finally the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi finally saved the forest. By 1981 Kerala became the most ecologically conscious state in India. In 1978 KSSP published a monograph, called "Man and Environment". The "three environment" concept was put forward for the first time in this book -the physical-biological environment familiar to the natural scientists, the socio-economic environment which dictates human-nature inter-action and hence impacts on the physical-biological environment and thirdly the ethical-cultural (later termed as spiritual) environment which either supports or questions both the existing human-human relationship and human-nature relationship. KSSP realized, also, that there are different ecological spatial scales. The micro environmental impacts of local chemical pollution, the macro environmental impacts of deforestation, soil erosion, land use changes, land reclamation etc. and the global impacts of green house gases and ozone depleting gases through climatic changes and insolation changes- these are to be addressed, each in a different way.

This realization of the three spheres of ecology and three scales of environment led the KSSP to a different understanding of human development. This could be seen in a very incipient form in the monograph "Wealth of Kerala" published in 1977, but by the beginning of eighties it has taken more concrete shape. This understanding was to play a cardinal role, a decade and half later, in the initiation of the People's Plan Campaign.

Energy

Energy development, especially electrical energy, entered the agenda of the KSSP with a paper “Electricity and Industrialization of Kerala” presented by its activist M.P. Parameswaran in the 10th Annual Conference of KSEB Workers’ Association in April 1975. Even in that paper it was argued that a hydro-based electricity supply system is not sustainable, that Kerala will face power shortage by 1982-83 if not supplemented by thermal electricity at the rate of at least 200MW per year from 1982 onwards and that construction of thermal stations should start in 1978 itself. Faced already with a surplus of energy, the giant Idukki project yet to be commissioned, the KSE Board engineers were in no mood to accept this proposition. The strategy was to create more surpluses, through the suppression of internal demand, sell this surplus cheap energy to Tamil Nadu, earn a large profit and declare huge rates of bonus. However, KSSP was able to break this strategy. It could successfully argue for larger investments in transmission and distribution during the sixth five-year plan. Release of suppressed demand quickly exhausted the surplus and Kerala faced power shortage in 1983. It remained so till the end of the century. Even today, in 2001 Kerala cannot meet all the demand, if through voltage improvement and reliability of supply, the technically suppressed demand is released.

It was the four yearlong debate on the Silent Valley Hydro Electric project, however, that brought KSSP into the center stage of power (electrical not political!) polemics. Since then, in its unique style, KSSP had organized thousands and thousands of lectures, slide shows, video shows and exhibitions, it has published books and agit prop pamphlets, it got constructively involved in energy practice, both electrical and thermal. It involved in all aspects of energy planning, in association with the State Planning Board, it is involved in popularization of energy saving devices and techniques and also, through its Integrated Rural Technology Centre, in investigation and implementation of micro and small hydro-electric projects. IRTC is the technical consultant for the Palakkad District Power Company (owned by the District Panchayat) for construction and operation of a 3 MW hydroelectric plant at Meenvallam at a cost of about Rs. 10 Crores.

In 1982 it took up a project of developing high efficiency, smokeless wood burning stoves. It came out with a model popularly known as *Parishad Aduppu* (stove). Nearly half a million households have adopted this, since then. Each household is saving about Rs. 1500 per year on fire wood. Half a million tones of firewood being saved every year. This amounts to Rs. 70- 80 Crores per year. The investment for this was less than Rs. 15-20 Crores in all. There is, also, a proportionate reduction in the release

of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. The carbon sequestration value of this is about \$ 15-20 million. The agricultural waste emanating from coconut palms and other plants will be about 5-6 million tones in all. The current state-wide consumption of firewood is 12 to 13 million tones which can be brought down to 5-6 million tones. Further, a project to convert firewood into gas, through community gassifiers is being initiated.

In tune with the philosophy of human development, the KSSP realizes that an exponential increase in energy consumption is neither sustainable nor necessary. The maximum requirement would be about 2 tones oil equivalent (2TOE). Even this is not sustainable infinitely, or even for a thousand years. The only sustainable source is the sun. The hydel, the wind, the biomass all are manifestations of solar energy in different forms. Direct conversion of solar radiation in to higher temperature thermal energy and electricity is now approaching the realm of commercial viability. The future society as foreseen by KSSP can be called “Solar Democracy”. KSSP is contemplating on a few large scale demonstration projects based on small hydro, wind, photovoltaic and solar thermal energy sources stabilized with gassifiers (wood being the stored form of solar energy).

Development

As mentioned earlier the KSSP was formed in 1962 with the limited objective of popularizing science, as a Forum of Science Writers of Kerala. At that time there was a great degree of optimism and a somewhat absolute faith in the ability of science and technology to solve all the problems facing human kind. The bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima and the revelations brought out by Raechel Carson, Barbara Ward, etc and the proceedings of Stockholm Conference persuaded the activists of the KSSP to re-examine their premises. This was the beginning of a critical attitude towards “development”. They realized (i) that science and technology live not as much in the pages of books, not in spoken or printed words, but at the finger tips of those engaged in active transformation of nature, in agriculture, animal husbandry , industries etc and (ii) that if scientific knowledge is to help people, if they have to develop a scientific world outlook, the printed books or spoken words are not enough (iii) that KSSP has to work at the science-society interface where knowledge is applied for production. From these discussions emerged the concept of “Rural Science Forum” and the first one was formed in 1974. This is the forerunner of VTC (Voluntary Technical Corps) and TSG (Technical Support Groups) and Task Forces of the People’s Plan Campaign. The KSSP was gradually evolving its ideas of society and development. A large percentage of its activists and leaders were Marxists by conviction and by training. There were also, a few

Gandhians and a few Gandhian-Marxists. The preparation of the monograph “Wealth of Kerala” in consultation with experts from State Planning Board and the Centre for Development Studies and later the large number of classes based on the monograph gave the activists ample opportunities to reflect on the development of Kerala and on development in general. Some aspects were becoming clear even by late seventies.

The land reforms had not resulted in any upsurge in agricultural production, in fact extreme fragmentation is causing the opposite and therefore some form of collective action is essential. (The concepts of Group Farming and GALASA- Group Approach to Locally Adapted and Sustainable Agriculture were evolved in response to this. However, they are yet to have any impact on the situation) Kerala has to depend mainly on smaller industries based on local resources (natural and human), local markets (not export based), not requiring too much water and electricity, needing only smaller levels of capital investment. Education will have to be recast to orient and train the upcoming generation towards the above objectives.

Levels of people’s participation in both politics and economic activities should go up continuously. Rural Science Fora should engage the people in extensive studies and surveys on the natural resources of the village, on agriculture and industry, on health and education, on roads and electricity etc. etc. and based on the studies prepare local level development plans.

In 1980 in the Vazhayoor village of the Malappuram district a ten-day people’s mapping festival was organized in which 120 local volunteers participated. This was the precursor of the PRM (Panchayat/ Participatory Resource Mapping) project of 1991. By 1978 end in nearly 600 panchayats, out of 1000, Rural Science Fora were formed. It was becoming increasingly clear that such levels of involvement in diverse fields require a permanent institution to help the fora. This gave birth to the concept of Rural Science Academy. Even this took another ten years to fructify in the form of IRTC at Palakkad.

Again, in 1978, after a long 16 years interval fresh panchayat elections took place and a new set of people’s representatives came to power. Collaborating with them the KSSP attempted to prepare a “Perspective Plan Document” for each panchayat in about 40 panchayats. The Vazhayoor survey was conducted as a part of this effort. The Rural Science Fora were expected to grow into Informal Panchayat Level Planning Boards. The panchayats were to become local self-governments with a wide range of powers. It took another decade and half before this could be realized at least in some measure. KSSP was forced to shelve

the concept of rural science fora for the time being because the panchayats were totally unable to make use of them. Issue No 40 of the Journal *GramaSastram* (Village Science) observed in its editorial:

“Panchayats are the basic units of development planning. The panchayat governing bodies which assumed power with myriads of hopes and ideas are disillusioned and disappointed. To carry out even simple development activities in ones own village they have to beg and prostrate before the bureaucracy. What sort of a democracy we have! The beautiful words and phrases like decentralization, democracy, village level planning, people’s control etc. shall not be further prostituted at the podium of public speech. They have to become real and powerful”.

“In their collective effort to achieve this KSSP will stand by the people of the villages... A debate on this can be initiated at a series of district level seminars involving panchayat presidents, members and others interested in rural development, development officials etc. In our objective of transforming science into a powerful weapon for social revolution, formation of effective rural science forum in each panchayat is expected to play an important role”.

“Will of the people is reflected best in panchayats and municipalities. Today they have practically no powers...a sympathetic state government can, in fact, change this situation and strengthen them considerably. Compared to other states in India, such an experiment can be done more extensively in Kerala. Firstly our panchayats are relatively big. Secondly within each panchayat one can find a good number of technical and professional people. Thirdly there is the back up support of such a wide organization as the KSSP.”

At the same time KSSP raised a demand that an amount of Rs. 350 million should be set apart for developmental activities in eleven areas, to be directly implemented by the panchayats.

In 1981 a major workshop on decentralization of powers was organized by the Centre for Development Studies. Chief Minister Shri E.K. Nayanar, Shri E.M.S. Namboodiripad, Dr. S.B. Sen (Chairman of the Sen Committee of 1996) and many other senior persons participated in it. KSSP too participated in a large way. It is not accidental that it is the very same team which gave leadership, later in 1996, to the massive People’s Plan Campaign. E.M.S. Namboodiripad was a national leader who always stood for decentralization of powers, ever since 1957. However, even in the 1980s almost all other political leaders were either afraid or unwilling to relinquish power in favour of the people. The bureaucracy too did not like the idea. And unfortunately, majority of the

people, their representatives, too were not anxious to take over or even accept power. The KSSP was convinced that unless the people become ready to assume power and acquire the skills to handle authority there will not be any change in the state of affairs. And so it continued its efforts with renewed vigour, to enable the people to take power in their hands.

KSSP continued its efforts to build a framework for development of Kerala. It carried out a number of studies and published a number of books from 1982 to 1988. The IRTC was formed in 1987-88, the Total Literacy Campaign in Ernakulam district was taken up in 1988-89 and Total Kerala Literacy Campaign in 1990. Participatory Resource Mapping project was taken up for 25 selected panchayats in collaboration with Centre for Earth Science Studies in 1991. In Kalliassery panchayat an attempt to prepare a perspective plan was made. This led to a major action research programme called Panchayat Level Development Planning (PLDP) in selected five panchayats- in 1996, with the help of Centre for Development Studies.

Activists of KSSP were becoming more and more convinced that redefining human development has become an urgent imperative. They felt that progress couldn't be measured merely in terms of consumption, income or 'choices'. It should be measured in terms of both physical and spiritual qualities of life. High effective life expectation, a reasonable mix of mental and physical labour and low demand on energy (resources)- all these denote high physical quality of life. Very low crime, suicide, alcohol consumption etc. rates, high participation in cultural activities- reading, listening singing, playing etc and high level of involvement in political and economic activities all these three together form the measure of the spiritual quality of life. Such a view of development extends its implications to economics, politics and ethics as well as science and technology. Such a society will be characterized by the following factors:

Organizing production and distribution in such a way as to strengthen local self sufficiency and decrease external dependency. Gigantic transnational enterprises controlling production will be replaced by a network of millions of small producers linked horizontally in non-or semi competitive manner and vertically in a non oppressive way. Small becoming not only beautiful but also efficient and powerful. Extinction of stock market. Primacy to primary sector. Exploitation of primary sector by secondary and tertiary sectors, of villages by towns will be done away with. Production processes to be ecologically sound and sustainable. S&T research and development will be geared to make small powerful, to tap solar energy cheaply and abundantly, to extract useful metals and other materials from very diluted sources, to convert present and future

wastes into harmless and, preferably, useful things. Participatory democracy in which the power hierarchy is reversed with the individual citizen being sovereign, in which each citizen has the knowledge, skills and will to participate, to share responsibilities, in which every elected member from panchayat to the parliament can be recalled by those who elect them.

Organizing politics as a set of concentric circles with the neighborhood and Gram Sabha at the centre, encircled successively by the panchayat, block, district, state and the nation, all circles lying in a horizontal plane, each having its own well defined function which may change with place and time. Wisdom to differentiate needs from greed.

The experience gained through all these activities and the resource persons developed through them gave courage for the newly formed State Planning Board, consisting mostly of persons who were partners in the efforts of the KSSP, to plunge into the decentralization and People's Plan Campaign, which has already attracted international attraction.

KSSP was able to provide the state with State level faculty, Key Resource Persons, district and block level coordinators, a large number of task force members, block and district level expert committee members, etc. . However, KSSP is fully aware of the nature of power: "devolution up to me, not beyond". Members of Parliament and Assembly, party bosses at state and district levels and power brokers at all levels were feeling unsafe. Many of them do not like Gram Sabha or neighbourhood groups, do not like monitoring by citizens' committees. Citizens still consider themselves as recipients of government aids and not sovereign masters. The road to participatory democracy is rough and long.

Communication

Whether it is development of scientific world outlook or rallying the people under the slogan "Science for Social Revolution" one is confronted with the task of communicating with large, very large number of people. They are to be given information (knowledge) skills and led to attitudinal changes. All elements of *peda / andre- gogy* are involved in this. All the activities of the KSSP can be viewed as component parts of a gigantic mass education project. Several tools are being used by it for this purpose- spoken words, printed words and performing arts.

Mention has already been made about mass lecture campaign. The first of its sort was 1000 classes in one week- January 1-7, 1973 on "*Nature, Science and Society*". The same was repeated in January 1976, 12000 classes in one month. *Resources of Kerala, Agriculture in Kerala, Public Health, Cheated Consumer, Welcome Mr Hally* (popular astronomy), *The World We Live in, Energy, Forest*, etc. were other subjects on which

massive lecture campaign were organized. A large number of KSSP activists were recruited through these campaigns. Besides such orchestrated campaigns, thousands of discussions and classes were organized each year on a variety of topics- AIDS, Globalization, Education, Environment, Health, etc. etc. Discussions permit inter action, but they are transient. Printed matter can be referred to again and again.

The KSSP is one of the largest publishers in Kerala and the largest science publisher. It has been publishing three science monthlies with out break *Sastragathi* for college students since 1966, *Sastrakeralam* for high school students since 1969 and *Eureka* for primary students since 1970. In 1976 it began to publish books. Since then it has published nearly one thousand titles with a face value of nearly Rs 80 million. Some books have gone to several (more than 8) editions and print runs over one lakh.

The *Kala Jatha* is yet another powerful communication medium and organizing tool. It is a new form of artistic blend mixing elements of street theatre with that of proscenium theatre and classical theatre with folk theatre. The first *Kalajatha* was organized in 1980. The *Jatha* or caravan moves from place to place- three to five locations per day and give performance. A performance is a series of skits and songs, with visualization or chorus singing, each normally 10-15 minutes long. The main theme of *Jatha* each year will be decided by the organization. The total repertoire developed so far will be about 70 to 80 hours long, about 400 to 500 items. In 1983 KSSP extended the *Jatha* to Tamilnadu, in 1985 to six states Karnataka, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi. In 1987 KSSP gave the leadership to Bharat Jan Vigyan *Jatha* and 1990 to Bharat Gyan Vigyan *Jatha*. *Kalajatha* has become an important weapon in the armoury of people's science movement and literacy movement. During the ten year period 1990-2000 *Kalajatha* was the principal tool to attract over 12 million volunteers all over India as instructors to 120 million learners. It has crossed Indian borders to the nearby Bangladesh and is poised to spread to other SAARC countries. *Kalajatha* is one of the most powerful tools innovated by the KSSP.

Research

As indicated earlier the dream about a Rural Science Academy was fructified in 1987-88 with the establishment of the Integrated Rural Technology Centre at Mundur, Palakkad. It is the R&D wing of the KSSP, designed:

- ❖ to do adaptable R&D work so that technologies developed in various R&D institutions in India and even abroad become viable in the hands of our rural producers
- ❖ to translate the problems faced by our villagers and industrial workers into a technical language understandable to our scientists in the R&D institutions
- ❖ to promote and fructify rural inventiveness
- ❖ to work out local development plans
- ❖ to develop integrated S&T packages and management models for strengthening local economies.

The IRTC was set up with a core support grant from the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India. Currently it is supported by an annual grant from Science, Technology and Environment Department, Government of Kerala and a large number of R&D projects taken up by it. Energy, land and water management, income generating activities like sericulture, mushroom cultivation, rabbitry, piggery etc. low-cost housing, local area planning, etc. are some of the areas in which R&D projects have been undertaken. Currently IRTC has got a contingent of about 70 persons, of which more than half are S&T personnel and has got about 40 on-going projects whose total value being one crore of rupees. It has helped to establish a Parishad Production Centre for electronic ballast, CFL and hot boxes, and a Samatha Production Centre for soap and detergents. It has taken up and successfully carried out solid waste management projects. IRTC has become the support for all creative intervention of the KSSP within the society.

KSSP had received a number of wards- Vikram Sarabhai Award for work in Science, Society interface, Vriksha Mitra, Global 500 and Indira Gandhi Paryavaram Puraskars for work in environment, King Sejong UNESCO award for Literacy and Right Livelihood Award (Alternative Nobel Prize) for work in development. Individual activists of KSSP too have won several awards.

Parishad Culture

Over these years the KSSP workers have cultivated a special culture which is generally known as “the Parishad way”. Simplicity, joy of doing things, lack of desire for positions, readiness to accept responsibilities etc are some of the elements of this culture. In reality it is difficult to persuade activists to take up the responsibility of even unit level secretary, not to speak of district or state secretaries and other responsibilities. Activists assembled in schools or other places for committee meetings, study camps etc do require only the barest of conveniences. One can see engineers, doctors, college professors etc

sleeping on the floor over a thin bed-sheet or grass mat. A document on who cannot be considered as a good Parishad activist says the following:

*Those who do not reply to letters,
Those who do not keep proper accounts
Those who do not fullfil accepted responsibilities,
Those who do not accept responsibilities
Those who do not understand the value of others' time
Those who always complain about others
Those who do not have faith in human beings*

-can never become good KSSP activists. Obviously all the members of the KSSP are not good activists. Efforts have been initiated to convert as many members as possible to activists.

KSSP relies on the voluntary work of its members. Its finances are met with the membership fees and the profit accruing from sale of books. KSSP does not receive any government fund for its routine functioning. It receives no foreign contribution. Its members sell the books taking them to houses, schools and offices. They collect subscriptions for magazines. Each member is expected to participate in these activities. Each member should, also, find time to do some bit of organizational work. Finally each member is expected to read and study. They have to present the contents of two books each year to fellow activists.

PEOPLE'S MOVEMENTS
The Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha: A Case Study
CHHATTISGARH

Praveen K Priyadarshi

They have decided to wear their colors today. The colors of their flag - red and green- have been splashed all over the capital city of Raipur. They are the mineworkers, the industrial contract workers, the small peasants, and the freed bonded laborers, *adivasis* and other oppressed sections of the Chhattisgarh region. They have gathered here to renew their resolve to create a 'new Chhattisgarh for a new India' on 28th September- a day on which their beloved leader Shankar Guha Niyogi was assassinated. They belong to the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha (hereafter the CMM), a movement that began as a struggle of the casual workers of iron ore mines of Dalli Rajhara, and that in no time became a voice of all the exploited people of the Chhattisgarh region.

The oxymoronic convergence of a sense of loss and a determination to continue with their struggle is not at all incidental; it rather underscores the underlying characteristic of the CMM. That a crisis should be taken as a challenge and an opportunity to shape the situation in a desired manner is not at all new for this movement. That a struggle is not a process, which is meant for achieving a constructive goal but is a constructive process per se, was a belief that actuated the CMM right since its emergence. That each moment in a struggle is a moment for construction and creativity too, led the movement to adopt *sangharsh aur nirmaan* (struggle and development) as its *mantra*. And in doing so the movement has been able to chart out not only a strong challenge to the existing system but has also provided an alternative through its experimentation in fields like education, health, employment and so on. Not that it has been an easy road for the movement and it has not suffered set backs, but worth noting is the way in which the movement has responded to the setbacks.

The distinction of the CMM lies in the multi-spherical intervention that it has been able to make, both in the systemic exploitation that people suffer from as well as in their lives in general. Not only the movement dealt with the interface of the people with the system that exploited them, but also sought to accommodate the aspects of life that were badly hit by the exploitation. Moreover, in the process, it has raised questions

that are indispensably important both for practitioners and for theoreticians of radical politics. I have divided the study of the CMM loosely into three parts. The first part is an endeavor to map the CMM: the background in which it originated, and its organizational expansion. In the second part, I deal with various struggles launched by the CMM as well as its constructive initiatives. Finally, the study seeks to explain the challenges presently being faced by the movement and the way it is responding to these challenges.

Chhattisgarh: A Profile

Until November 01, 2000, the southeastern part of Madhya Pradesh was known as Chattisgarh. On this day, Chattisgarh was carved out of its parent province and inaugurated as the 26th province of the Indian State. The basic reason behind the demand for the separate statehood was the relative poverty of the region, despite a relative abundance of the resources. Today, Chattisgarh consists of 16 districts and is surrounded by the states of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. It shares its northern border with Madhya Pradesh, southern with Andhra Pradesh, western with Maharashtra and eastern with Orissa. The total area of the State is 52,650 sq. miles, which is inhabited by 19,650 villages.

Historically, a local folk poet first used the name Chattisgarh in the year 1487. In pre-Independent India, the region of Chattisgarh was composed of 14 states, which included five Oriya speaking states - Kalahandi, Patana, Rairakhole, Bamna and Sonapur. However, in 1905 through a redistribution of geographical territory, these five states were transferred to Bengal. In turn, 5 Hindi speaking states - Sarguja, Udaipur, Jushpur, Korba and ChangBhakhar were included in the central province (of which Chattisgarh was a part).

According to the census of 1991, the total population of the region is one crore and seventy lakhs. The population includes significantly high percentage of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Among the inhabitants of mountains and forest areas, 10% are land less, 75% are small farmers, 12% are medium range farmers and 3% are rich farmers. Mainly people of middle-rung castes, dalits and adivasis inhabit the plains of Chattisgarh. Among them 30% are land less and 40% are small farmers, 12% are medium range farmers, 8% are rich farmers and 2% are absentee Landlords. Only 10% of the area are cultivated since agriculture is based on rainwater irrigation. That's why people went to work in iron-ore mines when Bhilai Steel Plant was inaugurated.

Ironically, though the people of Chattisgarh are among the poorest in the country, the region itself is mineral rich. Iron Ore, Coal, Dolomite, Bauxite, Calcium Carbonate, Quartzite, Copper, Tin and Uranium are

the mineral resources found in the region. About 36% of the total area of the region are covered by forest, which is full of valuable resources.

Bhilai Steel Plant is the hub of industrial activities in the region. Many of its auxiliaries sprung up with its establishments. Apart from Bhilai Steel Plant and its auxiliaries, major industries of the region are Bharat Aluminum Company in Korba, ACC Plant in Jaurmul (Bhilai), CCI cement Plant in Alaltara, Century Cement Plant in Baikunth, BN Cotton Mills in RajNandGaon, Rajgarh Jute Mills in Rajgarh, Bilaspur Spinning mills in Bilaspur and BrookeBond Paper Mills. Besides the Kedia Distilleries, The Bhilai and Chattisgarh Distilleries and Kumhari Distilleries are the main distilleries of the area.

Mineworkers and the Work Condition

However, people of Chhattisgarh never envisaged the richness of their environs as something they should exploit. It was a society, which lived with a different philosophy altogether. People lived with the nature and cared for it as much as it cared for them. They did not feel alienated from nature and received from it, whatever was needed for subsistence. They never perceived nature as 'natural resources'. The scenario, however, changed with the establishment of modern industries. It broke the uninterrupted peaceful and contented life cycle of the region as it was intended to do, but it did not bring the intended positive results for the people. The appropriation of forest and other natural resources for the purposes of development meant that people have been stripped of access to their means of subsistence. The only other choice available to them was to join the newly established industries as the lowest rung casual workers. However, they were not familiar with the rules of this new game. Working for the wages was altogether a new experience for these people and they were completely ignorant about the notion and language of rights and terms and conditions of their work. The concept of contract was alien to them and they had little idea of issues like working hours, job security etc. They worked relentlessly in the new oppressive conditions exactly the way they had worked for themselves, not knowing that few returns would come their way.

These casual workers worked under various contractors, who provided work force to the industries and had permit to raise iron-ore for a limited period. In order to maximize the profit, the workers were made to work for long hours in inhuman conditions for astonishingly low wages. There was no health security even in the case of an accident, no maternity relief for female workers, and no provision for bonus, even though regular workers got fair benefits. Janaklal Thakur, presently the president of the CMM, who himself used to work as a loader in Dalli mine, narrates the miserable condition these contract workers were forced to work in. Recalling those days, he observes that the workers felt

bad that they were exploited but even worse was the feeling of hopelessness that haunted them due to apathy shown by the mainstream trade unions. The trade unions represented permanent work force and when it came to the contract workers, they always worked in collusion with the contractors and the management. Consequently, the contracted work force, which was primarily drawn from the *adivasi* inhabitants of the area, became the easiest object of multiple exploitation. Not only they were exploited at the work place as they worked for approximately 12 hours a day for a wage of meager 3 rupees, they lived in a constant insecurity as their women folk very often became targets of contractors and their goons. Further, the presence of a large and powerful lobby of liquor barons was instrumental in persuading the workers to exchange their wages for liquor. As the result, the region witnessed the highest number of people living in conditions of bonded labor. Child labor was rampant with small children working to support and sustain the households. Liquor shops did a brisk business at the expense of livelihood and domestic peace in the workers' families. Overall, the innocent ignorance resulted in an unhindered exploitation of the people and the resources of the region until the CMM emerged on the scene.

Emergence of the CMM

The voice of protest began to emerge initially against the high handedness of the contractors. Anticipating workers' unrest, the contract system was formally abrogated and cooperative system was introduced as an eyewash. In practice however many contractors continued to operate secretly by virtually capturing the cooperative committees. Resultantly, the cooperatives started to show deficit on paper as the contractors started to corner lion's share of the income illegally, which again were covered by the hard-earned wages of the workers.

This situation led to the realization on the part of the casual workers that for similar work, they get lower wages and lesser facilities than the regular workers of Bhilai Steel Plant did. This sense of discrimination found a concrete shape in form of an issue when unequal bonus was announced for the casual and regular workers in 1976. The proposed bonus for regular workers Rs.370 whereas the casual workers were to be given meager 70 rupees. The casual workers took up the matter with the existing trade unions viz. AITUC (All India Trade Union Congress) and INTUC (Indian National Trade Union Congress). The unions, instead of channeling the demand to the management, started blaming each other for the discrimination. Now the workers were convinced that the trade unions are also party to this discrimination against them and therefore cannot be relied upon to represent their grievances.

It was the last days of the emergency when at least 10,000 casual workers of Dalli-Rajhara iron-ore mines started their agitation, revolting against the trade unions on the issue of the discriminatory bonus. On 2 March 1977, the workers announced general strike. On the next day, the workers gathered in the local 'Lal Maidan', where the historic process of forming a labour organization went underway. Twenty days later, On 23 March an agreement was signed by the management, administration and contractors on the one hand, and the workers under the leadership of Banshilal Sahoo on the other. Under the agreement, workers rejected the leadership of AITUC and INTUC and asserted their right to form their independent trade union. Shankar Guha Niyogi who was arrested during the emergency, subsequently joined the movement on the invitation of the workers. A delegation was sent to request Niyogi to lead the movement, which he accepted. He began to give a concrete shape to the spontaneous agitation as he brought with himself vast experience of radical politics.

The union became the most popular union in the iron-ore mines within two months. Hundreds and thousands of mineworkers joined the union, although it was not accorded recognition by the management. In May 1977, Chhattisgarh Mines Shramik Shangh put forth a 10-point charter of demands before the management. The charter included the demand for the increased wages for the loaders and drillers, bonus as par with regularized workers of Bhilai Steel Plant, proper safety measures for the workers and pre monsoon allowance for repair of their huts. A 22 days long strike took place and the management was eventually compelled to sign an agreement, that conceded many of the demands. The management, however, did not honor the agreement. On the payday (1 June 1977) when workers demanded the payments as per the agreement, the management not only refused it, it brought in the police to deal with the workers. In the same night, the police attempted to arrest Niyogi, a move strongly resisted by the workers. Police opened fire in which 11 workers died. Niyogi was arrested.

Nevertheless, the police firing and the arrest of Niyogi did not break the resolve of the workers. Within a fortnight of firing, even before Niyogi was released, the management signed an agreement with the (still unrecognized) union. Both pre-monsoon allowance and bonus were conceded. After Niyogi's release, the union was recognized.

This success of the movement led to its spread from the iron-ore of Dalli-Rajhara to the limestone mines of Danitola and Nandini and the dolomite mines in Terai. After two years of the formation of CMSS, the CMM was formed, in accordance with the view that for the true development of

Chhattisgarh, peasant's awareness and their alliance with working class are necessary. The CMM, subsequently, grew as an umbrella organization, having various trade unions, peasant organizations, and many of its organs within its fold. *Sangharsh Aur Nirman* (Struggle and Development) became its Basic motto and strategy, which meant that along with the struggle against the exploitation in various forms, the CMM would put forward its own alternative. Institutions like hospital, schools, garage etc. were established and similarly, it evolved its own procedures in accordance with its understanding of democracy and participation.

The CMM gradually evolved a worldview of its own, gaining inputs from the intellectual prowess of Niyogi as well as from the experience of the workers. After its establishment, it declared a 20-point programme, keeping in view, the contemporary problems of the region and its people.

Organization, Ideology and Leadership

The movement was quick to realize that workers were firmly linked with their roots in their villages and any structural intervention would not work unless it covered the villages. Right since its beginning, the CMM gave equal emphasis to the peasants, which found its symbolic presence in the flag of the movement. Its red part symbolized workers' solidarity whereas the green part symbolized equal importance and participation of peasants in the movement. This alliance of the workers and the farmers was significant not only for the strategic purposes of the movement, but it also reflected and was an outcome of the ideological platform on which the movement grounded its claims. Even though the movement used Marxist vocabulary for shaping and expressing its world view, it transcended Marxist framework the moment it started to view workers as a members of their community, which happened to be villages and which had significant number of members working as peasants. It was a remarkable shift from the Marxist understanding of workers' exploitation, which primarily viewed it as disproportionate cornering of the surplus value by the owner class. The issue in the widened horizon of the CMM's understanding did not remain just the exploitation of the workers, or other members of the community. Now the issue was the exploitation of the community as a whole, which also included, apart from its members, its culture, its natural resources, its environment, its history and so on. Further more, the issue was to bring the changes that made this community not only free from exploitation but also a collective that encouraged and inspired overall development of its members.

Further growth of the CMM can be understood in this ideological understanding. As the movement grew, it was realized that the fight would not bring the desired results, unless it is fought on all the fronts

simultaneously. The gains made in the work place, will be the lost in the other spheres of life if the exploitative conditions prevailed there. The realization that their struggle was ultimately aimed at building a community that was based on basic human values and inspired human values in them led them to redefine the meaning of struggle itself. This aim meant that the struggle was not primarily *against* something. Rather it was *for* building a community based on such human values as equality and justice. It also meant that opposition to a particular injustice was only incidental as the ultimate goal was not to correct that particular injustice but to build a just order. As the term struggle got this positive connotation in the vocabulary of the CMM, its horizon was bound to increase.

Thus, the CMM gradually became a conglomerate of several unions and organizations, which not only struggled for the just society but also showed through its various initiatives, how that just society might function. Over the years, new unions were formed under the banner of the CMM in various factories of Dalli Rajhara, Rajnandgaon, Jamul, Bhilai, Urla, and Tedesra and other areas of the region. Not only workers but also their families came into the fold of the movement through various wings that were set up within it. Mahila Mukti Morcha organized women folk while youth were mobilized under the flag of Chhattisgarh Student Federation. A separate cultural wing was created to promote the indigenous cultural activities in the organization in particular and in the whole region in general. Weekly newspaper *Mitan* was started to publicize the ideas of the movement. Several cells were also created to deal with the issues like environment. As a whole, the movement became an arena of experimentation in various spheres of human activity. It began to reflect all perceivable faces of exploitation and discrimination in the society. It gradually became a home to all those in the region who felt deprived and a threat to all those who were engaged in depriving them. Struggle for health, education, employment, people's technology and so on gave a completely new meaning to the term struggle in the political parlance. A school or a hospital did not remain just a place where students are taught or patients are treated, they became frontiers of social action that was aimed at rebuilding a community. As we will see in the next section, they were much more than just a cosmetic endeavor of charity of a trade union or provision of services by a self help group.

How the CMM could evolve itself into a sphere of innovativeness that not only exposed the inherent drawbacks in the system but was also able to suggest models that could replace them? The answer perhaps lies in the democratic space that the movement could provide to all its members. Extensive deliberations were encouraged not only for the symbolic purposes but for reaching at conclusions that ultimately shaped the

future of the movement. The leaders at best acted as guides who helped the members in having an informed discussion. For the procedural purposes, the *mukhia* system, which prevailed in the iron ore mines, was adopted in the movement. One *mukhia* was elected on every ten members. Again, one *mukhia* was elected from among these ten *mukhias*. This series reached right up to the central committee, which finally drew the elaborate plans according to the decisions taken in the *mukhia* meetings which was normally a monthly feature. Undoubtedly, until Niyogi lived, he remained a guiding force of the movement, but it was his conscious decision to encourage participation of the members in the decision making process. In the post Niyogi period, the movement is experimenting with collective leadership. Shekh Ansar one of the Morcha leaders observes that we are perhaps the largest movement that is practicing this form of leadership. Although there are problems in terms of communication gap and delay in the process, it is not that they can be sorted out. Another leader, Anoop Singh contends that post held by a particular member is not at all important here, important is the responsibility that a member is willing to take. In a long drawn struggle such as this, individuals come and go, but the struggle goes on as one individual is replaced by another. However, these leaders are unable to explain why for years now internal elections have not been held in the organization.

Struggles of the CMM

An agitation that began as a demand of the casual workers for their due rights as 'workers', gradually developed into a movement that sought to challenge and change the exploitative and hegemonic order of the society in many spheres. The movement gradually spread itself, keeping in view this larger goal. The history of the movement would show that it has launched struggles in such diverse spheres as workers' rights anti-people technology, on the one hand, and liquor, women's rights, ecology etc. the other. I, for convenience of the study, categorize various struggles of the CMM according to the spheres in which they have been launched.

Struggles at the Workplace

In the initial period, the mineworkers blamed their casual status for their hardships as the regular workers had several added facilities as well as the job security. The casual workers, on the other hand, did not get facilities like schools for workers' children, medical aid for their families and insurance schemes, which were even stipulated in Contract Labor Act 1970. Thus, apart from demanding wage-increase, fallback wages and other facilities, the CMSS began to raise the demand of abolition of the contract system and regularization of all the casual workers working in captive mines of the BSP. The CMSS argued in favor

of departmentalization as the Contract Labor Regulation and Abolition Act 1970 also stipulated that all the casual workers who are engaged in works of perennial nature, should be departmentalized. However, the BSP management showed great reluctance in complying with the Act. The CMSS nevertheless persisted with the demand for more than one and half decade, until the management in May 1995 conceded it. It took long agitation in forms of strikes, hunger strikes, *dharnas* and so on. Eventually all the workers below 50 years of age were departmentalized and others were allowed to work in various cooperative societies. The workers got facilities equal to that of the regular employees of the BSP.

This victory of the union, however, came in a time when it was faced with much larger crises. Fresh recruitment was stopped way back in the mines as the management was waiting for the present generation of workers to retire so that it can introduce machines for the works hitherto done manually.

Anti-mechanization Struggle and Proposal for Semi-mechanization

In fact, mechanization of the iron ore mines of the region had begun in the decade of seventies itself. The struggle of Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha had barely begun to produce some positive results when nearly 10000 workers of Bailadila mines in Bastar district were thrown out of mines to introduce machines for the same work. It meant that now the struggle was not only for the rights as a worker but even before that the struggle was for the right to *be and remain* a worker.

In the aftermath of the Bailadila experience, CMSS published a booklet- *kirundul ke Agnigarbh se-* about the experience of Bailadila, replacement of labour by machines and an alternative of this replacement. This booklet formed the basis of the anti-mechanization movement launched by CMSS and the alternative put forward by it in the form of semi-mechanization.

The CMM has vehemently opposed any attempt to mechanize the hitherto manual mines of the region. Not only the mechanization has been resisted through agitation, the arguments behind it has been equally dealt with, through pamphlets, booklets etc. Though mechanization has been a part of the modernization programme of various industrial units in order to upgrade the product quality, many other factors have also hastened this process. International management gurus have always perceived workers as a major obstacle in their scheme of things. Any demand from the workers has not been viewed as a demand of a section of society, it has been perceived as a particular organ of the production-mechanism, which is troubling the entire

system. The CMM has tried to argue on both the fronts. On the one hand, they argue for the shift in the vantage point from where the objectives of development is viewed. CMM argues that the employment of people is an equally important goal of any industry with the production. Machine is required only in two situations. Firstly, if enough work force is not available. Secondly, if the work cannot be performed by human hands. Niyogi quotes Mahatma Gandhi in one of his essay saying that mechanization is a virtue only if there is a scarcity of the workers.

On the other hand, it seeks to challenge the argument that it would be profitable -- both financially and quality wise --for the management to mechanize the iron ore mines. The management argued in favor of mechanization that-

- The quality of the iron produced by the manual labour is not good enough for blast furnace.
- The production cost of manual mines is greater than that of mechanized mines.
- A large quantity of iron-ore is dumped due to its non-utilization by B.S.P.

In response, the CMM put forward following arguments.

Since its establishment, BSP has been using iron ore produced by manual mines and its performance in terms of production and profit, has been better than other steel plants of the country. Manual mines of Bailadila have even supplied iron-ore to the Japanese steel plants and no complaints have ever been received. The CMM contends that blast furnaces are not being damaged by poor quality of the iron- ore. It is malfunctioning due to lack of proper maintenance. Regarding the production cost, the CMM has proved that manual production of iron-ore is not in any way costlier than the mechanized production. Furthermore, only 3 percent of the production costs are spent on iron-ore. Thus even if it is reduced, It is not going to make any substantial difference on the overall production cost.

On the issue of non-utilisation of the iron ore, CMM maintains that steel policy in particular, and industrial policy in general are responsible for it and not the workers. In addition to this, the union also proved by comparing several manual mines with mechanized ones that no way manual mines can be said to be inferior.

In a total mechanized mine, iron ore is raised by gigantic shovels. It leaves no place for the workers in the process. The larger ones replace small size drilling and blasting machines. Large dumpers replace small trucks. All this means that there is no place for loading workers, blasting

and drilling workers, truck drivers, helpers, mechanics etc. are thrown out of the mines.

CMM in its alternative proposal maintained that the works of drilling, blasting, raising, loading and transporting should remain as before. However, crushing plant should be established on the lower part of the hill, so that it can process the iron-ore and only processed iron ore should be transported to the BSP. Previously, the trucks were used to transport raw iron-ore to railway siding and from there it was sent to the BSP.

CMM in its proposal also contended that this semi-mechanization would cost less in iron-ore raising. After a long agitation, the BSP management accepted the alternative mechanization proposal on experimental basis. According to the tripartite settlement signed by the management, the Chief Labor Commissioner and the CMSS on August 11, 1980, a reappraisal had to be done about the functioning of this mechanization model after 2 years. However, the technocrats of SAIL have avoided any such exercise and have attempted many times to replace this model with total mechanization.

Thus, the resentment that swept the entire working class of the region in the aftermath of Bailadila tragedy was successfully channelised into an anti-mechanization movement by the CMM. Armed with their own model of mechanization, workers of the manual mines of Dalli-Rajhara have prevented any attempt of total mechanization of their mines so far.

The issue of departmentalization was also finally settled on 30th May 1995. According to the settlement, all the workers below 50 years of age and fit to work were regularized. Only 200 workers were found unfit but they were also allowed to work in different cooperative societies.

However, it did not mean that the management understood the benefits of semi-mechanization. Actually, they have got the point that so long as the CMM is present, mechanization would not be possible. Thus, they are waiting for the aging work force to vanish. No new recruitment is taking place. The process of the thinning out of work force is being accelerated by various voluntary retirement schemes.

Struggle of Bhilai Workers

The Bhilai movement of the CMM has proved to be the costliest so far as in this it lost its leader in Sankar Guha Niyogi on September 1991. In addition, 16 people died on 1 July 1992, when police opened fire on the workers who were sitting on dharna on the rail track. However, these dastardly attacks failed to demoralize the contract workers of Bhilai, who

got inspiration from the success of 15,000 contract workers of Dalli-Rajhara.

The movement leadership was aware that this time, workers have to fight against private industrialist, who would use every mean to break the movement. Thus, initial groundwork was done very quietly. CMM came out openly on the scene only when the organization was formidable enough to sustain the attack of the industrialists. Openly it all began in March 1990, when 77 contract workers of the ACC. went on indefinite hunger strike demanding better work conditions and other facilities. The management tried to break the strike by the help of goons and recognized INTUC union, but failed. Various trade unions of CMM supported the strike. Niyogi sat on indefinite hunger strike and finally, the management had to accept most of the demands of the workers. According to the settlement, contract workers got the work guarantee of 20 days a month, 20% of the profit of 1989 as bonus and other facilities. This success of the contract workers of ACC convinced the workers of other industrial units that only an organisation like CMM, with its diversified support base and commitment could, change their fortune. Thus, in the aftermath of ACC success, workers of Bhilai, Jamul, Tedesara, Urla, Kumhari etc. began to associate themselves with CMM. Consequently four trade unions, namely, Progressive Engineering Workers Union, Chattisgarh Chemical Mill Workers Union, Progressive Cement Workers Union and Chattisgarh Workers Union were formed.

Following the success of the ACC contract workers in July, Progressive Engineering Workers Union, which received a large response, organized a rally. Management, on their part, began to dismiss workers, who had participated in the rally. Again on October 2, 1990, the union proposed to organize a similar rally, but Bhilai administration denied the permission. In a very short period, the venue was shifted to Raipur and yet it was successful. Again, a large number of workers were shown the door next day by the management. The total number of dismissed workers was 3000 in December 1991 and 4,200 in June 1992. After a long agitation, which cost many lives, the government referred all the cases to the industrial court. Almost 10 years have passed but the judicial battle is still going on. On many occasions, verdicts have come in workers' favour, but on some pretext or other, industrialists have managed to get a stay. Clearly, industrialists are deliberately delaying the judicial procedure because, they can afford to wait. They also know that workers can't afford it. Thus, this delay in the delivery of justice by the court is indirectly in favor of the industrialists. The union leaders are aware that the judgement can go either way. Moreover, a favorable decision also does not mean a keen compliance from the industrialists, as has been evident in the case of interim payment to the workers by the

industrialists. Industrial court has recently directed the concerned industries to make payment as interim relief to the workers. The industries, however, declined to do any such payment, defying the court ruling. The CMM, nevertheless, is in no mood to give up the struggle

One of the most striking features of the Bhilai movement has been the support it has received from the workers of other areas, particularly from the workers of Dalli- Rajhara. Sudha Bharadwaj is perhaps not exaggerating when she contends that Bhilai workers have virtually been fed by Dalli workers for all these years. Not only that, the movement also ensured that children of the striking workers did not drop out from school owing to lack of money.

Struggle against Liquor

As a result of the struggle of the CMSS for the casual iron ore mine workers, the daily wage went up from a meager 3.50 rupees per day in 1977 to 23 rupees in 1980-81. However, on the place of bringing positive changes in the social life of workers, the additional income led them towards liquor, gambling etc. The contractors, who lost on wage fronts, were able to siphon off money through the sale of liquor. According to official figures, the consumption of alcohol in Dalli-Rajhara increased one and a half times in 1976-82(20,000 to 36,000litres) the license fees for the *thekas* went in the same period from Rs.5.5 lakhs to Rs. 1.4 millions.

Thus, the menace of liquor for the first time forced the CMM to expand its domain of struggle. In 1978,when the union inaugurated 17 departments to tackle various issues, prohibition department was among them. The anti-liquor movement began with a public-awareness campaign. Anti-liquor posters and slogans covered the union office and surrounding areas. To begin with, the office-bearers of the union pledged not to consume liquor, followed by *Mukhias*. Eventually, thousands of workers followed suit. A PUCL report on the movement notes - "Thousands of workers collectively took oath on the name of national martyrs. The previous of financial sanctions and social boycott were made of those who disobeyed the oath. The significant feature of this movement was that the workers were convinced on the political grounds and not on moral-religious grounds. The CMM explained to the workers how their hard-earned money is going back in the hands of the capitalists because of their liquor consumption. Bharat Dogra, a Delhi journalist, writes - "It is perceived that the urge for liquor in tribals are so strong that it can not be altered, but the union proved it wrong. The reason of this success was not sanctions imposed by the union, it was the realization on the part of the workers that it is in their own benefit and that consuming liquor would be a breach of loyalty of the union.

Moreover, the union ascertained it that the leisure time of the workers is spent constructively."

The success of anti-liquor struggle was a triumph for the women because they were the main victims of the violence caused by liquor within the family. Women took lead in the movement by picketing liquor shops and reporting any breach of oath by workers to their representatives. Importantly, the union did not merely imposed sanctions on liquor consumption; it also ensured that the workers got other avenues of recreation. In evenings, it began to organize various interactive programs based on contemporary national-international issues. Similarly, programs emphasizing the significance of the local culture were also organized. Such programs, on the one hand, provided recreational avenue to the workers, on the other it helped raising their awareness level.

Struggle for Education

The level of literacy and formal education among the mineworkers was quite low. Education was one of the means through which awareness level of the people could be raised. Thus, the CMM has made significant endeavors in this area as well. Immediately after its formation, the CMM advised the colony *Mukhiyas* to open primary schools for the children of the contract workers. At that time, only 22 primary schools were run by the B.S.P. in the labour camp areas and the children of the contract workers were unable to get admission in these schools. Thus, it was decided in the colony committees that they would open and run primary school on their own. If the required infrastructure is not available in the colony, the union would provide it.

Subsequently, primary schools were opened in Bhagoli Para, Dalli, RamNagar, Kelabaari, Rajwara and Kande. In the next three years, all the schools except one was taken over by tribal welfare department of the state government. Hemant School is one primary school, which is still being run by the union through workers cooperative committee. At present, it has 5 teachers and around 250 students. The composition of the students also differentiates it from a common primary school of rural or semi-rural areas. More than 95% of the students belong to scheduled castes scheduled tribes and backward classes and more than 60% of the students are girls. More recently, the workers have opened a primary school themselves in Veergaon (Urla) These workers have lost their job and have virtually no means to lead their lives. However, with the help of the union, they have managed to ensure education for their children. The school has been named Shaheed School.

Apart from the primary schools, the CMM is running one secondary school also. Initially, the union put the demand for a secondary school in the area before the government, which was never fulfilled. After that the CMM and the people of village of Kundekarsha took initiative to open a school. The school began to function in 1994 and it was named after Late Shankar Guha Niyogi. The school is being run by *Pragatishil Grameen Shikshak Samiti*. Currently, the school has two classes, three teachers and eighty students. It shifted in its own building in 1998.

In the CMM run schools, experimentation with the curriculum is also going on. These schools are not following the same curriculum as prescribed by the government. Here, education is an important instrument to make the future generation aware about exploitations, discriminations and fight against them. For instance children here are not taught k for kamal, instead they are taught k for *kam* (work) and m for *majdoor* (worker). Furthermore, children are also taught about martyrs like Veer Narain Singh and Niyogi. One can see children of these schools raising slogans of workers' solidarity in the beginning and the end of every day. Schools run by an NGO, Mukti Niketan in Pithora, Saraipali and other areas of Mahasamund district are also following the same pattern. Besides the initiatives in the field of formal education, the CMM has also made efforts to make people aware about various issues through pamphlets and cultural programs etc.

Struggle for Health

The immediate cause of the movement for health was the death of one of the female activist- Kusumbai- who died due to the negligence of the BSP hospital doctors during pregnancy. The resentment gradually shaped into a determination to prevent any such accident in the future. For that purpose, the union decided to build its own hospital, Health was already on the agenda of the union as one of the departments belonged to it.

The movement for health in Dalli-Rajhara began with the anti-liquor movement. In 1981, the representatives of the workers and the doctors sympathetic with the movement constituted a health committee. Subsequently, the health awareness program and dispensary were started, which functioned from the union building itself. On 15 August 1981, a pamphlet was distributed which appealed to the workers to struggle for the right to health. The pamphlet raised eight major issues including elimination of T.B., ensuring safe pregnancy, healthy nourishment of the workers etc. The pamphlet also pledged to build a hospital, conduct health awareness programs among the peasants, spread environment consciousness among people and train health workers. On 3 June 1983, a senior worker Lahar Singh and a farmer Halalkhor inaugurated Shaheed Hospital. Initially it was a 15 bed

hospital equipped with modern laboratory, operation theatre, ambulance etc. Now it has expanded into a 60 bed hospital and the construction work for another ward is almost complete. Saheed hospital has a minimal fee of one rupee for outdoor patients and five rupees for indoor patients. The hospital has been built solely by the contributions from the workers. The organization has given a truck to the hospital. Its income is used to subsidize the treatment and for other expenditures. Any additional expenditure is borne by the organization. The hospital does not accept any external assistance in order to maintain its autonomy. The hospital has gradually achieved self-sufficiency in its day-to-day activities and it seeks grants from the organization only in extraordinary situations. Saheed hospital has three doctors and the number of assistant staff is thirty. There is a team of six volunteer health workers, responsible for the management and health education activities. They are mineworkers who do this job in their spare time. The hospital provides free medicine to the patients and the doctors prescribe medicine from W.H.O's essential drug list only. It is their endeavor to treat patient by minimal medicine. Saheed hospital also has a training program for the assistant staff.

One witnesses a rather different environment inside the hospital .A doctor explaining the causes, nature and cure of the malady in the most comprehensible language. Mother of one of the child patient is quoted saying- "In the steel plant hospital, doctors do not touch our children, here I have seen doctors pick them up and hold them." As Dr Raju-the senior most among three doctors -puts it-"The purpose is one factor which makes all the difference. We are not here to earn a livelihood; we are here to make a difference in their lives. Moreover, their faith in the hospital makes us even more responsible. "

Perhaps this is the reason behind the phenomenal remedy rate of the hospital. Dr Raju claims that it is commendable even by the western standards. Though the hospital does not have the facilities required for the formal research, still limited research programs are conducted. The research is generally aimed at the development of the remedies, which are cheap and locally available. For instance, the hospital has incorporated an indigenous drug in the treatment of jaundice. Similarly, it has developed a very cheap treatment of the prostrate related problems in the old age. In the region where safe drinking water is not available in most of the villages, diarrhea related death is rampant. CMM's health awareness campaign has achieved a considerable success in reducing this type of death. Once again, *pasia* (water containing starch of rice) was prescribed on the place of ORS (Oral rehydration solution) because of its easy availability in every household. Dr Raju claims that diarrhea death was reported in the area in the year 1994. The hospital also

undertakes regular vaccination programme and organizes camps in the interior areas whenever required.

Khiwlal Patel, one of the health workers in the hospital, points out that the 'struggle for health' is against the utilization of medical knowledge as a capitalist possession. Majority of the doctors is very secretive about their knowledge because they use it as their business secret in the pursuit of profit. On the other hand, in the remote areas, doctors are not sufficient in number. Thus, the poor people are compelled to go to the quacks with insufficient knowledge. The health campaign of the CMM also includes programme to a minimum level of knowledge to these quacks.

The health campaign, spearheaded by the hospital, has achieved a considerable success in spreading awareness among the poor and the marginalized people of the region. But its specialty lies in the fact that it has perceived the problem of the health care in its context. As Dr Raju observes - "we mostly treat the maladies caused by poverty. Eliminating poverty is the most effective preventive measure we can have."

Struggle for People's Technology

Ever since the CMM encountered technology in the form of machines that threatened to replace the entire work force, it understood its hegemonic potential. The CMM realized that in order to counter the technologic invasion of capital, it is important to know technology and to make it people friendly. Proposal for semi-mechanization was a landmark achievement in this regard, when the CMM proved how technology can be used in production without making it anti-people. Now the CMM wanted to institutionalize its endeavors in the field of technology. The opportunity came when some 70 mechanics employed in various Dalli- Rajhara garages revolted against the owners demanding better work condition and facilities. At the end of a relentless struggle, 30 of the mechanics were taken back, and 40 others were retrenched. At was at this stage that the union came forward with a proposal to open a garage. Subsequently, Saheed Garage and Training Centre was established in 1982, with a purpose of imparting technological knowledge to the mechanics, who, although could repair any complicated part of an engine, knew nothing about the principles on which it worked. Moreover, the garage functioned on cooperative basis and provided a healthy environment for learning and earning.

According to the arrangement, the garage contributes Rs2500 per month to the union. Rest of the earning is distributed among the employees according to their work. An expansion plan of the garage is under consideration. However, with the decreasing number of trucks in the mines, it seems unlikely. There was a proposal to evolve the garage

gradually into a polytechnic institute but the Madhya Pradesh government declined to cooperate.

Struggle for Environment

The CMM has regularly raised the issue of environmental degradation in the region to underscore the point that the existing notion of development is not only oppressive for the workers but also has a destructive impact over the environment. Chhattisgarh, which had a comparatively large share of forest, witnessed deforestation at a massive scale in the post-independence period. The CMM contends that deforestation is a consequence of disempowerment of the people who inhabit forests. It argues that the contractors coming from outside and not the people inhabiting forest destroy it. Niyogi in an essay contends that the environment can be saved only if the process of development is a balanced one. He also favors the local ownership of forest on the place of its nationalization. The CMM is equally against any conservative argument in the name of environmental protection. It contends that a people friendly development would be equally friendly for environment also; the point is to grow in endogenously and in a people friendly manner. Any such development would not cause environmental destruction.

In accordance with its understanding on the issue of environment, the CMM launched a program called “Know your Forest” in 1984. In this program, the union displayed the indigenous trees in a vacant land adjoining to the office building. Its two-fold objective being, on the one hand to familiarize people with the forest and on the other to develop a reforestation program based on indigenously found trees. Besides this, the union has forced the BSP management to act to ensure that environmental side effects of mining are properly taken care of.

Solidarity with the Oppressed

Apart from demanding justice for sections of society, the CMM has also shown concern and acted appropriately against oppression of other kinds. Over the years, it has sought to fill in as a civil society organization that acts as an intermediary between the people and the state. On the one hand, it has organized the community against the oppressive tactics of the state, on the other, it has used various state laws and institutions to eliminate oppressive practices within the community. Furthermore, the CMM has pledged its support for various movements at the national and international levels, which have a similar outlook. Following instances will elaborate the role the CMM as a civil society organization.

The CMM has taken up the issue of bonded labor along with the Raipur Churches Development and Relief Committee. It went to the Supreme Court demanding intervention for release of bonded labor in the region. The court case was accompanied by dharnas on the streets of Bhopal and Delhi, and by protest marches to focus on the plight of bonded labor. Subsequently, 5000 bonded labors of the region were released on the directive of the court. The CMM also ensured their rehabilitation.

The CMM has focused on the problems faced by slum dwellers in Raipur. It supervises the rehabilitation of slum dwellers through programs initiated by the state government, sees that pattas are given wherever land are granted. It ensures that the slum dwellers are not relocated in a place that is too far from their place of work.

The CMM also ensures that the people of weaker sections of society do not suffer because of rampant corruption in the government departments. For instance getting a ration card takes quite a few trips to the office and a fixed bribe to the concerned officer. However, the CMM organizes camps where ration cards are distributed *en masse* to the families. In one such camp held by the CMM in Jamul in 1999, more than 500 families got their ration cards. Similarly, the CMM has taken up the cases of non-payment of pension to widows, old age and handicap people. One Mukhia of the organization is permanently deputed to look after such cases.

Recently, the CMM has not only taken up the issues pertaining to the marginal self-employed farmers, it has been successful in ensuring their active participation in the activities of the organization. In 1998, the polluted water of Kamal Solvent Factory destroyed the crops of 13 farmers of Khuteri village of Tedesara area. The factory management initially agreed to pay the compensation, later on refused to do so despite repeated written requests by the farmers. Finally the CMM took up the cause and the farmers got Rupees 38000 per acre as compensation. In addition, the factory management also agreed to raise the depth of pond and repair it so that polluted water would not flow in agricultural fields. In a similar case, the government acquired lands from farmers in Bafara village of Khaira developmental block in 1992. However, no compensation was paid to them. With help of the CMM the farmers fought for their cause and eventually got the compensation in May 1999.

Consciousness Raising and Political Creativity

The fact that the CMM is a locally organized social movement struggling against particular problems faced by the people of a particular region has not been able to narrow down its political outlook. On the contrary, it has sought to explain how the particularity of a problem is related with the larger phenomena, taking place at the world level. Therefore, the

CMM has always keenly observed all major events at the national and international levels and encouraged its members to form an opinion regarding these phenomena. For instance, the CMM members keenly followed and vigorously debated the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Similarly, release of Nelson Mandela was celebrated by distributing sweets in the CMM office. In the evenings, contemporary issues of national and international concerns are regularly discussed in the office of the organization. Consequently, one finds that the awareness level of the CMM member is quite high.

Because of such a creative and democratic political environment within the organization, the CMM has been able to respond imaginatively in the sphere of politics as well. Following two instances would show that the CMM has something to contribute into the day-to-day political practice also.

The 'Chhattisgarhi Identity'

Political struggles, which emphasize on sub-national identities, more often than not, take an exclusionist and chauvinistic position about it. Such a position means that the people who fall in the parameters of this identity include both the exploited and the exploiters. At the same time, such an identity alienates other exploited people who do not conform to this identity.

However, the members of the CMM has gone further and charted out a new meaning of what it means to be a Chhattisgarhi. According to the CMM, a true Chhattisgarhi is one who works in the region, and who does not exploit either the resources or the people for his personal benefit. The identity is thus not conceptualized on geographical or cultural basis, rather it emphasize on productive labor and non-exploitation. It does not matter if a person belongs to a different part of India, and if s/he does not speak the language of the area. Thus, by making non-exploitation the basis of identity, the CMM has outstripped existing structure of social and political power.

Political Representation and Accountability

The CMM is one social movement in India that directly participates in the electoral process. Importantly, however, winning the political power has never been high on its agenda. Sekh Ansar observes that the decision to fight or not to fight an election solely depend on the consideration which way the movement is going to benefit. If fighting is beneficial we fight or if it is other wise, we do not. Elections have been used by the movement to heighten awareness about the shortcomings of the present political system among the people. Accordingly, the CMM has spelt out a series of

issues that have never been taken up by the mainstream political parties.

Furthermore, the CMM holds and tries to demonstrate that accountability should be an integral part of electoral politics. Candidates fielded by the CMM take the oath on the names of Veer Narain Singh, Bhagat Singh and Nelson Mandela that they will remain true to the people in general and people in particular and would do nothing for personal benefits.

Clearly, at the level of perception of the problem, as well as at the level of strategies, the CMM has a holistic approach. This is clear from the range of issues taken up by the organization and the way it has carried out the struggles. This holistic approach becomes even more significant when we put it with the fact that the CMM does not claim any universal validity either of the issues or of the strategies to raise them; it has been able to distinguish the multi-dimensionality of exploitation from its universality. Its leadership recognizes the fact that peculiarity of a particular context, in which exploitation takes place, can not be undermined. The basis of solidarity of oppressed classes through out the world might be the oppression that they go through, but it does not necessarily universalize the methods to overcome the oppression. as clear from the struggles the CMM has evolved its strategy to establish a society- free of exploitation, keeping this in mind.

Major Challenges before the CMM

In the early 1990's, when Niyogi was assassinated, even sympathizers of the movement believed that it would not be able to sustain in the face of the loss of its leader. It was probably taken as one of those individual efforts, which live and die with a particular individual, ignoring the whole structural and procedural aspect of the CMM that it had evolved so painstakingly over the years. Apart from this sympathetic fear, one also comes across a very well organized campaign in the local press declaring the demise of the movement during this period. In fact, the forces opposed to the CMM had hoped that in absence of Niyogi the movement would falter away automatically. However, as the movement not only moved ahead but spread in other areas also, new ways of demoralizing it were resorted to. Bhilai massacre of the workers, in which police killed more than a dozen peacefully agitating workers, and subsequent framing of the movement leaders for murder of a sub-inspector can be seen in this light. This is just one of the instances of intended suppression by the government. Morcha workers face police high handedness and attack from the goons of industrialists so often that they now take it as a part of their agitation. Says Sudha Bharadwaj, a Morcha activist; "it not at all shocks us now when we receive any such

news. We take it as a provocation to turn violent and it determines us all the more to remain peaceful." Rajendra Sail, a social activist of the region who has been closely associated with the movement since its inception believe that it has hardened the activists and now they are not going to break down under threat of physical assault. He says that the CMM has a long list of martyrs so any addition to that is not going to demoralize the movement. Thus, the movement has proved that it is not going to crumble under the onslaught of the industrialists or the state. Moreover bid of suppression was not necessarily a post- Niyogi phenomenon; it continued parallel to the movement since its beginning.

However, the movement has faced some problems since the decade of 1990's that are much more deep-rooted and require some real imaginative response from the movement. To start with, the policy of liberalisation and opening up of the economy has adversely effected the industries in the region. A large number of factories have shut down and even running factories are not recruiting any new work force. Even the BSP has lately been under serious strain in the face of crisis in Indian steel industry. Retrenchments and shut downs have become order of the day in Chhattisgarh, observes Sekh Ansar. He says that new recruitment has been undertaken only in the police department in the newly created state.

The industrial work force that has provided the backbone of the movement so far is rapidly dwindling. Sekh Ansar concedes that although the impact is not being felt as of now, it is bound to effect the organisation. But the movement is in no mood of giving up, declares Ansar. He observes that as an impact of closures and retrenchments, a second phase of migration is taking place. In the first phase, people moved from their village to industrial centres in the region to find jobs. But as they are being thrown out from the industries, they are going wherever hope of getting a job lead them to.

Now the movement is working on two levels simultaneously to contain this process. At the ideological and policy level, Morcha has joined hands with various anti- globalisation/ liberalisation movements are trying to contain its onslaught through various political actions. The CMM is trying to forge a network of movements, which would oppose globalisation in every corner of the world. Anoop Singh observes that 'globalisation of solidarity' is only method through which globalisation of capital can be countered. At the other level, the movement is seeking to explore other options that may provide people employment so that they would not be forced to leave the region. Sekh Ansar gives the example of bamboo buckets used in the iron ore mines. The CMM prevailed upon the management to buy these buckets from the local people who are

engaged in making these buckets. He believes that similar initiatives would help in sustaining the local economy. He gives the example of shoes for workers of the BSP that are procured from Bata Company at present even if local shoemakers make shoes of no inferior quality. The CMM on its part is demanding that locally made shoes should be Oprocured by the BSP.

All the CMM leaders agree that globalisation has come as a blow for all the movements of the CMM kind, but at the same time, it has made the movement all the more pertinent. Over the years, the movement has been able to win the faith of the downtrodden that it is the only way that lead to a dignified life. Globalisation has just changed the form of exploitation, whose modus operandi is much more invisible, but whose impact over the victim is even more devastating. Thus the fight is far from over and far from lost.

Secondly, the creation of separate Chhattisgarh State is another change in situation the movement has to deal with. Clearly, for the CMM, a separate statehood has never been a solution. The president of the Morcha, Janak Lal Thakur had observed two years back in a personal conversation - way before the state was created- " we are not against the statehood but we know that it is not going to bring any profound change. And that is why we are for a new Chhattisgarh"(as distinct from a separate one). Even as opinions are divided about the impact of creation of new state over the fate of the movement, the new establishment has already started to work on its strategy of keeping a check on the movement by co-opting its symbols and most importantly, its leader Sankar Guha Niyogi. On the one hand, the state government is promoting dissidence in the movement, on the other it is swearing by the ideals of Niyogi. In one of significant moves the chief minister of the state inaugurated a reading room in Dalli Rajhara, shared the dais with the widow of the deceased leader and observed that he would work on the ideals cherished by the firebrand leader. Even if no body took the promise as more than eyewash, the intentions are very clear.

However, the Morcha leadership exudes confidence that any such attempt would not succeed. Says Ansar- we are a cadre based organisation and members here are wedded to the ideology. Rajendra Sail echoes the view when he says that he would be happiest if the state wants to work on the ideals of Niyogi. However, the CMM cadres are not fools who would be carried away by such tricks. On the administrative level, the leaders believe that the only difference the new state is going to make is that now they would not have to run to Bhopal for everything. Otherwise, they do not see any qualitative difference taking place either in the lives of the people or in the movement. However, few independent

observers believe that the new state is going to have a negative impact on the CMM. Lalit Surjan - editor of Raipur based Hindi daily *Deshbandhu* for instance believes that an *adivasi* chief minister, who uses similar rhetoric as of the CMM, will be able to make a dent in support base of the movement.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that the CMM is not concerned with its support base for the electoral purposes. They have established their image as an organisation, which genuinely fight for just causes. And as Ruchir Ghosh - a journalist of the same daily puts it- the situation is so acute that even spontaneous strikes are taking place, without any initiative from any trade union. People will continue to mobilise under CMM's banner due to its history of sustained struggles.

Thirdly, mushrooming of large number of NGO's in the area has also come as a challenge to the CMM. Similarly, various government policies that are supposedly meant for empowering people, ironically without tampering with the larger dynamics of power, is also something the movement has to deal with. The region has witnessed a large number of NGO's coming up particularly in the areas inhabited by *adivasis*. The NGO's way of social action is generally depoliticised that make them status quoist after a point and in the process they become an instrument of legitimacy for the forces who are against any structural change taking place in the society. But again the leadership is not alarmed. Anoop Singh believes that the crisis is so acute that any such cosmetic attempt is not going to work.

Further, the CMM is also trying a kind of innovative collaboration with few of the reliable NGOs. Rajendra Sail says that we can sell some of the ideas to NGOs also, which we would not be able to implement otherwise owing to resource constraints. In the process, we also seek to politicise the NGO. For instance, the movement is seemingly intermingled in the Mahasamund area with an NGO called *Mukti Niketan*. The NGO works in the diverse fields of education, health and consciousness raising. It follows the ideals of the CMM and resultantly, most of the people who come into its contact, become the CMM members. Shiv Kumar Patel, co-ordinator of the NGO, who himself is a member of the CMM and belong to Bandhua Mukti Morcha, contends that we train people in political action and as soon as they live our premise, they lift the *Lal-hara* flag. However, many critics believe that this alliance is not a good sign for the movement. Prafulla Jha- a close associate of Niyogi at one point in time- argues that on the one hand such collaboration would dilute the radical element of the movement. Moreover, it might even hamper its image, as NGOs would try to use the credibility of the movement for their own benefits. It is too early to be judgmental about the issue right now.

However, it can be said that the movement is trying to respond to all these challenges with its characteristic creativity.

PEOPLE'S MOVEMENTS
Ekta Parishad
MADHYA PRADESH

Rahul Ramagundam

Introduction

The movement for land reform in Madhya Pradesh has been building up momentum over some years. For more than a decade, Ekta Parishad has been instrumental in the mobilization and organization of the adivasi and landless communities. Adivasis are citadel to Ekta Parishad's struggle and its worldview. The Parishad has been constantly struggling against the state and other forces that are responsible for the disintegration of the adivasi society and economy. Beginning with awareness building, the Parishad works to strengthen the local village leadership and their organization around the common cause. The focus of Ekta Parishad movement has been to get access to and control of natural livelihood resources especially land, water and forests ("Zamin, Jal, Jungle") to the local communities. There is a growing awareness among the people of the entrenched social inequities and the fact that the power relations perpetuated by the State are antithetical to their interests.

Making of the Movement

Ekta Parishad is a mass-based organization led by a large number of committed local women and men, catering to the needs of the poor sections of the Indian society. The Parishad was founded in 1990 as a national body for articulating the disempowered people's aspirations. It sprouted in the state of Madhya Pradesh but has also spread to the neighbouring states of Bihar and Orissa. It has over one lakh members in the state of Madhya Pradesh alone. Ekta Parishad is an experiment in accordance with methods propounded by Mahatma Gandhi for village revitalisation. It works with the motto that organization and struggle constitute an important element of the development. The belief that the awareness generation and organizational strength building through trained village-level activists is central to problem solving is at the root of the organizational ideology. The strategy, however, is not only to engage in the agitation programmes but also to undertake constructive activities for the economic upliftment of the people and to strengthen people's organization.

Ekta Parishad has been involved in building 'indigenous leadership' to propel the empowerment process among the dalits and adivasi population of the state. It has its roots in the need to give a united voice to a fragmented struggle being waged across the country in general and Madhya Pradesh in particular for the

livelihood rights of the deprived and the dispossessed. It is an organization that helps people articulate rights over the natural resources of livelihood such as land, water and forest. Ekta Parishad is specifically mobilising people around the issues of proper utilisation of resources for people centred development, land distribution, access to forest for adivasi, implementation of social legislation like minimum wages, release of bonded labourers, decentralisation of decision making and participation of women in the social and political process.

Ekta Parishad works through its seven associated development agencies that are located in six traditional regions of the state. Some of the associate agencies of the Ekta Parishad have been active in the state for more than three decades. These agencies are operational in about 2,068 villages cutting across 26 of the 61 districts in the undivided Madhya Pradesh. These agencies were formed to meet the emerging needs. They also work towards spreading concerns. The role of assisting the workers to achieve the better output is done by the associate agencies in their respective regions. While the associate agencies have their own independent executive councils with respective rules and regulations, in the field these agencies work under the banner of Ekta Parishad which itself remains a non-registered people's organization. The village organizations' that its trained activists spawned felt that in isolation their work lacks impact. They needed to have an umbrella body representing grassroots aspirations in the macro forums. Further, the committed workers required sustenance support as well as assistance in capacity building. These concerns led to the birth of Ekta Parishad.

A brief introduction to the associate agencies will provide an insight into Ekta Parishad's organizational structure as well as its diverse activities. All but Mahatma Gandhi Sewa Ashram at Jaura with which he was symbiotically linked, were founded by the personal intervention of and ideological inputs from Rajgopal.

Mahatma Gandhi Sewa Ashram

Located at Jaura in Morena district of the Chambal region, it was the earliest one to take root under the able leadership of Gandhian Subba Rao. The Ashram played a vital role in the surrender of dreaded Chambal dacoits. Presently it is spread over some five districts of the Chambal region and works for the empowerment and land rights of Saheriya adivasi.

Parivartan

After the successful work in Chambal, Rajgopal turned eastwards to work among the poorest of adivasis in Chattisgarh. He chose Bastar and formed Parivartan (Transformation) in mid 70s, to educate and organise adivasis against their exploitation. Even today, Parivartan is undertaking awareness generation programmes through its many exposures of the bureaucrat-business-politician nexus in the exploitation of adivasis and forest resources.

Prayog Samaj Sevi Sansthan

The genesis of Prayog Samaj Sevi Sanstha, located in the forlorn region of Chattisgrah lies in the restlessness borne out of sublime anger in a group of young and dynamic individuals. An anger that was directed against exploitation. There was a determination to construct an exploitation free society. Since 1980 Prayog Samaj Sevi Sansthan is located at Tilda, a small railway station between Raipur and Bilaspur in Chattisgarh. Founded as an experiment in volunteerism, it is, more specifically, an experiment in workers building.

Those who came to be part of Prayog were people who had seen life from close quarters. There were women who had borne the brunt of domestic violence. There were young girls who had been deserted just after their marriages because of their dark complexion. There were young mothers who had courageously taken a step ahead in life by leaving their abusive and drunkard husbands. There were young men who had returned to their background after undergoing training in Prayog. These were the people who had trudged in with ambition to discover themselves by dedicating to the cause of healing the pain of exploitation and oppression.

Prayog stands as a landmark institution in Madhya Pradesh in general and Chattisgarh in particular. An institution which became the mother of voluntary movement in Chattisgarh. From here the trained workers went to work not only in Madhya Pradesh but also to unfurl the flag of voluntary work in Bihar and Orissa. It is Prayog, which strengthened the idea of Ekta Parishad.

Navrachna Samaj Sevi Sansthan

Navrachna Samaj Sevi Sansthan (Body for Initiatives in Social Reconstruction) was founded in 1987 to create mass awareness against the brutality of the feudal practices in Bundelkhand and Baghelkhand. It works among the adivasis and dalits of the region to effect their organization in order to raise their stake in the management of the natural livelihood resources.

Gramin Yuva Abhikaram

Gramin Yuva Abhikaram (Village Youth Initiatives) is active in the Malwa region. Its focus is on the question of adivasis identity, habitat and knowledge. It believes in people's responsibilities towards preserving their habitat. It is advocating the cause of people's participation in forest management and regeneration. It is working to revive the traditional water harvesting system of the adivasis as practiced in Up-hill Irrigation, which consumes less energy for the distribution of water. It is also documenting the untold stories of adivasi heroes so as to present the adivasi history by de-constructing the colonial hagiography that stereotyped certain tribes such as Bhils as habitual bandits. Similarly, in 1986 at Tilda was formed Gramin Vikas Pratisthan (Body For Village Development) to undertake activities in village economic construction and to organise the people to fight against inequitable distribution of resources.

In Mahakaushal region sprang Mahakaushal Gram Swaraj Samiti. It works among the Baiga tribes for their rights over their local resources.

Ekta Parishad was the outcome of a realisation borne out of the fact that the localised work in different regions by these agencies had not been of much help in the desired policy change. At times the associate agencies fighting for the rights of the people felt that their energies were consumed by local social action and had limited impact on the policy change and thereby bore minimal fruits. As Rajgopal says, "If the agitation is not carried out at the state level there cannot be much impact and if there is not much impact then there cannot be policy changes." The village groups in different regions also reciprocated this feeling. Localised presence had also failed to build a shield against government repression against the workers in one region, as there was no state-wide presence to pressurise the government machinery.

In parts, Ekta Parishad was also the outcome of a series of futile attempts at alliance building. In 1989, Federation of Voluntary Agencies of Madhya Pradesh was founded in order to build a consensus over the common agenda for voluntary activities in the state. Although the body still exists as a registered organization, it proved to be short-lived in the terms of the real functioning. In 1990, therefore, those few voluntary organizations working on Gandhian principles of social agitation and constructive work, came together on a common platform to deal with socio-economic issues which came up during the course of their work among adivasis and other dispossessed communities in the state. Ekta Parishad thus came up in response to people's spontaneous desire to fight for their due rights in the iniquitous society where resources are controlled by a few. Over the years Parishad has become a mass movement and has been raising its voice against the exploiters and the corrupt practices of the government

Ekta Parishad's genesis lies in the Gandhian tradition and philosophy. Ekta Parishad believes in *Rachana*, *Sangharsh* aur *Bahishkar* (Creation, Struggle and Boycott) and in non-violent methods. Its ideological aspiration is to rediscover the radical in Gandhi that conveniently was erased from the societal memory in the post-independent India. The heirs to the Gandhian movement that is dominated by the upper caste men have reduced Gandhi to a symbolic caricature of his original self.

The Gandhian lineage and Rajgopal's association with Gandhian ideology, activists and institutions (he was the National Secretary, Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi for three years; 1994-97) notwithstanding, Ekta Parishad could not protect itself from the unsavoury denunciations by the vested interests in both the government and outside. In the beginning, the work of the Parishad was wrongly likened to that of the activities of Christian missionaries engaged in the conversion of adivasis. The Church's initial support was presented as the evidence enough for the movement's leadership

to be seen in cohort. As the movement turned radical with issues of people's control over the natural livelihood resources of land and forest, the church distanced itself from Ekta Parishad.

Then came the accusation of being the breeding ground or the frontal organization of the ultra left naxalites. In the nineties, with growing militant left onslaught on the institutions of the state and its inability to understand the underground movement, key functionaries of the state government and most often the local bureaucracy targeted the radical non-violent groups with unsubstantiated allegations. It is factually true that there are overlapping areas as well as concerns. Naxalites have made inroads in the regions where Ekta Parishad has been active. The Parishad works in the most marginalized regions of the state and this is the natural terrain for the naxalites. Rajgopal points the irony when he says, "if we work for the poor we are branded as missionaries and if we fight for the rights of the adivasi and forest dwellers, then we are branded as naxalites." Further "this mindset of the government is deeply distressing and reflects its approach to the poor and adivasi."

Ideological Positions

Gautam Bandhopadhyay, the voice that articulates Ekta Parishad's concerns on forest issues, is the flag bearer of ethno-conservation. That the human rights are integral part of conservation ethics means that there is no contradiction between the rights of the forest dwellers and need for conservation. The socio-economic and cultural existence of adivasi community is symbiotically tied to the forests. Forest is central to the mores of adivasi civilisation. For a government with an agenda of industrial growth and economic development, it is merely a source of revenue. The political economy of the state is such that the exploitation of the natural resources, be it minerals or forests is crucial to its growth. Forest conservation, therefore, cannot be seen in isolation from the larger societal context. The Parishad led struggle for land rights of the adivasi has made it a target of environmentalists and the state alike who accuse it of encouraging encroachment, land grabbing, and deforestation. But it is the profit motives of the forest department-contractor nexus that is the real culprit of deforestation. Thus the real contradiction is between two different civilisational paradigms; between the adivasi worldview and the modern mainstream worldview; between life, co-existence, regeneration and conservation, and exploitation, consumption, surplus and profit.

For more than a decade now Ekta Parishad has been waging struggle for the land rights and for the regularization of Pattas (Land Entitlement) to the landless adivasis. In spite of several assurances from the government, adivasis are treated as encroachers and are constantly harassed and threatened with eviction. The Parishad believes that the right of adivasis over their land resources, irrespective of the legal status of the land, is inalienable. The Parishad questions the hypocrisy of the government when it gives thousands of acres of land for industries and at the same time denies the poor of their only

livelihood resource. These contradictory viewpoints always put adivasis in confrontation with the state-industry nexus, which surfaces in different forms. Ekta Parishad's celebrated struggle through the exposure of the Malik Makbuja scandal led the Supreme Court to ban all tree felling in Bastar district. Ekta Parishad clearly perceives a link between the pressure mounted by people's organization and the deferral of the second phase of the World Bank's Madhya Pradesh Forestry Project. Ekta Parishad is a mass organization that raises an inherent contradiction between the interests of the disadvantaged section (poor, landless adivasi, women, etc.) and the ruling elite (nexus of business-bureaucrats- politicians). This brings the inevitability of the conflict with the state. But the state is last of the monolithic entity. Within the state structure there are constituents that are sympathetic to mass movements and recognize people's agenda. They provide democratic space to breach the insensitivity of the state apparatus. Even though, the state remains antagonistically positioned, people's democratic aspirations can ever be suppressed under the baton of law and order.

In encouraging the villagers to protect forests on their own, Ekta Parishad has a positive agenda. It is introducing the idea of each village having its own village forest, which provide for fencing material and certain items of daily use. The Parishad in its attempt to protect the environment and forests, is opposing mining activities in the forest areas. If mining is essential in certain areas then Ekta Parishad demands that the right to mine should be given to local communities, which shall form mining cooperatives. Another significant agenda of the Parishad has been to struggle for the rights of people living in Protected Areas, national parks and sanctuaries. It is constantly struggling for the rights of the adivasis in the Protected Areas, opposing displacement and demanding adequate compensation and holistic rehabilitation.

Organizational Structure

Ekta Parishad's main concern while formulating the organizational objectives was to have an effective voice of the people for whom the organization sought to work. It was therefore dictated by the 'bottom-up' approach in which the village-based organizations have as much say as the representatives of the regional organizations. At the village level, Ekta Parishad is organised as Gram Sabhas which is headed by a Mukhiya. The Mukhiya is the elected representative of the village who performs the basic task of mobilizing the villagers around local issues in accordance with the larger objectives of the Parishad. Mukhiyas are important for expanding concerns of the Parishad. As an organization, it is moving from a worker centred approach to the community centred approach. An Ekta Parishad activist is appointed by the associate agencies to work in a cluster of villages. The number of such workers in Madhya Pradesh is around 300. They are the fulcrum of the Parishad. As Rajgopal explains:

“When one is caught in a framework of large network that can build a large social movement, then you do not have much time for individual actors. Quality does become a casualty in search of quantity. To some extent you try to build a large network by training young people. There are also concrete organizational players, who are paid workers. This has its positive and negative sides. A person from a village earns an income or a livelihood working in the field as a labourer or a migrant. By taking him or her as a paid social worker, we compensate the wages that he or she would have otherwise earned. The idea derives from the availability of wage in the surrounding areas. The motto is to ‘Learn and earn a life as existing’. As it is, the person is comparatively more secure with the paid wage. He earns a guaranteed minimum wage and we expect that the person should devote a lot of time and mobilise the people on the relevant issues. It is possible that those not earning the guaranteed money, may ask, why should we do the same thing as you do? Some of our activists do go through this dilemma. No one is questioning the paid worker. The thing is that guaranteed wage workers commitment should be seen in action. Motivating the person or making him committed to the situation can easily overcome this dilemma. One can gradually replace the paid worker. The Mukhiya of the village can play a major role in this regard. There can be self-reliant committees in the village. Then support for a cause would not come from one person but would shift to a larger group.”

At the state level Ekta Parishad is organized according to the Vidhan Sabha constituencies. Every anchals (traditionally defined socio-cultural regions) has its own regional committee and then a state level committee for looking after the affairs of Ekta Parishad in the state. The State Committee of the Ekta Parishad, the body which gives state-wide voice to the rumblings at the ground and sets the future agenda for action, is representative of the organizational heads as well as people’s representative as sent by Gram Sabhas. The activists of Ekta Parishad assist people to form their village level organizations. Thus constituted Gram Sabhas (Village Body) are the main authoritative bodies to take decisions on behalf of the people. Gram Sabhas take their own decisions regarding the struggle and the constructive activities.

A significant element of Ekta Parishad work has been to secure women’s participation successfully in change processes, i.e., participation in village level elections, organising struggles against liquor contractors, forming women co-operatives to manage land and forest and giving leadership to local struggles.

The basic goals for which Parishad works include:

- To clearly define and project the aspirations of the last man by their organization.
- To sensitise the youth on ground realities.
- To focus on the role of the women and bring about attitudinal changes in the society pertaining to gender differences.

- To strive for value-centred politics with specific emphasis on: a) Decentralisation; b) Practical Democracy c) Participatory Democracy.
- To establish people's rights and control over local livelihood resources and check the exploitation of natural resources, which would otherwise deplete resources, marginalise people, raise unemployment and increase migration.

As Ekta Parishad has grown over the years, the nature of challenges too has changed. From being just feudal to the threats emanating from the global content of much the same trend of exploitation of numerical majority lacking in the language/technology of the exploiter minority. During this time, the forces of exploitation have not only gained in strength owing to the acceptance of globalization as an inevitability for development, but have also adopted a deceptive character that eludes the comprehension of people. The additional element of globalization that the forces of exploitation have aggregated, made it inevitable for the positive forces such as Ekta Parishad to adopt the organizational strategy that are keeping with the changing times, and invent some that are more potent in the changed scenario.

The greatest strength of the Ekta Parishad is its workers. The decade-long work among the rural and dispossessed people has given organizational strength to the Ekta Parishad that mainly came through a band of activists drawn from similar background. Training of field workers, now decentralised, has remained one of the major focus areas of the Parishad. The workers are directly selected from the field. It all begins with the conducting a Shivar (Training Camp) in the village. The best of the village youth are selected and invited for special training programmes for further intensive indoctrination of the ideology of village work. Accountability of the socio-political system, organizing and mobilizing group efforts for regaining control of local resources is the agenda around which a trained worker gets involved.

In the changing scenario, the Parishad is involved in redefining the role of the village worker. It is led by a group of rural youth for socio-economic and political change, which has its own strengths and weakness. A new set of workers is emerging with freshness in approach and necessary qualifications not just to understand the nature and content of the altered forces of exploitation, but also to have effective communication of the same with people at the grassroots. Injection of young blood is also meant to overcome the self-dissipating dynamics of a mass movement; the self-imposed limitations with which a people's movement is formed and precariously sustained. As service delivery is not its agenda, the Parishad continuously recruits new people to offset the possibility of being burdened with a jaded and blunt activist force. For this, the new recruits are provided with proper and effective indoctrination of the agenda and a congenial atmosphere to explore their limitations.

For an agenda of the kind envisioned by Ekta Parishad, expansion was natural. Further, it was also the demand of the time. Rajgopal puts it thus, "young

people would come from many areas for training. It is their eagerness to take up organizational activities in their respective areas that drives the movements. Issues like land, forest, and so on cut across the region. As a result people are joining from new areas in a rally or Dharna, and when they go back they start the campaign in their own areas. The organization is expanding in spite of our not wanting it. Every village demands involvement. Many young people want to join. The expansion, therefore, is self-propelled. What we have to resist is the promotion a worker-centred expansion method.” The organization is presently working to evolve a systematic plan for the consolidation of the decades of expansion that it went through.

People’s Movement, Micro Finance and Empowerment

Ekta Parishad’s main strength comes from its dedicated band of trained village workers. As it enters into a new phase of mass movement, it requires that it is freed from the concerns of raising money in order to support its workers. Today, it has more than 300 workers on its payroll and thousands of Mukhiyas active in the organised villages. It has more than a thousand of organised villages where its reach is strongest. Therefore, considering these factors, it initiated a process of consolidation after reaching a scale of expansion. First step towards consolidation began with an idea to help old workers undertake into certain economic activities so as to enable them to undertake social activism locally. Second step involved drawing a resource map of each organised village so as to undertake community centred economic activity. For both these activities, there is a need for generating finances at micro level. In the organised villages there are people who have come together to take control of the natural livelihood resources such as land belonging to both the revenue and forest departments of the government. There is non-timber forest produce in the forest regions, which are being sold profitably by the people’s organization. There are stone quarries and minor mineral resources which people have fought to take control of against the combined adversary of the powerful village people as well as an insensitive government. To develop an agricultural land for community cultivation, to procure stone slabs from stone quarries, to sell leaf-plates against all odds, requires financial inputs which help in building people’s capacity to ward off debilitating challenges emerging from systemic and individual limitations.

Ekta Parishad as discussed in the preceding paragraphs, functions through its associate agencies located in different regions to give the Parishad a state-wide presence. These member agencies play an intermediary role to accelerate the creation of local organizations, to provide assistance in strengthening and expanding such organizations, and fostering linkages among them. This is done with the belief that such a process would lead to the proliferation of grassroots organizations that can, as a ‘people’s movement’, have a wider impact on development policies. The main emphasis for an agency involved in such efforts is the ‘process’ involved in supporting local initiative- awareness raising, conscientization, group formation, leadership building, training in

management skills as opposed to the 'content' of the programmes and activities which local organizations pursue. This is because such a strategy seeks to 'empower' people. Empowerment is taken to mean the process of assisting disadvantaged individuals and groups to gain greater control than they presently have over local and national decision making processes and resources, and of their ability and right to define collective goals, make decisions and learn from their experiences.

In a people's organization it is not the amount invested as a micro finance that is important. In fact, heavy inflow of money at the grassroots can create some unforeseen problems for the organization as well as for the community, which may veer into the paradigm of developmental ethics. At the grassroots, the micro-finance programmes carried out by the people's organization is to strengthen people's capacity to struggle for their rights. It is assumed that the resources are available but what is lacking is the equitable distribution of the same among the population with different degrees of bargaining power. A people's organization endeavours to empower a section of population, which is perceived to be lacking in the bargaining power. A micro-finance programme merely adds to the total empowerment process.

Many different approaches emphasize the strategies of grassroots organization, but these share the notion that disadvantaged individuals need to be stimulated into taking group action; that groups of the disadvantaged can have a discernible impact on the local situation, and that the combined efforts of grassroots organizations can coalesce into movements that have the potential to influence policies and politics at the state and national level.

Differences in the conceptual roots which intermediary NGOs recognise, along with local contextual factors, mean that approaches to supporting local level initiative vary considerably. Amongst agencies that seek to serve as catalysts for group formation, there is a vast analytical gulf between those who believe that membership should be open to all in a 'community' and those who opt for exclusive organizational forms in which membership is open only to the disadvantaged. Ekta Parishad concentrates upon a group analysis of the social and political causes of poverty in a locality and the need for groups to see themselves as political actors. Simultaneously, it also focuses on the advantages of group action and the management of group activities such as maintaining a Gram Kosh or a Grain Bank. It trains the group to undertake management of natural resources for better and sustainable economic management of livelihood resources.

It is a fallacy to assume that the problems of grassroots developmental can be understood purely, simply and totally as a problem related to incomes and employment. Financial empowerment is only one aspect of empowerment. Micro finance programme by itself cannot bring about other transformations- social, political, cultural, spiritual, humanistic etc.- necessary for the

upliftment of individual and social well being at grassroots level. As would be evident in the following case study of Ekta Pura any attempt to flood the community with money can easily transform them into a people getting slowly habituated to the doles given out by the agency. The people need to have the maturity as well as the capacity to understand the process as well as components of empowerment. For Ekta Parishad, the agenda of empowerment is of great importance. For them empowerment is Jansamuh ka sashaktikaran, the process which invests power in the community. Rajgopal explains Ekta Parishad's definition of empowerment as a process by which people stand up against their oppression and also own upto the consequences for standing up.

“People are oppressed and it is important for them to stand up. The only difference we made is that empowerment is not only in terms of an understanding. I think that understanding needs to be acted out. When we say that poor people are to be empowered the basic assumption is that we all are empowered. Our empowerment is very false and very superficial. We are empowered in terms of language, in terms of having read some books. We call this empowerment. In reality, we have a very powerless heart which is not empowered enough to give away. An empowered person also has guts to give. A society basically dealing with a false notion of empowerment, when it speaks of the same it transfers that notion of empowerment to the rest. A school of thought maintains that literacy would make people empowered which again is narrow understanding of the empowerment process. So one of the important tasks is to challenge the notion of empowerment as understood by the so-called academic intellectuals. When we speak of empowerment at the bottom level, we not only talk of intellectual understanding but also of one's capacity to act it out and to bear its consequences. Empowerment is the capacity to give. In my view, there are five levels of empowerment:

1. Capacity to decide that my sorry state is due to the circumstantial conspiracy and it is in my hand to overpower that.
2. Capacity to say no to exploitation and stand against it.
3. Capacity to deal with consequences of one's action
4. Capacity to understand that one can not do alone but needs people to stand together
5. Capacity to understand that one's action is dictated by one's understanding of self and the necessity to reach for others whenever necessary.”

It will be a travesty of the lofty objective of upliftment of individual and social well being if those living in grassroots level communities are excluded from participating in the designing and implementation of micro finance projects. As Rajgopal again says, “participation, to me, is possible only when all the actors are involved in the decision making. Unfortunately, at present, in government or even in the NGOs, few take decisions and others are asked to participate. People end up implementing programmes designed by others.” The best way to

ensure unhampered participation is to target homogeneous communities instead of taking on whole spectrum of stratification that grassroots level communities are saddled with. Ekta Parishad works only among the adivasis and dalits and that too focusing on the rural segment of the society.

Not taking urban population together was part of the total strategy. “For long, we have left this country to educated, urban people. It was thought they would bring desired social change. But what they did served their self-interest. We wanted to break this. So we thought that we would take only illiterates as our workers. One of the basic aims of my life is to provide respectability to the life and knowledge of the common people.”

Ekta Parishad has always laid an emphasis on having, what it calls, “indigenous intellectuals” to take up decisions concerning the organization at the local as well as state level. Any attempt to import people from institutions built on modern intellectual diet would have gone against the very purpose of Ekta Parishad. Further, taking the cue from Gandhi’s concern for the last man, Ekta Parishad has its vision firmly set on the upliftment of those people belonging to the lowest rung first. It is an eternal dilemma for post independence followers of Gandhi to focus either on Sarvodaya (the well being of all) or Antodaya (the well being of the last man). According primacy to Sarvodaya can mean the fruits of development can be appropriated by most articulate of the community leaving again the most backward to rot. From the beginning Ekta Parishad was clear about working only among the lowest of village community, the most dispossessed lot, that is adivasis and dalits. It is aware that so long as these communities and individuals being part of it do not realise the power with in themselves, no amount of service delivery can achieve the real empowerment of the dispossessed group. And hence, its prime emphasis on the organization of the people hitherto marginalised in the decision making process owing to their perceived social, educational and other backwardness. It did not design its work in the league of service delivery which may give the suffering community a precarious economic security but it would not have empowered them in a holistic sense. It gave the call for the organization of the people on the question of taking control of the natural livelihood resources.

Taking Care of the Cadre

How is the movement run? What is the basic building block of a movement, which purportedly is termed as People’s Movement? Often the movements for livelihood rights are long drawn and sometimes have indulgent focus. Their base is among the poorest of the poor whose resilience is low. How can a movement, one may ask, continue to sustain itself as it does now, for time to come? How is the high morale maintained during the ebbs when everything seems so dark, depressed and futile? A search for answers to these questions leads us to the reasons of longevity and survivability of a movement or lack of it. The basic building block of a movement is not its people but the motivated

cadres. It is the cadres who form the vanguard of a movement. The quality, intensity and the depth of a movement rests on the motivation, training and personal history of cadres. But, for a movement which goes beyond the spurt-of-the-moment kind, and for those, which wage struggles involving livelihood rights, it is not enough to have motivated, trained and internalized cadres. They should be equipped to handle the pressures of a long drawn battle. They are first human beings and have needs of survival, which after the waning of initial enthusiasm can intimidate even the steeliest resolve of a revolutionary. It is this area, which is most thorny, and many a debris of debacle lies here. For an activist cadre, it is a fine edge walk between embracing anonymous toil or an existence legitimized by conspiracy of convenience.

An ordeal by fire of similar kind existed when Gandhi led India's struggle for freedom. It was tauntingly alive when Vinoba led a marathon march for voluntary redistribution of surplus land of the rich among the land-less poor. It incessantly teases India's civil society frontrunners leading New Social Movements. From Freedom Struggle to New Social Movements, leaders of each phase devised their own methodology to tackle the problematic of cadre care. Unfortunately, however, from twenties to nineties of the last century, the methodological journey became more vague, more opaque, and more deceptive.

"There are four courses open to me", mused Danial Latifi, a senior Supreme Court advocate who died recently, from Oxford to his parents on 22nd of January 1937. Latifi belonged to that section of Indian students, which became politically radical while studying in England. His radicalism however was tempered by his future existential dilemmas. Outlining his tentative future course, he wrote: "(i) to serve in the ICS in the Punjab; (ii) to serve in the ICS in Bombay; (iii) to practice at the Bar in Bombay, keeping away from Congress politics, perhaps with a view to office; (iv) to serve for some years in the ICS in Punjab or Bombay, resign upon some oppressive action on the part of the government, and then to take up politics unhampered by any ties (this would probably mean fairly extreme Congress politics), while keeping alive by practicing or by other means." This need for "keeping alive" also disturbed the rising politician of the time, Jawaharlal Nehru, who had been once toying with the idea of taking up some teaching assignment in Allahabad. In candid acceptance of hard times owing to financial crunch and reluctance to ask monetary support from Motilal, junior Nehru wrote to Mahatma to look for some avenues and even contemplated donning the advocate's black-coat to supplement his income.

Gandhi too faced financial needs. But from the beginning of his South African sojourn to his ashrams in India, he lived in community and his needs got mingled with that of community for which he was always on the look out for financial contributions, be it from the general public or an industrialist. But it was altogether a different matter to maintain a band of cadres spread around the country who were mobilisers of the general public.

To engage such a large number of cadres in productive work and use them when the trumpet reached crescendo required an idea, which naturally had to incorporate Gandhi's holistic view of life. The idea of Khadi had that potential. By forging links with spinners, weavers and retailers, Khadi workers fulfilled an economic dimension of Khadi. In their political role they exemplified freedom fighters by the simple act of wearing white Khadi and by the fact that they worked for its propagation. Gandhi termed them 'soldiers in barrack' to be deployed supposedly when pitch of the struggle was heightened.

Whatever their sporadic involvements, these 'soldiers in barrack' were not deployed till 1942 when a call for the total overthrow of the British was declared with "Do or Die" battle cry. The result of their involvement sounded death knell for Khadi infrastructure and work, as most of its godowns were seized, workers arrested and debilitating fines imposed. Although a spontaneous upsurge, the call of 42 had a long innings and faced maximum government repression owing to its war paranoia. In 1945, when the release of workers came, Gandhi sat in Sevagram along with his Khadi workers and faced the prospect of rebuilding what was demolished. His years of painstakingly created structure lay in shambles. The movement was successful but Khadi ambition got buried underneath. Or was it a design? From Sevagram deliberation emerged a 'reorientation' in Khadi work. From now onwards, only those who spin shall wear Khadi and those who wear Khadi shall spin. Cynics might say, having used his 'barrack in soldiers' for the last shot at the empire, Gandhi had no better use of them.

In this analysis, Khadi was a way of keeping a large manpower required for the independence movement engaged in some productive and self-sustainable work. Khadi however came handy again in the post independent India when Vinoba launched his Sarvodaya movement. By this time Khadi had been taken over by the government to show its benevolent loyalty to Gandhi. In 1955, Khadi & Village Industries Commission came into existence by a parliamentary decree. Its Chairmen were those Sarvodayi leaders who raised uncomfortable questions on government's un-Gandhian policy decisions. KVIC proved to be a convenient dumping ground for a government which could not go against the precepts of Gandhi openly. Vinoba requested Khadi workers, now christened as Sarvodayi, of the KVIC funded Khadi Santhas to work for the Bhudan movement. It was again Sanstha employed Khadi workers who were turned into foot soldiers of Bhudan Satyagraha. Their needs were indirectly taken care of by the government sponsored KVIC. Government allowed itself to be used as Vinoba was performing a task at which its police miserably failed. Vinoba's ideological challenge to extremist violence demanding land reform saved the government from much political and practical embarrassment. But from Khadi's point of view, it proved to be the last debilitating factor in its sorry tale as exemplified by its present rudderless and uncertain existence.

As the social action traversed its path from Sarvodaya to New Social movement, the movement became more worker-centred, but the façade of voluntarism was maintained. Workers were needed to mobilize people. These workers were also to be paid and sustained. Some money came from the members but most of it came from the funding agencies. Bringing money from beyond the national boundaries to foment social movement for deprived did seem a bit ideologically incongruent. There was therefore an attempt to hide the source or fudge the record. A straightforward acceptance of the source would have saved these movements from much of the needless embarrassments.

It is not that these movements lacked any social base. They had genuine issues and in many quarters received genuine support from their respective constituencies. The activists were also paid a trifle in comparison to one gets in the organized sector. Ekta Parishad believes in compensatory wage for its village activists.

Rajgopal heads the national organization of Ekta Parishad. It is he who provides the ideological backbone to the organization. He is ably assisted in the Madhya Pradesh state organization by Ransinh Parmar who has been nominated as the state Convenor of the Parishad. In Gautam Bandophadyay, Ekta Parishad has a very incisive ideologue whose passion for adivasi issues and concerns remains a telling personality trait. In Bastar district of Chattisgarh, Ekta Parishad has Ratneshwar Nath, an active social worker in the region since 1975. It was his investigation combined with the then District Collector's administrative activism that led to the exposure of the bureaucracy-business-timber mafia nexus in the Malik Makbuja scandal. Ekta Parishad later filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court demanding immediate intervention. The Supreme Court by its ruling delivered on 11th of February, 1997 directed the state government "to ensure that no trees are felled in the forest of Bastar District, even under any permission granted by the local administration until further order". To this date the ban remains in force.

PEOPLE'S MOVEMENTS
The Koel-Karo Struggle
BIHAR

Smitu Kothari

In the mid-1970s, over a decade before the historic mobilisation in the Narmada Valley and the subsequent formation of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Movement to Save the Narmada), a remarkable struggle of tribal communities (adivasis) took root in a cluster of valleys in the hilly, resource-rich part of the eastern state of Bihar¹ new Indian state of Jharkhand. This democratic struggle against a hydroelectric project on the Koel and Karo rivers has been one of the most sustained struggles for identity, justice and place – a struggle that has contributed hope and inspiration to a wide cross-section of people's struggles throughout India.

The project, targeted to generate 710 MW of electricity, comprises of two dams, one each on the Koel and its tributary, Karo linked through a 34.5-km long trans-basin channel. Planned as far back as 1955, official seek to displace 7063 families from 112 villages in the predominantly adivasi districts of Ranchi, Gumla and West Singhbhum, home to the predominantly Munda adivasis. Community estimates suggest that the actual displacement will be of about 200,000 people, nearly two-thirds adivasi. 66,000 acres of land will be submerged, of which 33,000 acres is under cultivation, and the rest is forest land over which the adivasis have traditional rights; 152 sarnas (sacred groves, places of traditional religious worship) and more than 300 sasandiris (sacred graves) will be inundated

When initial construction started, the local people launched a peaceful Satyagraha (Gandhian non-violent resistance)² at the dam site and on its approach roads. Soon after, they came together in an organisation, the Koel-Karo Jan Sangathan (KKJS – the Koel-Karo People's Organisation).

¹ The state has since been bifurcated into the predominantly tribal southern state of Jharkhand and the state of Bihar

² "Truth (Satya) implies love, and firmness (Agraha) engenders and therefore serve as a synonym for force. I thus began to call the Indian movement "Satyagraha", that is to say, the Force which is born of Truth and Love or non-violence, and gave up the use of the phrase "passive resistance". M.K. Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*.

As the movement gathered momentum, and facts about the full extent of the impacts of the projects became clearer, it became evident that the scale of displacement would be much more severe and extensive than officially acknowledged. A powerful slogan took root at this time: "we will give our life but not the land."

The united response of the villagers in not allowing any land acquisition brought the project to a halt. Some of the most creative strategies of resistance have evolved in the struggle so far. Dayamani Barla, an activist of the KKJS says, "Tribals fought relentlessly against dams like Iccha-Kharkai (Suvarnarekha) and Kutku, extensive mining and deforestation in vain. Developmental intervention resulted in reducing the tribal population in this area by 30 per cent. The participation of the adivasi women in these struggles has been more than that of men. They are more vociferous as they have to bear the major brunt of the economic and cultural destabilisation. Adivasi women in the villages facing the threat of displacement by the proposed Koel Karo dam have clamped a people's curfew. They equally participate with men in blocking any project-related vehicles, machinery or personnel inside their villages. Women ploughed up the roads and sowed seeds. Volunteers stood as watch guards to see that no one tramples upon their sown fields. Organisations involved in the struggle cannot take any decisions or make any settlements without consulting women's groups." Given that production and reproduction are so linked to place, and in the valleys of tribal India, women are central to this process, it is no surprise that they were some of the most militant and peaceful defenders of nature and culture. The resistance and defence of place was so strong that even India's then Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, who was to inaugurate the project on July 6, 1995, had to cancel his visit. The project was suspended soon thereafter.

Less than a year ago, in late 2000, the newly elected government of Jharkhand – ironically the state came into being after over a half century of adivasi struggle that argued that internal boundaries in India had been drawn based on dominant languages and tribal culture and language had been marginalised in this process – sought to revive the project. The local communities re-ignited their collective resistance. A public expression of solidarity was planned for February 3, 2001 in response to the police destroying a people's barricade, an emotional symbol of their decades-old struggle. It was to break this sustained unity that the police planned a massive operation. Reports suggest that without provocation, the police opened fire. Nine people died and at least 12 others were seriously injured. The police have claimed that they had to resort to firing 136 rounds, because the crowd had attacked them with stones and bricks

The struggle in the Koel and Karo valleys and villages is also a struggle against development policies that have privileged the needs of industries and urban centres over those of the local communities, policies that have been made predominantly by those who have little comprehension of the importance of place and of the critical issues that this essay and this issue of the journal raises. The place-based interests of local communities have come into sharp conflict with the national interest of states and of national and global capital and their remote-controlled extractive governance. The processes of economic globalisation that have placed additional pressures on resource-rich Jharkhand have compounded these conflicts of interest. Koel-Karo is also the site of another contestation – of electoral democracy that most often privileges privilege and direct democracy rooted in place. The latter has been no stranger in Munda areas where consensus-based local governance is part of a sophisticated political and social system

The state of Jharkhand was carved out of southern Bihar on 15 November 2000. It accounts for 48% of the country's coal, 100% of its mica and several other minerals and about a third of all other minerals in the country. It is imperative for the state and central governments to keep the channels of extraction open and towards this end, it has resorted to numerous strategies – from financial incentives to engendering community rivalry and conflict -- to manipulate and divide the adivasi population. The biggest threat to the tribal people is the large-scale alienation from their land through large projects like mines, industry, animal sanctuaries, new townships, highways, military cantonments and army firing ranges, all in the name of national development and national interests. Between 1960 and 1980, 2.25 million acres of tribal land in Jharkhand, has already been taken for the above mentioned types projects. Displacement disrupts collective identity which itself is integrally linked to the geographical place where the communities have historically resided. When people are displaced, the very cohesion and interdependence of community life is broken. Alienation, emotional distress and immiserisation inevitably result.

There has been a long history of repression and state high-handedness in the Jharkhand region. Almost two hundred years ago, the first acts of resistance to British colonisation occurred in these areas and some of India's most sustained struggles – from the Santhal rebellion to the struggle led by Birsa Munda – are part of the collective history of those in the movement in the Koel-Karo valleys. More recently, this cycle of mobilisation and state repression has been witnessed around the state – from the struggle since 1992 of thousands of adivasis against the Netarhat Field Firing Range to the struggle of the Visthapit Mukti Vahini against displacement by the Chandil dam and the Suvarnarekha multi-purpose project, from the resistance of the Karanpura Ghati Bachao

Andolan to the Piparwar coal mines where compensation was calculated based on land prices prevailing several decades back to the Chotanagpur Adivasi Sangharsh Samiti's struggle against the proposed Peraj mines in Hazaribagh. The repression in Netarhat was particularly brutal as central and state para-military and army forces were sent in to crush the movements. The army harassed the tribals, raped women and increased the insecurity of women (forced them only to move around in groups). The army had to withdraw from the project in the face of a protracted mass struggle.

Women have been at the forefront of most of these movements and in several of them, they outnumber men 2-to1. The mobilisations have strengthened collective solidarity and self-confidence as people have moved out of their homes and participated collectively in marches, satyagraha and collective social activity. These processes are part of a long-evolving process of people-centred politics that has suffered periodic setbacks but has emerged again and again to assert a vision of cultural and ecological plurality and justice.

PEOPLE'S MOVEMENTS
Meira Paibi: Women's Movement in Meitei Society
MANIPUR

Nandini Thockchom

Introduction

Every night, in every leikai of the *Meitei* community, at every lane junction, groups of women sit in vigil against threats and disruptions to the peace of the community. In periods of relative tranquility, a few women sit at night, taking it in rotation. But at times of high perception of threat, participation is universal and to the optimum. The women carry no weapon or defence besides the torch, which burns till dawn when the woman go home. These are not activists women or political women, they are ordinary next-door women who bear the ancient traditional responsibility for the safety and well being of the community.

Meira Paibi in *Meiteilol* literally can be translated as 'torch bearers', *Meira* means a torch and *Paibi* means the carrier or bearer, conjuring up an image of women with torches keeping a vigil on the streets of Manipur at night. The use of *Meira* as a weapon symbolizes the declaration of a just war. The use of fire- a sacred symbol of the *Meiteis* adds sanctity to the movement.

Feminism in an Indigenous Society

*The fruit of knowledge is from our fathers and grandfathers and the reserved wealth from our mothers and grandmothers
Husband bring in firewood; wife brings all the other goodies*

These two above proverbs show the basic concept of division of labour and interdependence between man and woman. There isn't any form of discrimination at any level. The status and role of women is remarkably evident in the mythologies and archtypes of legends and folklores. The predominant image of the female principle is therefore of the woman- victorious, free, happy, fulfilled and triumphant. It is not perceived as enough for a woman to be strong in the face of oppression nor is endurance confused with transformation. The *meitei* woman strives to win on all counts. Powerful female bonding practices with the traditional institutions of female authority and autonomy have created a unique environment for collective political action.

Meitei Women' Movement - a Historical Context

Community based organizations in Manipur have a distinct history and character. Women of all communities in Manipur have a long history of forming consensual groups and forums which fulfill a wide range of economic, and social needs of the community. Feminist movements all over the world has always had a singular mandate: to uplift women from their subjugated roles in their respective societies. The genesis of *Meira Paibi* however may be traced from a totally different perspective. The traditional concept of Division of labour between the sexes in the indigenous society of the *Meiteis* was clearly perceived and there was an intrinsic interdependence but not discriminatory at any level. But there has been a gradual and ongoing process of erosion of the role and status of women by both external and internal influences. The transition of governance from feudal institutions to bear with the yoke of democracy completely dismantle the indigenous structures and the massive power bases of the *meitei* women. The western concept of development has contributed immensely to an increase in economic and gender inequity.

However, the roots of *Meira Paibi* may be traced to the two *Nupi-lan* or women's war against the British in 1904 and 1939. The *Nupi-lan* which started as an agitation against the economic policies of the Maharaja and the Marwari monopolists, later on changed its character to become a movement for constitutional and administrative reforms in Manipur. The original demand of the women were confined to the banning of rice exports, but later included changes in the Durbar and the administrative set-up. The uniqueness of this *lan* lies in the fact that in the emergence of a new Manipur after the end of the Second World war, it was the women of Manipur who were in the vanguard of change.

It also showed that political consciousness has grown in Manipur and the popular vigour which was heightened by the "Women war" or "*Nupi Lal*" which began from 12th December 1939 which brought the question of introducing reforms in Manipur. Some businessmen, in order to make a good profit by raising price, had begun to board rice to monopolize the trade. The effect was felt very soon. So, women rose against it. The women's war was gradually taken over by the Maharaja and it used the Women's War as the tool for fermenting agitation on Congress line. The situation was soon completely out of control and State police could not prevent a large meeting held in the police *Bazar* on 14th January 1940. The Maharaja, therefore took up the issue with Governor for Assam for establishment of Legislative Assembly, Chief Court and other reforms. Churachand Maharaja abdicated the Throne of Manipur in favor of his son Budhachandra in the month of September 1941. On May 10 1942, the Second World War broke out and it devastated Manipur completely but the war gave the golden opportunity to the people to contact people of other Indian states. Thus a current of Indian Political movements started flowing into Manipur. After the end of the War, many organizations renewed demands for a responsible Government. So, while a movement for constitutional reforms has been initiated in 1938, it was the *nupi lan* that brought the matter to a head

and focused on the inadequacies in both the economic and administrative policies of the Manipur State.

Evolution of Meira Paibi and Changing Role

Meira Paibi, as the name stands today, originated as a movement to prevent and control public disorder due to alcohol abuse in the late 1970s. When narcotics abuse, primarily primarily heroin abuse and consequently public disorder and crimes dramatically increased a few years later, *Meira Paibi* took up this problem as well. At the superficial level of analysis, these problems were and are generally perceived even by *Meira Paibi*, as largely social evils, requiring measures of social control, traditionally exercised by women. However seen in the light of the extent of social control in a small population and in the larger political context of Manipur and its numerous proscribed militant national liberation organization struggling against the Government of the Republic of India, the tacitly recognized and factually proven role of the Indian armed forces as a source of alcohol supply in a prohibition state as well as couriers of narcotic drugs over the Indo Myanmar border and into continental India, the movement takes on a completely different hue.

In the early 1980s massive security operations were launched in the valley, ostensibly to destroy camps and hideouts alleged to be located in the Manipur valley. The *Meira Paibi* responded instantly with protest demonstrations. Later with continuing stepping up of the activities, political as well as military, of the proscribed national liberation organizations in Manipur, yet another valley wide crackdown was launched by combined security forces-Operation Sunny vale. No sooner was the crackdown launched, incidents of assault and molestations of civilians were reported, and the *Meira Paibi* took to patrolling the streets at night. Women of every *leikai* or ward of every town and village in the valley participated in the daily patrolling, bearing no weapons but only the *Meira*- the bamboo and rag kerosene torches. The moral force and no doubt the votes represented by this massive turnout soon tuned the routine house-to-house, indiscriminate searches into a desultory and occasional exercise. However, a stepping up of offensives by the militant underground and the Indian security forces against them resulted in frequent violations of civil rights, from rape and murders, assaults, disappearances and public shootings.

This evoked the next level of response from *Meira Paibi*: public meetings, demonstrations, road closures and public *bandhs* or shut down of all essential services, hunger strikes and mass rallies. Tens of thousands of women have been actively involved in these protests over the period of almost a year: even hundreds of thousands, all told.

Organizational Structure

The structure of the *Meira Paibi* organizations reflects their genesis and character. As a spontaneous, mass response using the traditional motifs, the groups that are mobilized for various issues, literally overnight are not called

Meira Paibi. This is a generic term for a range of women's groups that mobilise exclusively for this purpose. Every ground level group is autonomous. It generates its own funds from women in the ward and from donations from individuals households in the community. The more active members are elected consensually to act as office bearers. Membership, being mandated by peer pressure and community status, is universal though extent of participation is variable and determined by the women's own inclination and the severity or magnitude of the situation. In times of acute crisis, at least one omen from every household participates and whereas in less critical times, active participation dwindles down to a handful of older women or recognized leaders.

In 1992, the process of formalization of the *meira Paibi* began. A statewide cell was registered as voluntary agency. Membership was, as still is open to any Manipuri woman. Office bearers continued to be elected by consensus. Financing continues to flow in from individual women, from community fund raising activities or by donations from other women's group. Several units at ground level, having registered themselves independently receive funds from government agencies and non governmental sources for welfare and income generation work. All ground units are financially independent from each other.

This structure has, as all structure do, its inherent strength and weaknesses. The strength lies in universal, voluntary character of participation and the consensual nature of decision making and leadership selection processes. Peer pressure and social control being the essential mechanisms of power hierarchical processes in a society that values women highly, and is fundamentally democratic, the units and *leikai* level organizations have the most desirable characteristics of grassroots level organization and governance. Characteristics which incidentally are the most elusive goals of the contemporary feminist movement of urban and western women's group.

Taken to the central coordinating body, however this character becomes more ambiguous. Theoretically built up on similar lines as the *leikai* units, the operating dynamics becomes radically different. The political power represented by such an apex body makes it a prime target for political party maneuvering and manipulation, in the democratic numbers game. The consensual processes become susceptible to self-selection and lay the organization wide open to subtle take over by vested interests. The methods of fund raising, i.e., member donations and donations and voluntary contributions similarly lay control open to manipulation by interests with little money power.

Horizontal lines of communications, from *leikai* unit to *leikai* unit are excellent. With skeletal, if any logistical infrastructure supports, information, news and consensus decision-making processes are conducted from unit to unit literally overnight. Vertical communications, however appear to be somewhat impaired,

partly due to the fundamental nature of the organization. But partly due to the inexperience in mass organization management and inadequate involvement of units in the coordination cell. On the part of the *leikai* units, the lack of involvement is engendered partly by intrinsic constraints of time and resources of the women and also by a high trust factor due to the consensual mode of leadership selection and decision making processes.

The most interesting feature of this movement is the manner in which the women gather together. In times of emergency, all one needs to do is pick up a stone or a pebble and hit it on the nearest electric pole and the message is then loud and clear that a meeting is called for and all the women in that particular *leikai* gathers together in the premises of the local club. If at all it requires the attention and cooperation of the adjoining *leikai*, then the message gets across in the same manner and so on and so forth. At the instance of the banging sound is heard, all women leave their household chores and duties and immediately attend to the need of the hour and situation. The menfolk, at this juncture, casually takes up from where the women had left and carries on with the household work.

Lessons for Women's Role

Immense faith is entrusted upon the leadership on such a scale that it offers opportunities for manipulation which even if these have not been exploited offers no guarantee that the trust will not be breached. One of the major tasks of the evolving leadership must be the development of check mechanisms. The vulnerability of the *Meira Paibi* will be and, in fact, is already particularly evident in long-term campaigns and in confrontation with rigidly organized State apparatus. Without effective strategy planning, the best of efforts tend to fizzle out in the face of determined opposition from the government. These in turn leads to disenchantment, loss of morale at ground level, vulnerability into welfare activities and general lack of cohesiveness and coherence.

The sharply increasing polarization of the political climate in Manipur will bring the *Meira Paibi* into sharper focus. At this point, the role of the passive section, the educated, the middle class woman, will become critical. As yet, her participation is nominal. Her lack of participation is evidenced by the image of *Meira Paibi* outside Manipur as anti-alcoholism, anti narcotics abuse agitation by women of the lower classes. This has resulted unfortunately, in the isolation of this movement from support that would be readily available from women's organization and networks at the national and global levels.

It has also been the loss to women's organizations and the feminist movement. The women's movement has a lot to learn from women who have never, historically experience the kind of repression taken for granted by women elsewhere in the world. *Meira Paibi* could very well show the way in many dark areas facing the local form of governance in general and the global feminist movement in particular.

PEOPLE'S MOVEMENTS
Tamil Nadu Science Forum

Balaji Sampat

Historical Background

Tamil Nadu Science Forum was started in 1980 by a group of scientists in Chennai. But like most Indians, we also like to trace our origins to a much distant past ! We feel that the philosophical and historical roots of people's science movement goes back to the freedom struggle. Even during the anti-colonial struggle, there were different visions of what India's future should be – Gandhian, Nehruvian and other less well-known visions. All grappled with the role of Science and Technology in the new India. While the vision of a 'modern industrial India' drove large centralized project and central research institutes, a small minority motivated by the Gandhian vision critiqued this mindless industrialization and sometimes in the extreme advocated a return to the past. Sandwiched in between was a small group of scientists and intellectuals who believed that scientific and rational thinking should be the basis of a new society, but who were also able to see the problems with Nehruvian Industrialization.

To popularize science and scientific thinking, this group began science writing in local languages. Science societies were formed in Assam, Bengal and Kerala. Scientists organized popular science lectures and programmes against 'superstitions'. At the same time, this group also debated the state's science policies – though in a small way.

It was at this period that the Silent Valley project was initiated in Kerala. The Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP), organized a widespread agitation against this project. Study groups were organized across the state and books bringing out the facts of the project were published and this mobilized popular opinion against the project and eventually the project was scrapped.

This movement was a turning point in the history of the People's Science Movement. It proved that debates on scientific projects need not be confined to scientists and intellectuals; that public debates on these topics were possible; and also that such debates could form the basis of a new democracy, which would challenge the current mode of development.

Inspired by the KSSP, in 1980, a group of scientists in Chennai started the Tamil Nadu Science Forum. This group, which started out organizing 'popular science lectures' in the city, began to take telescopes and slide shows to village

and show people the stars! Often people who hear this ask us why a hungry and roofless villager would want to hear about the stars. Whether it is innate curiosity about the world, or whether it is entertainment that keeps people from thinking about their hunger we cannot say with certainty. But one thing we can say – people enjoyed these sessions and turned out in large numbers.

By 1985-87, we were involved in school education. A lot of school teachers joined our efforts and we began publishing a science magazine for children and organize children's science festivals. We were also publishing a lot of science books in Tamil. 1987-89 was a period of ferment across the country. The process of globalization had already begun and was beginning to affect the poor. The gains made by progressive struggles in the earlier decades were being reversed. Communal elements were also getting stronger. Using the Bhopal Gas Tragedy as the pivot, the science movements across the country organized a large mobilization using Kala Jathas (Street Theatre). Five all India Jathas left the country from 5 corners and after traversing villages on their route culminated in Bhopal. The troupes had organized village programmes on a number of social issues - water, health, literacy, education, employment and gender. The whole process, the drama and the actual mobilization when the jatha troupes arrived, helped initiate the science movement in several districts and towns across the country.

In 1989, KSSP initiated the first mass literacy campaign in Ernakulam. This was soon followed by similar campaigns in Pondicherry and Tamil Nadu. The literacy movement put us in touch with lakhs of village volunteers and completely changed the scale and quality of work the science movement was doing. We found new energies and motivation – everywhere we went to mobilize we found new people and a new commitment. People worked round the clock, gave up jobs, and began mobilizing people for literacy. It was not just 'literacy for reading and writing' – it was 'literacy for social change' which motivated people. In each district we had 20,000 volunteer teachers and 200,000 learners. Many of these learners were women – and this brought us in contact with the problems that rural women face. In Nellore an anti-arrack campaign was launched and women bravely fought the police and arrack goons for three years before they won the battle. In Pudukottai women learnt cycling and formed quarry workers association and launched a struggle against contractors to take control of the quarries. Enterprises and credit programmes were started in several places – all under the banner of the literacy movement.

This threatened the vested interests and the government. After a particularly large mobilization in Pondicherry, politicians in the State Assembly demanded that the Pondicherry Science Forum be declared an illegal organization and that the literacy campaigns should be closed down. Everywhere the TNSF felt itself being pushed out of the literacy campaigns and after a short while withdrew from the campaigns.

The sudden withdrawal from the literacy campaigns (1994-95) jolted the organization and many people could not adjust to this new non-movement era within the Science Forum! What next was a question in everybody's mind and no one had the answers. So each district tried its own experiment. Kanyakumari and Virudunagar built self-reliant women's networks around savings and credit. These networks now have 40000 women who have together saved Rs. 2 Crores! Ramnad and Vellore started a health programme - training village volunteers to provide individual advice on children and women's health needs and now this programme reaches 500 villages across Tamil Nadu. Madurai experimented with enterprises for women, Pudukottai with women quarry workers struggles, Villupuram and Cuddalore with school drop-outs, Vellore with an activity based school and Ramnad with a support shelter for women victims of violence. Lots of experiments - some worked and many failed. Some of the ideas that have worked are now expanding. In this article we will discuss some of these ideas.

All these programmes are much smaller in scale than the literacy campaigns - they are mostly block centered rather than district centered and cover only a few hundred villages as compared to the earlier phase of campaigns covering thousands of villages. Again these are not campaigns - they are sustained programmes. They are built as self-reliant programmes so that we do not have to depend on external support. They try to build up a block team that can locally plan for the needs of the block.

These block programmes demonstrate how science can be used by ordinary people, they demonstrate how even the poorest can plan their own development. These efforts also strengthen our ability to fight larger policy issues. Most importantly, these programmes save thousands of children from malnutrition, from dropping out of school, empower lakhs of women with credit and with enterprise and health skills and help farmers improve their soil and their yield. But before we look at these programmes, it is important to understand the philosophies and ideas that guide these programmes. It is an understanding of poverty and of inequality and of the role that science and technology places.

The Role of Science and Technology in Development

We believe that the social goals of assuring the minimum basic necessities of life for all, equity and sustainability can be achieved only in a democratic society. A democratic society is one that allows maximal participation for people in all decisions that concern them, a society that is tolerant of dissent and minority opinion and further a society that provides for the fullest creative development of the individual.

But we live in a society where majority of world's children go hungry to bed even though there is food surplus. It is a world where the richest one-tenth control all the resources of the world and their desires determine the world's

economy. We believe that this inequality is the cause of poverty. This inequality was achieved not through hard-work or talent, but through exploitation - economic exploitation of the poor by the rich, social exploitation of the lower castes by the upper castes and gender exploitation of women by men.

The rich are rich because they own a large part of the total assets in society. The poor own almost nothing. This again is not a result of talent or work or even luck. It is the result of a continuous concentration of political power in the hands of a few. Huge sums of money lent to private industry from the public exchequer, large tracts of land acquired under public land acquisition, and a number of inequitable laws and policies lie behind the rich modern industrial houses - and not any ideal notion of a free market.

The history of civilization has also been one of continuous struggle of the oppressed against exploitation. All positive changes that we see today in the world is a result of these struggles - whether it is democracy, women's rights, state support for health and education or 8 hour working day. In this context it is important to see how the dominant retain power and sustain the inequality. The three main strategies they use are:

Force: The use of direct force takes on many forms - physical violence and economic coercion, use of threats, fear, mental and emotional coercion and social pressure. One should see in this the role of the state machinery - law, police, army and justice system as being important coercive tools. The key point to note here is that the state uses these tools of coercion to protect "its laws and policies" - and often its laws are very biased against the poor and oppressed sections. It is not only force by the state that sustains inequality - direct use of force by the dominant sections through hired goondas, through economic pressure, and sometimes by direct physical aggression (for example violence against dalits or wife-beating and rapes) also plays an important part in this.

The use of force coerces the victim into submission and drills fear into him/her. But it makes it clear that this inequality the victim is subjected to, is unfair and unjust and that the exploiter is to be blamed for the state of affairs. Such an understanding leads to frequent uprisings against the system of exploitation and requires a lot of force continuously applied to keep up the oppression. Even in a dictatorship, such constant rebellions are difficult to deal with - in a democracy even more so. So the second strategy used is Manufacturing Consent.

Cultural Domination - Manufacturing Consent: By Culture we mean a way of life - the ideas, the beliefs, the values and the practices that make up life. When a young girl learns that "women are inferior to men" - by seeing her mother and sisters, by being told so directly or by learning it from the media, she is accepting her "exploitation" as being "natural". She is therefore less

likely to resist it. This manufacturing of consent - molding cultural ideas - crushes even the idea of resistance.

It is important to recognize that dominant cultural ideas are biased. They support exploitation and tell the exploited not to resist it. They suit the dominant section's interests. The dominant sections play a very active role in creating and promoting these ideas. They use all forms of media accessible to them for this purpose - TV, Radio, Newspapers, Magazines, Movies, Fictions, Religion, Rituals, etc are used to spread these ideas. Sometimes consciously, often unconsciously. Other civil society institutions like the religious and educational institutions, the scientific and technological establishment are also impregnated with values and mechanisms that go into legitimizing, reproducing and building up inequality and injustice.

When we talk of people's participation, it must be kept in mind that often people's ideas and views can be biased by this cultural indoctrination. Force and Culture go together. Culture (and to a large degree the democratic state itself) represents a social compromise that expresses the existing power relations between two conflicting interests. It is important to see cultural practices and values as some kind of compromise that two sections with opposing interests come to. Often this line of compromise is quite exploitative to one section. But the line represents in some sense the power equation on either side. As long as the oppressors exploit at the level agreed to, there is not much resistance to it. The oppressed oppose more exploitation and the oppressors oppose attempts to reduce the exploitation. Dominant Culture therefore defines the "path of least immediate resistance". But this does not make things fair. The social compromise is certainly biased against the oppressed and has to be fought. As the oppressed gain strength (by organizing themselves), the line of compromise shifts towards the side of equality. But if they don't keep up the struggle, the oppressor will gain strength and push the line further towards inequality. This is where social movements come in - movements take sides with the oppressed and help organize and empower them, so that this line shifts towards equality.

Hegemony through Science and Technology: Religion played a major role in cultural domination earlier. In today's world Science and Technology plays this role. Science is often considered unbiased - its users determining whether it is used to exploit or to help. But this is not true. Science and Technology not only creates material wealth, but also shapes consciousness. Today, it is being used against the poor, misused in military pursuits, in wasteful and luxurious consumption and in legitimizing the control of natural resources by a few. Science can also be put to use to ensure that with available natural resources everyone's basic needs are met. It can be used to enable societies to function more democratically. The techniques of science and the positive aspects of the spirit of scientific endeavor can be used to challenge discrimination and suffering.

But this cannot be done with science and technology as it exists today. Science needs restructuring, so that it is more democratic, more people-centered. We have to look critically at how science and technology is developed. There are technologies which are beneficial to society - technologies which allow decentralization, which the poor can use and benefit from, which promotes equality. There are technologies on the other hand which are more easily centralized, which concentrate power in the hand of a few. The important point to note is that society does not give all possible technologies the same chance - the technology we see around us has been *chosen*. There are some technologies that are not looked at, not developed, rejected. There are other technologies that are researched and developed. How this choice is made and who makes this choice are very important questions to look at. Developing a technology requires money and capital input - to research it. Who puts in the money often decides what should be the focus of the research. The focus is therefore decided in favour of the rich who have the money. Even when the government puts in money, it is often the research priorities of the rich that gets preference. Money is poured into developed centralized technology, technology that benefits the rich and then decentralized and people-centered technology is called unviable.

Whether it is in the power sector, or in agriculture, whether it is education or health the question of science and technology choice is important. Understanding why a particular technology is often chosen over others helps us see the politics hidden behind the veneer of science and technology. Similarly, the cloak of professionalism is often used to prevent people's access to science and information. For example medical sciences use "specialization" to control and certify knowledge, centralize it, mystify it and to restrict it to members of the profession - to prevent others from possessing or using this knowledge. In this way, knowledge which can be a tool for empowerment becomes a tool for control and exploitation.

Just as culture is used to exploit (by making people feel that their subordination is natural), so too is science and technology used to justify exploitation (by making egalitarian alternatives seem technologically inferior and unviable). The programmes of the Science Movement are therefore informed by this understanding of science and technology. Our aim is to demystify science, to restructure knowledge and technology so that it is more democratic, to develop alternatives which are pro-poor and decentralized. In our programmes therefore the idea of people's participation is combined with the understanding of cultural hegemony. These programmes therefore aim to:

1. Create an alternate culture - which opposes inequalities and promotes egalitarian and progressive ideas.
2. Develop alternatives in science & technology - restructure it to make it people centered and pro-poor.

3. Mobilize people on these and other issues that affect them - so that they have power and strength on their side.

Now we will look at two of the current programmes that the TNSF is involved in.

Arogya Iyakkam – Community Health Movement

The Arogya Iyakkam Programme was initiated in 1997 in two districts – Ramanathapuram and Vellore in 60 villages each. Now it reaches 5 lakh people in 500 villages in 10 blocks spread over 6 districts. The basic idea behind the programme is this: A village health committee is formed which selects 1-2 volunteers who will be the health activists. These activists are trained by the block team in camps and more importantly through house visits. The activist is not paid and is responsible only to the health committee. The block trainer (herself an 8th-10th std educated girl from one of the villages in the block) spends 10-12 hours a day visiting various villages and training the activists there. The activist also maintains a register with minimal but effectively usable data. The register has information on all the families covered, the demography and the ages, weights and nutrition levels of all the children. The activist then visits the families where there are weaker children or where the children are at most risk and advises them on feeding practices.

The process of advising is participatory – the activist discusses the family situation with the mother, find out what the mother feeds currently, whether the child has any illness and what efforts the family has made to improve the health of the child. She starts her advice by praising the mother on the good practices she is following. This is important as it reinforces the good practices and also builds up the mother's confidence in herself. The advice by the activist is very practical and limited to specific details – for example on feeding practice, the advice would be on feeding the child 5-6 times a day. This will be accompanied by the rationale for why this is necessary (while adults need to eat only 3 times a day – a child has a proportionally smaller stomach, but her food needs are not since she also needs food to grow). Along with this will be worked out a specific diet pattern for the child – based on what is available at home and is cheap. If the child needs de-worming or some simple medicines, the activist arranges for this by talking to the government Village Health Nurse.

Very general advice – give good food, or be clean or be affectionate to the child – makes very little sense and makes people sound like fools and this irritates them. So the activist is encouraged not to talk in general terms and to stick to specific interventions. Also the advice is not given in top-down fashion. Often health workers talk to mothers as if the mothers were fools who did not care about following good advice. Our volunteers are reminded to keep in mind the nature of our intervention. The poor mother has to worry about so many things – she has to work outside, cook for the family, look after the children and the old, get beaten by the husband, often her income is the main source for food.

TV advertisements and neighbours push her to use costly foods like Cerelac and Horlicks and constantly try to convince her that she is a bad mother. Within all this she manages to do a great job in taking care of her children. It is with respect that we have to approach her. In this context of poverty and deprivation, our programme offers some optimisation in managing the food needs. The success of the programme lies in addressing the mother's needs by encouraging and building up her confidence.

This intervention also builds up the skills of the activist in addressing women's health problems to some degree, in following up TB patients and in identifying simple ailments and providing medicines. The activist and the health team meet regularly and discuss health issues. Village meetings also are used as an occasion for health education. The local information collected becomes an effective tool for local planning on health and the panchayat regularly updated on the progress. The health activist also functions as a watchdog on the public health system – she ensures that the de-worming, Vitamin A, iron tablets reach all the children. She also helps the Govt nurse in immunization and antenatal care.

In each block there are about 30-60 villages where the interventions take place. One full-time trainer looks after 10 villages. A support team of about 5-8 people at the block level help the full-time trainers raise the resources locally and to mobilize local support for the programme. After two years of funded support, the external support is withdrawn and the programme manages to sustain itself with local support.

In most of these villages, women's self help groups have been formed. These groups save money and use it to circulate loans. They partially support the health programme activists financially. More importantly around these groups is being built a women's support network – micro-credit and health are two aspects of this. A library for women, support shelters for victims of violence, enterprises and marketing networks to provide incomes are other aspects of this.

Many of these villages participated very actively in the People's Health Assembly Campaigns and used it as a chance to mobilize people for a public audit of the health system. Village level enquiries into health status, followed by dialogues with the Govt health department were organized in many districts. TNSF played a very important role in mobilizing a number of organizations and people for the campaigns as well as in coordinating the national campaign activities. TNSF also helped in producing, printing and distributing five cartoon books on health, which was used as the main campaign material highlighting the problems of the current health system and what could be done to change it.

For those who are not aware of the People's Health Assembly - The PHA was an 8-month long village level campaign organized in the year 2000 AD, with rallies and state conventions in 20 states, which culminated at Calcutta with 2000 delegates from all the districts attending the 2-day National Health Assembly and adopting the People's Health Charter. 300 Indian representatives then proceeded to Dhaka for the International PHA where 1500 people from 93 countries participated. This unique event reiterated the government responsibility in ensuring that health care reaches the poorest and the weakest sections. This is particularly important in the current context of reduced government spending on health, education and social programmes.

A recent study of the impact of the Arogya Iyakkam programme found the following achievements. There were 5 main objectives of the programme and the achievements on each of these counts is given below:

- **Health Awareness:** This was realized in a major way even if difficult to quantify. A campaign focused only on health awareness could not have led to the degree of internalization of the health messages as has happened here. The awareness was not only in health and disease aspects but extended to learning about the services the PHC provides and should provide.
- **Better Utilization of Government Health Services:** This was realized where cooperation could be established between the health center and our programme. There were pockets where cooperation could not be sought and the programme remained weak on this aspect. In most villages, however, this component was quite successful. This was particularly evident in the utilization of iron and folic acid, in Vitamin A, in de-worming tablets and in the use of ORS packets.
- **Measurable improvement in Health Indices:** This was also reached in most of the villages. Data analysis of child malnutrition based on about 10,000 children showed significant quantitative changes made in child malnutrition levels. In the 1.5 year period, the number of malnourished children decreased from 65.5% to 54.2% - which means the number of Normal children has increased by 11.3%. Considering children who improved significantly but were still malnourished, the data showed that 35% of the children has improved and compared to other villages, 31% more children in these villages showed improvement. Similar improvements were also made in women's health - particularly in the case of pregnant women.
- **Building a women's support movement:** In all the programme areas, this was very successful. The organizational form of this has been the formation of credit co-operatives. But these have also served to organize women on health, literacy and a host of local issues. In some places, they have taken up issues of violence against women. This is also the component that is providing the resources for sustaining the programme after the funded phase.
- **Building panchayat capabilities:** The panchayats were engaged in discussion and in about one fourth of the cases contributed meaningfully to

the process. What was achieved in a more widespread manner is their awareness about the health status and the facilities available and some idea of what demands they should be articulating. The large mobilization as part of the People's Health Assembly also helped in this.

The initial programme in Vellore in 60 villages was supported by the Department of Science and Technology for two years and the expansion to 7 blocks was supported by UNICEF again for two years. Now the programme has started shifting into a self-reliant phase where each block raises the resources required to keep in going. This programme has inspired a number of other NGOs and organizations to start similar community health worker programmes.

Tank Rehabilitation Project – Pondicherry.

The story of the Keezhparikkalpet Tank

There are 84 tanks in Pondicherry and these tanks have been the main backbone supporting agriculture in Pondicherry. These system tanks, believed to be constructed hundreds of years ago, were till recently being used extensively as the only source of irrigation. The village community used to desilt and manage the tanks. But with the coming of bore wells, the tanks went into disuse. Slowly tank lands were encroached upon and the tank filled with silt and with the bunds broken hardly stored any water.

But with more and more ground water being exploited began the decline of ground water table and increasing salination of aquifers. Across Pondicherry village and village began to find its ground water saline. This led the government to re-think the water strategy and a Tank Rehabilitation Project of Pondicherry has been planned out with support from the European Commission (EC). The idea was to curtail the ground water depletion by using the tank water for irrigation and second by increasing ground water recharge through tank fed irrigation.

Keezhparikkalpet tank, situated in the Bahoor commune, south of Pondicherry, was one of the three pilot tanks selected in the first year. Center for Ecology & Rural Development (CERD) – the research wing of the Tamil Nadu Science Forum and a registered NGO was entrusted the work of community organizing. The stated objective was creating a democratic structure in the village with adequate representation for all sections of the village, women, land less poor, other stakeholders of the tank etc. But we were in it for more – this was a chance to organize the community to intervene in local planning, to demonstrate that participatory technology development was not only possible but also necessary for real development. The programme gave us the opportunity to prove this. The community mobilization resulted in the Keezhparikkalpet Eri Sangam (meaning Keezhparikkalpet Tank Association) registered as a Society under the Societies Registration Act.

Challenges in Community Organization

There were a number of challenges we faced while we tried to form a democratic body in the village. The lack of an elected local body for three decades made creating an acceptable leadership difficult. Unlike the method adopted in most of places where only the Command Area farmers with land were part of the tank association, here we wanted even the landless to benefit out of this intervention. So the tank association involved the landless, women and other tank users apart from the command and non-command area farmers. Since 70-80% of the village population belonged to this category, their involvement in the association was tricky. They had no direct benefit unlike the command area farmers, so they had to be motivated to join the association. The benefit to the landless was organized through fish culture in the tank, tree plantation etc - these systems also help in maintaining the tank. On the other hand, the command area farmers were afraid that the landless would prevent their use of water since use for fishing meant the water should be kept in the tank and not let out! This conflict was resolved by an interesting arrangement - making sure that neither side had a majority. The voting rights in the tank association was divided such that neither the landless nor the command area farmers get a majority.

After the tank association was formed in December 1999, officer bearers were elected to run the day-to-day affairs of the tank. Women in the Executive committee have taken part in the planning and implementation of all works and have also initiated 6 self help groups in the village with 145 women members.

CERD provided training on management, accounts and implementation of works and helped mould this into an active team. The agriculture department also conducted a series of field schools to train people on efficient water management practices for paddy. Soon after the association was formed, the tank association identified the encroachments in the tank water spread area (foreshore lands) and also in the inlet channel, which had been encroached 20 years ago. While most encroachers voluntarily allowed the tank association to retrieve the tank area, the main encroacher who was obstructing the inflow of water into the tank refused to give up the land. This eviction was difficult since the person concerned had strong political linkages. But the tank association with support from all the villagers and from the PWD and the local police successfully evicted the encroacher.

The next problem was that the lands of the foreshore farmers was below the tank water level and therefore drainage was not possible. But then without drainage their farms were uncultivable and so these farmers would break the tank bunds releasing the water. On discussing this problem, some of the farmers in the tank association suggested an inverted Siphon to drain the water from the foreshore lands to the surplus course. The PWD was reluctant initially - but later it sanctioned the construction. The farmers also wanted a

road to be formed from the village to the Mullodai road along the tank bund and they wanted to connect the tank bund to the Mullodai road by a Pipe culvert so that the distance from the village to the Cuddalore road is cut short considerably. Almost all the construction work was done by the tank association.

The tank association appointed a Neerkatti (water distributor) to ensure equitable water distribution. The farmers who did not give their contribution in the initial stages came forward and gave their contribution once they were sure to get water for irrigation from the tank. To sustain the operation and to maintain the tank, the tank association has been taking steps to increase the income from the tank by fish culture.

The tank association has collected about 15% of the total investment through local contributions. The tank association is planning for annual contributions from the farmers for the operation and maintenance of the tank even after the project is over, for sustainable and equitable distribution of water by engaging a *Neerkatti* (water distributor) who will regulate the water supply to the command area farmers who will be paid by the tank association from the contributions received from the farmers. Other than this the interest accrued from the corpus fund created by the tank association also would help to take up occasional desilting of supply channels and maintenance of tank structures.

Apart from the above the Keezhparikkalpet Tank Association constructed the road for the Dalit colony, built a threshing floor, constructed the foreshore bund and planted 3000 Palmyra nuts on the bunds. Thanks to the motivation of the villagers, 20000 cubic meters of desilting was done as against the 8500 cubic meters for which funds were sanctioned. They are digging a community bore well to benefit the small and marginal farmers who did not have bore wells to supplement the tank irrigation. The association managed to pressurize the transport department to sanction bus facility to the village. The association also helped remove an illegal arrack shop.

The Tank Association is still going strong is organizing farmers to experiment with soil fertility and other innovative, sustainable agricultural methods.

Education: TNSF's activities in Continuing Education for Neo-Literates and Children's Education. Thanks to the mass literacy campaigns, there are lakhs of neoliterates in the state now. This means that at once there is a thirst for a huge volume of neoliterate material, and a danger that unless reading material is provided, these neoliterates will relapse into illiteracy. TNSF has been active in building a rural library movement for this purpose - we also publish a neoliterate broadsheet called *Arivu Thenral*, which comes out monthly. In addition, we also publish a number of neo-literate books: many based on materials collected from neoliterates themselves! For instance, riddles,

aphorisms, folksongs and traditional medicine collected from them have proved to be a treasure.

Some booklets are published as series. These are mainly used in campaigns and programmes that develop the skills of the local village teams and village panchayats. For example, a series of 15 booklets on women and laws for legal literacy and 10 booklets on women and health was used in a series of training camps to train women panchayat and ward members to understand their role in the panchayat structure and what they could do to help women in their villages. Similarly a series of 10 booklets on agriculture and 4 booklets on Animal Husbandry is being used to intervene in agriculture and enterprises.

Every June, all members of TNSF are encouraged to participate in school enrolment campaigns, to ensure all eligible children in the neighborhood have been put in school. In several districts, campaigns are held to prevent children dropping out and to ensure that they continue and complete primary school. A volunteer group in a village goes to the school every month, learns from the teacher about the children who have dropped out during the previous month (or absented themselves for long periods) and immediately meets the parents of these children and ensures that the child returns to school. (Invariably, it is found that the parents did not even know that the children were not going to school). In the Ilayangudi block of Sivagangai district (and, to a lesser extent, in the Tiruvarankulam block of Pudukkottai district), this effort was carried out in more than a hundred villages for more than 2 years, demonstrating that such methods do largely prevent drop-outs, if not totally. Since then, such action has been attempted in many districts. The idea of providing support centers for slow-learning children has proved useful; currently such centers are running in Cuddalore and Villupuram districts. These activities are done under the guidance of the local panchayat and involve the ward members if not the panchayat presidents themselves. Apart from providing visibility to such a programme, their involvement gets the panchayat involved in planning locally for the education of their children.

A major activity of TNSF has been towards improving the quality of primary education, in particular, promoting activity based education in primary schools. To this end, TNSF has compiled a number of language activities, math games and science activities and not only published these as books, but also conducted extensive teacher training programmes. Today, the government's District Primary Education Programme largely follows this material for its teacher training. TNSF has a strong primary teachers' network today, and can count nearly a thousand teachers in it. The TNSF brings out a monthly magazine called Vizhuthu, which looks at the issues in primary school education. The teachers in the network subscribe to the magazine and discuss it in their monthly meetings. They also share their classroom experiences through the magazine.

Another offshoot of the adult literacy work has been the education of child workers. A large number of them want to learn further, and go for equivalency certificates from the formal system by private study. While we are committed to universal schooling, we are also sensitive to the plight of these children and have been conducting educational efforts for them. Currently, such efforts have resulted in evening centers in Virudhunagar, Kanchipuram and Vellore with more than 1000 child laborers benefiting. Again, in many village the local panchayat leaders help and sponsor these efforts.

Apart from these focussed programmes, every district organizes programmes for children - Metric Melas, Children's Science Festivals and Science Clubs in schools and neighbourhood encourage children to learn by doing. Reading groups and mobile libraries help promote reading habit in children. We also bring out Thulir a tamil children's science monthly and Jantar Mantar an english bi-monthly on science.

TNSF Activities in Education

Ensuring Universal Elementary Education

There is stated commitment towards this from the state, but in implementation this agenda faces a number of problems. The situation in a state like Tamil Nadu is much better than in a state like Bihar. But even here UEE (or UPE) is far from achieved. The difficulty in child labour intensive areas like Sivakasi and Kanchipuram is obvious, but it is hard to understand how this happens in other areas where child labour is not endemic. A study by the Tamil Nadu Science Forum showed that:

- In villages where there are no organized avenues of child labour, most of the drop-outs at primary level occur due to a combination of children's disinterest in school, their academic failure and lack of parental monitoring.
- If dropped-out children are not put back in school within a very short span of time, it becomes much harder as time passes.
- In an atmosphere where all their peers are sending their children to school, every parent also wishes to do so.
- In many situations where children are needed by families for economic activity, it is only for a few hours during school time, but in the current scenario, such absenting is not allowed.

Based on this study, the TNSF had initiated an intervention programme in 2 clusters of villages in 2 districts - Villupuram and Cuddalore. The programme had 3 main components:

1. Community Monitoring of Enrollment and Dropouts:

- a. A village education committee is formed and a village education activist is chosen.
- b. At the beginning of the academic year, an enrollment drive is done and all children of school-going age are enrolled in school.

- c. She keeps a register and systematically records the educational status of every child in the village under 10 years of age, accurate to within a month.
 - d. The record not only tracks whether a child is in school or not, but also whether (s)he is a potential drop-out as well. Currently, this information is based on the schoolteacher's input and how the child fares in exams - but as the programme develops a better index may be developed.
 - e. Any change in status is met with immediate intervention. If a child has absented himself for more than 10 days in a month, the child's parent is met immediately, and if it is a drop-out situation, every effort is made to put back the child in school immediately.
2. **Support Classes for slow learners:** *Support classes (free private tuitions) are held outside school for slow learners so that they do not drop out later.*
 3. **Non Formal Education Centers:** *NFE is conducted for children who cannot be re-enrolled (for whatever reason), and equivalency ensured under the National Open School curriculum.*

This programme tried out as a model programme for viability was found reasonably effective and we feel this can be done in any village where there is no systematic employment opportunity for children. With such a programme in place with no additional expense a child health component can be added.

In places of systematic child labour, a different programme has to be conceived. Right now, TNSF is running a number of Non-Formal Education Centers and Night Schools in such places. But the aim and the impact of this is obviously very limited. Campaigns against child labour have helped, but again only to a limited extent. A programme like the M.V.Foundation's Child Labour Eradication Programme in Ranga Reddy district may be an answer. But this component needs to be worked on further before one can propose a definite solution.

Improving Learning Levels in Schools and making schools child-friendly

As we saw in the earlier section, the main reason for drop-outs in schools is low learning levels and the unfriendly atmosphere of the school. The community monitoring programme helps to retain the children in school - but without improving the school atmosphere and the teaching methods used, the UPE programme will not achieve its real goal. The TNSF has been involved in a number of programmes in this area - Teacher Training Programmes, Joy of Learning Campaigns, Publications like Thulir, Jantar Mantar, Low Cost Science Experiments etc, Education clubs (Thulir Illams), Children's Science Congress, Quiz programmes, etc.

The most direct and the important of these programmes (for our purpose) is the Teacher's Network. This is a forum for teachers to meet and discuss

curriculum, teaching methods, classroom experiences and ideas for improving learning levels. This programme is still in its initial stages and has the potential to evolve into a forum which actively develops material, introduces changes in teaching methods and experiments with new pedagogical ideas and activity based learning methods in classrooms.

Often the problem with adopting new methods is a lack of training in teachers – many teachers actually want to teach better. Lack of materials is also a major handicap. But the most serious problem is a lack of good example. The teacher's network helps address all the three problems. The group as it evolves is trying to construct itself as a resource and support group for teachers. The idea is that such a forum should slowly challenge the notion of education agenda and curriculum being set by a bunch of experts and followed by teachers and instead should intervene in the task of developing a curriculum which is both flexible and meaningful and also do-able. Most of the other interventions of TNSF in improving schools can be linked to the

Teachers' Networks

In Vellore district, TNSF has also initiated an alternate school – Thulir School. The need for such schools has been debated. In places where there are no government schools or private schools, our going in for a school seems to make sense. (Even here the question remains why not struggle to get a government school started). And in the north, there are many places where there is a need for such schools. Tamil Nadu on the other hand, has government or private schools in almost all places. Our going in for alternate schools makes sense only in remote tribal areas. The other reason for an alternate school is to demonstrate a different pedagogical approach. If this be the case, an alternate school makes sense when:

- (i) It is sponsored by the teacher's network (to test out their ideas in pedagogy which they are unable to fully test in their own schools) or
- (ii) The local community or a group of parents are convinced about the need for an alternate pedagogy for their children and want to start such a school. At any rate, looking at schools like Rishi Valley or The School, such parental understanding and support seems necessary and without such support alternate schools do not seem to succeed.

The Thulir School's constant attempts to get students and to convince parents takes up a lot of time and effort and the feasibility of such schools on a larger scale is questionable.

Curriculum Changes and making Education relevant to social problems and needs

Education today caters primarily to creating people to "fit" into socially defined roles and therefore reinforces the existing inequality by teaching children to conform and not resist. The education system and in particular textbooks exhibit gender and caste bias. The need for intervention in this cannot be over-emphasized. TNSF has worked on curriculum changes already particularly in

the area of Science Education – we have been involved in identifying Hard Spots, Reducing Burden on Children, Re-writing textbooks, Critiquing the 83rd and 93rd Amendments, etc.

PEOPLE'S MOVEMENTS Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha

Kathyayini Chamaraj

Introduction

Though our country is glorified as a land of farmers, farmers today are facing the severest crises. Though their work has always been fraught with risks, dependent as the farmer is on the vagaries of nature, the farming community was never driven to the levels of despondency seen in the present generation, which sees no other solution to its problems than suicide. And yet, beckoning all such hopeless farmers with a 'seed of hope' is the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRRS). It is calling upon farmers to carve out their destiny themselves and fight for their own survival instead of being swept away by relentless forces sweeping the world.

Evaluating the work of KRRS, a European group has said, "The work of KRRS is impressive for us in a number of senses: The incredible broadness of its scope, the combination of resistance and alternatives, the coherence and elaboration of its analysis and practice, the connections it makes between the local, the regional and the global, the diversity and originality of its forms of actions, its scale and its very marked long-term character".

Beginnings

Levy Procurement- The KRRS had its beginnings in a farmers' group that was established by T.A. Pai around 1966 to protest against the levy procurement order of the government when the Food Corporation of India was formed. Levy procurement was at half the market price with a compulsion to sell on the farmer, who was otherwise sent to jail. Even a farmer holding one acre was not spared. Levy procurement varied from 5% to 10% of the produce. Farmers from different districts started forming associations locally, protesting against and burning the levy demand notices. The same associations also protested later against forcible recovery of farmers' loans by cooperatives, attachment of moveable and immovable properties of farmers.

In 1977, farmers realised the adverse impact of the chemical intensive Green Revolution farming practices. When Charan Singh, a farmer became the prime minister and visited Tumkur in Karnataka in 1978,

farmers started toying with the idea of a state-level organisation merging all the diffuse local organisations. Things came to a head in 1980 when the Congress government resorted to illegal forcible recovery of water taxes in the Malaprabha and Ghatabrabha irrigation areas (Krishna basin) though under the Irrigation Act, no tax was to be collected for the first ten years after irrigation was provided. Betterment levy was also charged on the ground that the market value of the land had gone up due to the provision of irrigation. Higher market value of land would result in greater profits to the farmer only at the time he decided to sell the land, which was not always the case. Forcible recovery by the government led to farmers' agitation in Nargund and Navalgund in which two farmers and two policemen died. This made all farmers' groups, even those represented by various political parties, come together and form a Farmers' Coordination Committee on 17 October 1980. But very soon the realisation set in that members of political parties do not let any decision to be taken. A majority hence decided within three or four months that members of KRRS could not be members of any political parties.

Remunerative Prices- The relentless fight of KRRS in its early stages was for getting realistic and remunerative prices fixed for the farmers' produce. Its plea has been: the government has made no laws to determine the price or profit levels of commodities other than agricultural produce. Why is not the same freedom given to farmers to fix the price of their produce themselves and determine their profit levels also? The Commission for Agricultural Costs & Prices never scientifically takes into account the actual cost of production of agricultural produce and nor does it consider the cost of living of an average agricultural family while fixing costs and prices. The government has not framed any laws to guide the scientific fixation of prices.

Thus, according to calculations made by KRRS, in the period 1966 to 1983, farmers had lost Rs. 6,000 Crores as a result of non-fixation of remunerative prices for their produce. And yet, the government which had looted the farmers of this Rs. 6,000 Crore, calls the farmer a debtor and refuses to write off just Rs. 100 Crores that farmers owe banks. KRRS' call was hence for extinguishing all loans of farmers.

Senseless Loans -The practice of giving loans to farmers - who face natural calamities such as famines and floods, attacks from wild animals, pests, birds, bandicoots and thieves - at the same rates of interest as given to industrialists also came in for attack. KRRS demanded interest-free loans to farmers.

Unjust Taxes- The step-motherly treatment given to farmers even in the case of taxes came next under attack. Whereas industries do not pay

taxes on the raw materials they use but only on the finished product. But a farmer has to pay taxes on the raw materials nature provides him, such as land and water, in the form of land tax, water tax, betterment tax. Whereas others had to pay income tax only if their income exceeded Rs. 22,000 per year, the farmer who was earning practically no income due to levy and loans, was being taxed income tax merely on ownership of land. (Both the betterment tax and income tax were abolished for farmers in 1980 as a result of KRRS' campaigns.)

Industry Vs Agriculture- More than the unjust levy procurement, loan and tax policies, greater injustice is done to the farmer through the exorbitant prices that are allowed to be set for factory products, such as fertilizers. It is only when similar principles are applied while fixing prices for agricultural and industrial products that the farmer can ever hope to come out of poverty, KRRS believes. The prices for crops should be fixed after a realistic evaluation of the value of labour input, on the basis of man-hours spent for growing different crops, and also on the basis of requirements for a dignified existence. The same value should be placed on man-hours while fixing costs of production for both agricultural and industrial products and the same percentage of profit should be fixed for both products while fixing market rates. The KRRS went ahead and fixed the costs of production of various crops on this basis. But on its failure to implement these prices on its own, KRRS says that the average farmer was still too weak to hold out and demand such prices as his goods were perishable and he was at the mercy of a buyer's market.

Agricultural Labourers- For the landless labourers and the very small farmers who also had to work as labourers to augment their earnings, KRRS demanded that agriculture should be declared an industry and all labour laws applicable to industry should be made applicable to agriculture also. In addition to a scientific pricing policy, there had to be a scientific wage policy for agricultural labourers. KRRS also demanded government land to the landless, non-farm employment, free housing, education and health care and pensions as compensation for the long-exploited agricultural labourers. Expecting the former tenant to pay for the land given to him, as a result of land reforms, in instalments was considered inhuman and free land as compensation for his long years of servitude, was demanded.

Villages Vs Cities- KRRS demanded a reversal of the topsy-turvy policy of allocating only 20% of plan funds for the rural areas where 80% of the people were living, and the inordinate amounts spent for the beautification of urban areas. It called for spending 80% of plan funds on rural areas.

Global Issues- KRRS makes important connections between the local, the regional and the global. Since the nineties, it has hence been spending a considerable amount of time and energy to global issues and to global networking. In 1992, when the Dunkel Draft came up for discussion, KRRS had to concentrate on the impact of free trade. KRRS realised early that many of the problems that it was struggling against have their roots in global processes, structures and institutions. It is believed that KRRS was the first people's movement in India, and probably in the world, to organise massive mobilisations against GATT. Up to half a million people used to respond to its demonstration call and this helped to create awareness about these issues among many other movements and organisations.

One of the earliest direct actions against MNCs was the occupation by 1000 activists of the Cargill office in Bangalore. A big bonfire was made of all the equipment of the office which was simply thrown out of the window on to the street. A seed unit of Cargill that was being constructed in Karnataka was physically dismantled with iron bars. The other is the well-known occupation of a Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet in Bangalore to protest against the anti-farmer agreement between the TNC Pepsico (the owner of KFC) and the Indian government.

A new element has been introduced to this tradition by opposing the introduction of biotechnology, or more specifically, genetically modified crops. In 1998, KRRS activists set fire to two of the three field trials of Bt cotton that Monsanto was conducting in Karnataka and repeated the same in Andhra Pradesh. KRRS' rejection of GM crops was brought home to the centres of international power that are seen as forcing destructive development on the Third World – TNCs, the WTO system, governmental research institutions, etc.- through the Inter-Continental Caravan for Solidarity & Resistance. KRRS reiterates its commitment to stop any research activities of Monsanto in Karnataka and “to continue giving fuel to the debate on these issues among the population and roasting the field trials of biotech TNCs that venture into this country.

Besides taking global issues to the local level, KRRS has been actively involved in national and international networking processes, since it is clear for them that global issues cannot be tackled unless awareness-raising and mobilisation takes place beyond the local level. They have played a key role in bringing about national networking processes such as the one that gave birth to the BKU (Bharat Kisan Union) or the JAFIP (Joint Action Forum of Indian People) against the WTO which includes movements representing farmers and other social sectors like industrial workers, women's groups, academics, etc. They were also a key initiator of the PGA (People's Global Action) process against Free Trade and the WTO and they were the ones to propose the ICC project. They are also

one of the main actors within La Via Campesina, a worldwide network of peasant movements. They are still actively involved in all these processes. For instance, KRRS hosted both the PGA Conference in April 1999 and the Third International Conference of La Via Campesina in October 1999.

To the accusation that KRRS is a rich farmers' organisation representing only their interests, Prof. Nanjundaswamy counters this saying that in Karnataka, 75% of farmers own less than two hectares of land and are dry farmers and most of the members of KRRS come from this strata. "Anyway, how many farmers are there who are big farmers?" queries the Professor.

To the accusation that many consider the actions of KRRS to be violent, Prof. Nanjundaswamy says, " People who talk of us as violent, do not know the meaning of violence. Violence against inanimate things is not violence. We have never harmed human beings. What we have done is in the interest of the nation. We have destroyed the potential destroyers, we have ransacked the ransackers." When pointed out that no one was forcing farmers to buy capital-intensive HYV or GM seeds and if they were buying these seeds, they were doing so out of their own choice, Prof. Nanjundaswamy calls this far from the truth. He points out that cooperative credit loans in 1965 were given only for HYV seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, etc. They were not given to anyone wishing to take loans merely for traditional agriculture thus indirectly forcing farmers to shift to capital-intensive agriculture. "Rural debt increased after the Green Revolution. It did not spare even the big farmer. The big farmer became a big loser and big debtor while the small farmer was a small debtor. The Green revolution 'grew' loans. Traditional farming is that which does not lead to loans." On the Rs. 25,000 to 50,000 crores provided in the latest central budget of Mr. Yashwant Sinha for crop loans, Prof. Nanjundaswamy says, "You can bet it will be for genetically modified crops."

Many feel that attacking the Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet in Bangalore was pointless as the number of Indians who can afford to eat at KFC is very limited and this small number cannot be a threat to the food security of the whole nation. Countering this argument, Prof. Nanjundaswamy points out that the matter was not just of the minuscule number of Indians who eat at KFC outlets. The point at issue was the Memorandum of Understanding signed between Pepsico of KFC and the Export Promotion Board of the Government of India and the major role seen therein for introducing 'modern livestock technology'. As a sequel to this, the Maize Board of Karnataka was started to increase meat exports at a time when there was mad-cow disease in Europe and there was a great demand for lean beef and veal in Europe. All this has a

direct bearing on cattle in India. There has been a 300% increase in exports since the signing of the MoU. “Truckloads of cattle are being transported to slaughterhouses. A government claiming to be a supporter of ‘*go raksha*’ (cow protection) is fostering the sale of ‘*gomata*’ in tins,” underscores Prof. Nanjundaswamy. “Illiterate journalists have reduced the issue of KFC to one of *ajinomoto poisoning*. The issue is how Pepsico is linked to cattle in India. How do you expect small farmers of India to survive without cattle?” he questions. “What are the Prani Daya Sanghas and the SPCAs doing about increased animal slaughter in the country?”

“Cargill, Mansanto and KFC ransacking was all Gandhian,” defends Prof. Nanjundaswamy. He further points out that the Privy Council, the highest court in England, recently ruled that if an act which is described as vandalism has a proportionate relation with national interest, then it is not vandalism and not an offence.

“WTO issues do not affect just the Third World, but have their impact globally. North and South are like Siamese twins. You can’t stop the global bodies from making laws but we can’t stop anybody from breaking the law either. In that sense, what they decide in WTO will not affect us,” says Prof. Nanjundaswamy. For instance, the Karnataka Power Transmission Corporation Limited (KPTCL) too has imposed new taxes on power and penalties for power thefts. “Four crore power users will start using power without paying tax. Can it be stopped?” questions Nanjundaswamy. The same situation will prevail with regard to the patent law, he avers.

When it is pointed out that some critics opine that the fall in prices of agricultural commodities like coconut is not because of liberalisation of imports under WTO rules, Prof. Nanjundaswamy counters, “Then why are the prices falling despite fall in yield due to diseases, etc.?” The fall in prices of copra is due to the cheap import of palm oil, and similarly with regard to the prices of maize, sugarcane and paddy, he states. “With the madness for profits, many countries will become Argentinas, economies will collapse. World bodies will realise that their experiment will not succeed. In that sense, definitely, there is still hope,”

Cultural Change- Cultural change has also been an intrinsic goal of its endeavours. Thus it has denounced the caste system as a hurdle to a class struggle and hence a hurdle to the attainment of social justice in India. This stance has made the KRRS the target of the BJP, which has continually lured prominent KRRS activists with money, party tickets for elections to state assemblies and parliament and also high political positions. For instance, the current union minister of rural development, Mr. Babagouda Patil, is a former member of the KRRS. BJP

activists have also tried to stop the car of Nanjundaswamy and set it on fire.

On 'Swadeshi'....

While KRRS is obviously against capitalist globalisation and in favour of self-reliance, this does not prevent it from denouncing the neo-fascist use of the 'Swadeshi' concept by the Hindu far-right, which is a perverted and abused version of the originally very positive Gandhian concept of self-reliance. It believes that the Hindu far-right's xenophobic discourse is boosting "the most stupid nationalism and intolerance". The KRRS' aim is "to reclaim the internationalist roots of the Gandhian concept" which it does not see as an objective to be achieved at the national level, but at the community level. "We have had enough years of over-bureaucratic, centralised, corrupt, inefficient and industry-based 'national self-sufficiency'. Instead of the 'national Swadeshi' so loudly proclaimed by the Hindu nationalist fanatics of BJP, we fight for the economic self-management and freedom of Village Republics," KRRS says.

Simple weddings as alternatives to the expensive and ostentatious weddings indulged in by farmers (which drive them into debt traps) are promoted by KRRS as another means of cultural change. What is also noteworthy is that these ceremonies are not conducted by Brahmins or any other religious or civil authority. They consist of simple oath-taking by the couple wherein both of them state that men and women are equal and should respect each other.

Anti-Patriarchy Struggles - KRRS has fought patriarchal structures in other ways too: women members have their own structures, mobilisation campaigns, rallies and demands. Both men and women members of KRRS participated in the protests against the holding of the 'Miss World' contest in Bangalore. As a result of its demand for reservation of seats for women, Karnataka became the first state in India (and probably in the world) to create women's constituencies at the Panchayat level and reserve 33.3% of seats and offices for them.

'Gram Swaraj' KRRS is a truly Gandhian socialist movement and believes in 'gram swaraj' (village republics), " a form of social, political and economic organisation based on direct democracy, on economic and political autonomy and self-reliance, on the participation of the community in decision-making about the common affairs that affect them and on the creation of mechanisms of representation that ensure that affairs affecting several communities are decided upon through processes of consultation involving all communities affected by the decisions. An unusual element in the concept of the Village Republic, as enunciated by KRRS, is that the autonomy and freedom of the village

should be based on the autonomy and freedom of its individual members. This requires the repudiation of the caste system, patriarchy, of religious intolerance and all other forms of oppression.

Internal Organisation

The same model is applied to the internal organisation of the movement. The basic unit of organisation is the village unit, the only level where membership registers exist because it is not possible to keep central registers for a movement of this size. There is decentralisation of administration and finances of the organisation to the village level. The village units decide on their own forms of organisation and finances, programmes and actions. Above the village level, there are the taluk, district and state level units. The principle of subsidiarity is applied to all these levels. For instance, only the decisions that affect more than a taluk but not more than a district are taken at district level. Decisions at state level are taken by the State Executive Committee which consists of 400 delegates from all the districts. KRRS has its presence in 17 of the 19 districts of Karnataka. KRRS, as a matter of policy, never accepts money from any source other than the farmers of Karnataka.

Electoral Politics

Since 1999, KRRS has been debating extensively on how to bring about fundamental social change. One of the issues centred on the participation of the movement in electoral politics which has heralded a new phase in the development of the movement. KRRS, since its founding, was depending in the best Gandhian tradition on civil disobedience, non-violent direct action and the initiation of local alternatives by local communities for bringing about fundamental social changes and dismantle capitalism from below.

However, KRRS found that even persistent civil disobedience was not successful in changing government policies which were affecting farmers very negatively. Hence in 1987, KRRS took the calculated risk of registering the movement as a political party and contesting elections. At that time, massive civil disobedience jail-courting actions were taking place almost every single day by hundreds of thousands of people, with up to 37,000 people being arrested in a single day. The mobilisation capacity of the movement was estimated at 10 million people out of the 40 million population of Karnataka, and yet, the government did not acknowledge the movement because it was extra-parliamentary. In view of the size of the movement, KRRS thought that it should take the challenge of going into the machinery of the state to change it from within. But, in contrast to mainstream political parties, this was done putting a number of conditions on itself, to ensure that the party would not take over the movement:

KRRS candidates were not allowed to pay the election deposit with their own money; their constituencies had to pay the deposit on their behalf. This was to eliminate the risk of wealthier candidates being able to access more power than poorer ones and to give greater control over the decision to run for elections. KRRS was not allowed to form alliances with any other political parties at local, district or state level – the principle being that no other political party should ever receive a vote from KRRS. This has much significance in the first-past-the-post electoral system inherited by India from the British in which the one who gets the most votes wins the elections and the votes received by the other candidates simply get trashed. This is why several alliances are formed by mainstream parties in each constituency in order to consolidate the votes in favour of one candidate. These conditions were imposed in order to ensure that if KRRS obtained power, it would not be on the basis of any compromises in its policy with other political forces. It was also to ensure that electoral politics did not gain an upper hand over the movement itself.

In the first-ever elections that KRRS contested in 1989, it won two seats in the state assembly. Its candidates were placed second in 24 other constituencies and third in 30-40 others. Prof. Nanjundaswamy was one of the two who succeeded at the polls and he was able to raise numerous issues related to the farming community in his five-year tenure as an MLA.

In 1994 elections, however, KRRS did not win even a single seat and Prof. Nanjundaswamy himself lost by a narrow margin of 3,000 votes. KRRS gave up the electoral experiment during the third elections and did not field any candidates. Prof. Nanjundaswamy attributes this debacle to the lack of voter awareness and their continued predilection to vote along caste lines.

However, the 12 years of electoral experiment demonstrated that the “risk to the movement was greater and the destructive vigour of electoral politics more powerful than was expected”. KRRS’ experience as a political party led it to a couple of conclusions. The first conclusion was that even the strict conditions under which it decided to participate in electoral politics had no influence on the “spectacular capacity of the electoral system to degrade and corrupt the small group of people that reaches positions of power”. The electoral experience saw even exceptionally committed and honest grassroots activists, who came to contest elections due to their leadership of the movement, transform themselves within short periods into power mongers willing to betray the movement.

Before every election there were also leaders proposing “to be realistic” and join in alliances with mainstream parties to increase the share of

seats of KRRS in the assembly or parliament, even though this idea was always rejected by the movement. Their frustrated ambitions made these leaders easy prey for other political parties to lure them to their fold and engineer 'splits' in the movement. Thus such power-mongers have left the movement in four successive waves which have been portrayed as 'major splits' by the media though each of them took only about 20 members with them. But these splits do erode the movement in the time and energy that they consume away from grassroots work.

A second important conclusion that has been reached, which has much significance for other movements which are also contemplating entry into electoral politics, is that in the long term it is not possible for a movement to pursue a struggle for self-rule and decentralisation while participating in the structures of power. The learning has been that the "so-called democratic elections are a perfect tool to kill any kind of lively grassroots movement challenging power from below, transforming it into a guarantee of continuity for the system characterised by a profoundly undemocratic internal structure and aimed only at preserving the privileges of its leadership".

Apart from this, the most important effect of the electoral experience has been "the silent redefinition of power relations that takes place within the organisation" when a few members attain positions of parliamentarians. KRRS feels that this redefinition of power invariably reduces the democracy and equality within the movement. A disproportionate weight gets attached to the opinions of this handful of members and intensifies the hierarchies in the movement. The movement is held hostage to this group even when the group's opinions are not necessarily shared by the movement. Increasing numbers of people react negatively to this change and this is the reason for KRRS losing some of its strength and not so much the defections *per se*. KRRS sees this as a temporary problem which will get solved once the movement goes back to its roots by eschewing electoral politics and concentrating again on civil disobedience, non-violent direct action and construction of alternatives.

In addition, the interaction of KRRS with non-hierarchical organisational groups in Europe, often led by many highly emancipated and committed women, has inspired it to intensify its anti-patriarchal work, to tackle the issue of property with increased strength, to increase engagement in the fight against the caste system, among other things, by giving dalits a space within the organisation to fight for their rights and lastly, to reduce the hierarchies in the movement and make it more horizontal.

Alternatives

Resistance to certain policies has also meant that KRRS has been active in fostering alternatives, as it is its belief that one cannot take place

without the other. Saying 'no' to chemical agriculture and biotechnology has gone hand in hand with promoting traditional agriculture which could also be labeled as 'organic' or 'ecological'. One of the first campaigns to preserve the environment was the massive campaign in the eighties to uproot the eucalyptus plantations sponsored by the government and their replacement by local trees. This forced Rajiv Gandhi to stop a national programme for the promotion of eucalyptus in India.

More recently, KRRS has been campaigning against road construction, specifically, against the proposed raised expressway between Bangalore and Mysore. And against mining for iron ore in the Kudremukh region of the Western Ghats, one of the last reserves of tropical biodiversity in the country. Currently, one district unit in South Karnataka is building a Global Centre for Sustainable Development which is engaged in the conservation and development of traditional varieties of seeds. The Centre also promotes traditional technologies, medicines and a 'green school'.

It should not be understood as blind adherence to tradition and rejection of all that is new. The Centre, for instance, is protected by an electric fence powered by solar energy. Technology is accepted or rejected not on the basis of how old it is, but on whether "the technology can be directly operated and managed by the people who use it and whether it is labour-intensive or capital-intensive, and so on. It should also be said that modern technologies do not usually fit these criteria.

Not all farmers of KRRS have shifted to organic farming. About 5% have shifted and some of them are getting better yields. They still have doubts about going back to old methods. They are asked to start slowly, devoting perhaps two and a half acres to begin with and gradually increasing it.

Money-less Markets

Small farmers produce the most food in India and they form the majority of farmers in India. They are the source of the highest revenue to the government. In order to bring the government to heel and also enable these farmers to get remunerative prices for their produce, KRRS has been asking the farming community to experiment with money-less markets, which are being tried out already in some other parts of the world. Farmers should fix their own scientific prices for their various products and 'barter' products with one another on the basis of these prices at farmers' own '*santhes*' or traditional farmers' fairs to free themselves from money markets.

If farmers organise themselves, unite and carry out this programme in campaign mode just for a year, then there is no doubt that farmers can

bring the whole nation under their control, KRRS believes. “There is a need to take up this campaign as an experiment at least in a phased manner. When government does not do what it should, then we should do it ourselves. And when government does what it should not do, then we should take direct action to stop it,” advocates KRRS.

Outsider’s critique of KRRS

A member of a Leftist movement says that one has to understand the social processes in rural India to understand the emergence of KRRS. After Independence and up to the mid-sixties, the government followed one set of policies with respect to agriculture. But during the era of the Green Revolution, the terms of trade shifted favourably towards agricultural production. From mid-sixties to mid-seventies, prices of agricultural produce increased to make the farmers invest their profits back into agriculture. Credit supply through nationalised banks, fertiliser subsidy, etc. were made available to the middle and rich peasant and this section grew correspondingly in economic clout and flourished. The Green Revolution forced feudal landlords to take up capitalist agriculture.

It was at the same time that land reform laws were enacted in Karnataka. Except in the districts of Uttara and Dakshina Kannada, land reform laws benefited rich farmers. It actually led to eviction of tenants and landlords assuming full ownership of land through benami and other transactions. This only led to further concentration of land in the hands of a few. This was also a means to help the Green Revolution strategy of the government. This led to polarisation of the rural strata – feudal vs. poor labourer and peasant. This was also the origin of the emergence of two simultaneous movements in Karnataka, the KRRS and the Dalit movements.

After mid-seventies, the terms of trade in agriculture turned against agriculture production and farming was no longer remunerative. The fertiliser subsidy was taken away. Betterment levy was imposed on irrigation and power. The squeeze was felt by all of peasantry, the new rich peasantry as well as the poor labourers and peasants. In 1980, the Karnataka Prantha Raitha Sangha (KPRS) led by Marxists such as V. N. Halkatti, which was part of the All India Kisan Sabha and was catering to the tenants and poor peasantry in the Malaprabha basin, led the movement against the squeeze of all peasantry. This acted like a spark and spread to entire Karnataka within a few weeks. The districts in which KPRS was not present, came under the influence of Prof. Nanjundaswamy. KRRS was formed basically with the rich peasantry and since the other peasantry did not have any other alternative in those districts, they also joined the KRRS.

The demands of the KRRS were all of the rich peasantry – remunerative prices, credit, subsidy for tractors, removal of levy and other restrictions on grains, etc. This went on for a decade but thereafter, the poor peasantry started leaving KRRS. When the situation with respect to credit and subsidies improved to some extent, farmers from Southern Karnataka left them. This was because KRRS did not take up the issues of rationing, housing, drinking water, laws for agricultural workers, etc., which were the issues of the poor peasantry. KRRS' base shifted to North Karnataka where feudalism continued to a large extent. Less than 1% farmers own more than 40% of land here, some owning up to 3000 acres of irrigated land under fictitious land transactions which are not reflected in government records.

The KRRS won some election seats in North Karnataka but here also they soon lost their base because they did not cater to the needs of the other peasantry. Hence only large peasantry is still with them. When their strength became weak, they started taking up issues of globalisation. They have played an important role in this and they are a hope to the farmer in the context of globalisation, the Patents' Act, environmental and food security issues, etc. But now, KRRS is taking up only those issues thrown up by the international community and does not take up the issues of the local peasantry, such as issues of toor, paddy and sugarcane prices, any more. The linking of local with international issues is not happening properly, according to this critic. Attacks on MNCs are done by a selected few as these issues did not become issues of the mass of peasantry. Political aspirants in KRRS left and joined other parties when they saw no hope for themselves within KRRS. It is in this situation that the splits have occurred and even the peasants of North Karnataka have left Prof. Nanjundaswamy. As a consequence, all the factions are weak and they are only shadows of their former selves.

One more reason for the weakening is that, though KRRS speaks of 'gram swaraj', the proper functioning of grama sabhas and the panchayat bodies has never been taken up by them. Also, no elections are conducted in KRRS and there are no regular contributions. It is wrong to say that the big peasant is a big loser and debtor, because the big peasant is rarely a pure farmer. Not only does he have the power of landholding, but he is also involved in money-lending operations; he borrows money at low interest rates from banks and lends the same to poor peasants and labourers at higher rates of interest; he acts as a contractor of government works; he supplies seeds, fertilisers and pesticides to smaller farmers and also purchases their produce; he is more or less a *dalal* or agent. Thus this section has prospered because of the rich farmer's multiple roles. The cream of rural society is made up of such people.

PEOPLE'S MOVEMENTS
Travails of a Rehabilitated Village
MADHYA PRADESH

Rahul Ramagundam

On 10th December 1999 Ekta Parishad launched its Land Rights Satyagraha Padyatra from Ekta Pura Soin in the Sheopur district of Madhya Pradesh. The point of departure was chosen to pay homage to the sacrifice of Babu, a Saheriya adivasi, who was axed to death two years ago on 1st October 1998. His death was a result of the ongoing land struggle that Saheriyas were leading to settle themselves permanently after having been released from the bondage. Ekta Pura is a resettled village. There are 28 formerly bonded families who were identified, released and rehabilitated by the Ekta Parishad in close collaboration with the families and a sympathetic administration. All its residents have come from different villages and now live in a community. Babu's family was one of the settlers. They have been settled in Ekta Pura, a village named after the organisation that backed their struggle.

Babu was second of four brothers. Their father was a bonded labourer. And the four brothers too had been eking out a living as bonded labourers until 1991 when their release came. Life of the bonded labour was the most lamentable one. It was a life of continuous physical and mental distress. Their existence was however somewhat mitigated by their ignorance. They took their life of bondage as given. They were excluded from all forms of social interaction, for instance, they were not allowed to sit on the cot in the village. Various factors collude to render an adivasi-bonded labourer. One of the factors could just be the borrowing of money from a landlord to buy freedom from the current lord and thereby falling into the waiting trap of the former. Gangaram, the eldest brother of Babu was bonded to the Sarpanch of village Barda in Sheopur. For twelve years he had been working with an annual payment amounting to about 500 rupees. Babu, the second brother, too had worked under the same Sarpanch for five years and when daily beatings and physical torture became unbearable, he borrowed Rs.2500 from Pandit Gajraj to buy his liberation. He stayed with Gajraj for a year until the final freedom arrived in the form of campaign for liberation of bonded labour launched by Ekta Parishad in a successful collaboration with the district authorities.

The third, Bhajanlal, acted as replacements for the brothers when they were incapacitated due to ill health or any other factors. The fate of the youngest brother, Siyaram, was linked to the whims of the village landlord, Dhanpal Maina, a Rawat, to whom he was bonded. Families of these four brothers and other similarly placed twenty-four families inhabit Ekta Pura. Today, the lives of these brothers have changed beyond recognition. The change is most perceptible in Gangaram. A full time activist of Ekta Parishad, he is the district president of the organisation and constantly moves from one village to another to educate and mobilize people. As Ran Sinh, Secretary of the Mahatma Gandhi Sewa Ashram, an affiliate of Ekta Parishad, says, "Gangaram in his loin cloth used to come and sit in our camps where the district collector Radhe Shyam Julania used to hear the cases of bonded labourers. He never spoke throughout the proceedings which extended over days. Today, clad in dhoti and kurta, he fears none and can talk to any authority." Anagram himself concurs with Ran Sinh when he reminisces about his past life and says with an obvious tinge of gratitude, "Today I can speak and talk by the grace of Rakeshbhai and the Ashram". Rakeshbhai has been one of the foremost activists in the rehabilitation of surrendered Chambal dacoits and of the released bonded labourers. Mahatma Gandhi Sewa Ashram, founded by Subba Rao in the late sixties, was meant to carry out peace initiatives in the dacoit infested Chambal ravines. In the mid-eighties it began to focus its attention on the plight of the bonded labourers in the region. In 1990, when Ekta Parishad was founded to formulate state-wide responses to the government's policies, the Ashram became one of its active associate members.

Once the bonded labourers were identified by the Ashram, a systematic campaign for their release was launched. Camps were organised in village after village to which district authorities were invited to hear the individual cases. The rehabilitation after the release was dependent on finding a suitable occupation for the people to earn their livelihood. Land was seen as a source to eke out a living. But search for land was the most difficult process. It began with Ekta Parishad workers scouting the nearby villages for vacant land. In Sheopur district, people from Punjab and Rajasthan came and bought land in the vicinity of Chambal canal. It is they who benefited from the canal network whereas the indigenous residents have remained as poor as before. It was in Soin village that a big stretch of land was found lying unused. It was close to 105 acres and belonged to the state's Dairy Department. The Parishad and the released families decided to settle themselves on this land. They made their thatched huts and began to prepare the land. But the influential residents from surrounding villages eyed the land too. In all the land struggles while the fight seems to be between the landless and the state, there is often an invisible third player, the influential land-owning

villagers. At Soin, when the landless arrived to take over the land in defiance of the state, it was these influential villagers who complained to the police against them. The police came, burnt down their huts and confiscated their meagre belongings. When it was pointed out that it was the state's avowed goal to rehabilitate the released bonded labourers, the district administration relented and granted rights over the land to the twenty-eight families. The action however, was against the interests of those who already had a greedy eye over the land. They began to create problems for the rehabilitated families. They were not allowed to draw water from the village well. Their children were shooed away from the village school. Wage work was not given. Those initial days were terribly difficult. But the families chose to dig in. It was patience, perseverance, and fortitude of the community that was on display. In the end, the village influentials resorted to violence and intimidation. In one such scuffle, in October 1998 Babu was axed to death in broad daylight.

The resettlement of the released bonded labourers began earnestly but was strewn with many difficulties. These difficulties are manifold and go beyond the mere acquisition of land. A major stumbling block that an agency supporting rehabilitation faces is that of attitude. It is ironical but true that to those in bondage, the slavery provided a certain degree of security. These people had hitherto been bonded to one or the other landlord. There was an absence of a consciousness that explored their inability to choose their vocation freely. It was an extremely wretched existence but there was a safety in dependency, even if it meant a survival at the seams. At best, they did wage work and at worst, were bonded to some big agriculturalist. There was exploitation of every kind and degree but there never developed a consciousness to see their abject existence as borne out of an unjust system. At best what they could do was to rationalise their pathetic existence as a quirk of fate or adopt some actions of passive protest such as feigning illness or executing assigned work at a minimal efficiency to the detriment of the landlord's profit. Agriculture itself is becoming a less profitable proposition given the proportion of inputs it requires. And if one lacks in resources one may end up ruining one's fate.

The vagaries of nature is another unpredictable eventuality that needs to be faced. added to this list is an adivasi mentality that abhors accumulation for the rainy day. Their needs were limited to the daily consumption. Being satisfied with whatever they found was their ingrained habit. It was the abundance of forests that encouraged the complacency. It is in this context that a group of liberated bonded labourers turned neo-agriculturists show their inability to grab a potentially profitable future. Agriculture is a difficult vocation. The choice of crops and the right kind of cropping is important. Timely intervention is imperative as the agriculture mostly is dependent on nature's whims.

Hard physical work may end up in a whimper. And besides their own physical work, if one has invested in seeds, fertilisers, arranging for the irrigation, and hired the labour, stakes in the harvest goes higher. Under such conditions, if the crops fail due to any number of reasons, a cultivator can survive the first year somehow as rural needs are stretched to minimal limit. If the crop fails in the succeeding year too, then survival at the fringe may ultimately mean taking recourse to suicide.

Some important criteria are required to make a successful agriculturalist out of the adivasis. One needs to offset and meet the challenges of nature's unpredictability. There should be sufficient resources as a part of inputs as well as to meet the unpredictableness. Most important part in being an agriculturist is pride in being an independent entrepreneur. It is this feeling that lends strength to face the whimsical nature and develop an attitude for cultivation. A marginal farmer survives from cultivation as he discounts his and his family's physical work in the field in the final calculation. Exploitation-based agriculture is profitable as one illegally and immorally keeps human beings in bondage for free labour inputs in the field. There is also another kind of profitable agriculture but limited only to big land holdings. It is highly subsidised agriculture whereby subsidy is provided in electricity, irrigation, equipments and other inputs.

At Ekta Pura, people have gone ahead and fought against official apathy to install a hand pump near their settlement. It was Rs 40,000 worth benefit for the community. The land they got was worth rupees one Crore. The land of 100 acres has been divided into 26 plots, each approximately 4.5 acres. The fighting spirit that Ekta Parishad has instilled in these people is now their only asset to build their future. They have applied for a tractor to the district administration under one of its schemes. Ekta Parishad has just started a primary school in response to the enthusiasm shown by some 30 children of varying ages and their parents. There is also a plan to get concrete houses awarded by the administration under its house for poor programme. School too would be transformed into suitable accommodation. Today, in a low lying self-made thatched encircle, children are being taught by an adivasi man from a nearby village. He is paid Rs. 500 a month for this service.

There is no blackboard or flooring, no copy or books. There are only slates and books, which had been part of the curriculum of the adult literacy campaign begun years ago by the state government. But the beginning has been made! The residents of Ekta Pura have become the torchbearers of Ekta Parishad in the region. Gangaram, who was till the other day most reluctant to open his mouth is now the Sheopur District

Co-ordinator of the Ekta Parishad. He nurtures a dream of standing one day for election to the state assembly.

Given his background and his self-proclaimed dream, it is truly an instance of adivasi empowerment. Similarly, the residents of Ekta Pura not just contribute their annual share of grain to run and feed the Sheopur Ashram which is often visited by the villagers from interiors, but also go to other villages to collect their membership contribution for the organisation. The residents are most vocal and active participants in any of the programme and protest rallies conducted by Ekta Parishad.

PEOPLE'S MOVEMENTS
Bhalapur: Women For Trees
MADHYA PRADESH

Rahul Ramagundam

The legitimacy that the top-down approach has received in recent past has done more harm to the community initiatives than any other thing that has come to symbolise the modern age. While all forests areas are depleting rapidly, there are some heartening instances of community initiatives of not only forest conservation but virtually re-growing it out of the stumps of the barren expanse. In the megalomania of mega-projects and concerns, these instances however remain unrecognised.

Bhalapur is a village some 84 km from the block office of Mohla in the Rajanandgaon district of Madhya Pradesh's Chattisgarh region. In the mid-Eighties a unique idea for community participation in forest preservation began here with modest resources and aims. Today, on a 12 hectare land which was barren with felled trees stands a dense green cover. The turn around has been achieved by the determination and organisation of the village women. Mohini Bai, the 60- year old president of the Mahila Mandal is ecstatic while talking about all that it took to make the dream come true.

The impetus for the initiative had come from within the village. The presence of an activist from the Ekta Parishad facilitated the successful implementation. In mid-Eighties, at a nearby village, Dundera, Prayog, an affiliated NGO of Ekta Parishad, held an activist training camp. Vikram of Bhalapur participated in the camp. He came back to village with new learning. He organised all the women in the village, mostly dalits and adivasis, into a Mahila Mandal. For some time discussion in the Mahila Mandal focused on a diagnosis of the village problem. It was evident that the greatest difficulty women faced was in procuring fuelwood for their hearth. The village forest was shrinking given the indiscriminate felling by the local rich for purposes other than daily use. It was the suffering of walking for long distances for fuelwood that brought unanimity among the women; they decided to re-grow the forest on the barren tract. The land at that time was full of stumps of felled trees.

It is from these stumps that now a forest has re-grown. For protection against grazing animals they dug up deep trenches all around the

deforested stretch. And against preying poachers and timber mafia, they positioned themselves as volunteer guards. Soon green life sprouted on the stumps. Today, almost 15 years later, there is a dense forest standing here in the outskirts of the village. It fulfils the need for fuelwood consumption for the locals who collect dry twigs from the forest. And there is a variety in this bio-diversity, which is the original culture of forests. There are timber trees, fruit trees, and bamboo among other local variants. Later, besides providing protection to the tree stumps effort towards selective plantation was also made.

The success has been achieved against all odds. The rural rich did not look at the collective female effort with great happiness. They felt threatened. When the women were digging trenches around the tract, the influential in the village put stumbling blocks by raising the question of land demarcation. The official administration lacked innovation as well as imagination to see the uniqueness of this effort. It, however, later veered around to give “tree patta” to the Mahila Mandal. At first, after repeated petitioning and representation, the collector gave the ‘patta’ for a period of five years. Then, after the expire of the stipulated time the *patwari* extended the *patta* for another one year. Each time the lease period ended women had to fight a renewed and complicated battle of legality with the authorities.

It is ironical that whereas a business interest can procure a lease for a period close to 100 years, a people’s initiative is so suspiciously looked at and no long-term lease is granted. Today, the forest stands without those responsible for its growth having any legal right over it as the granted patta has not yet been renewed despite repeated pleas and representation.

The successful initiative has also inspired those in village who had initially opposed effort. Today, the same powerful and hostile sections of the village have formed a Mahila Mandal in the name of their women folk and have taken over a stretch of barren land nearby for reforestation programme. They have gone a step ahead and planted tree suitable for sericulture. This yields them a handsome profit every year.

The old Mahila Mandal had begun initially with 20-odd members but now has only 13 members left. Some of the old members have died while some young members have married and have gone to their new homes. The mandal not only helped protect and re-grow the forest, but also formed a small savings and credit group among themselves. They often took up cudgels against the mismanagement of funds meant for the relief of the poor inhabitants or for general village development by the influential people of the village.

Today, as the green forest proudly sways in the wind, the women are happy. Says Mohini Bai, “ We have the pleasure of seeing our effort bear fruit.” The pleasure is now on the border of her village, entering new terrains.

What are the lessons one can derive from the experience at Bhalapur? First the ideology of conservation itself. It is not mammoth projects like the World Bank-backed Madhya Pradesh Forestry Project that will protect the forest from depletion. It is the imperatives of local needs that will bring forward the indigenous ingenuity to preserve the natural wealth.

The mega projects only displace people from their natural habitat. It is inhuman and violates the right to life. The World Bank claims that it is enforcing the dictum of voluntary withdrawal of the people from project area to minimise the adverse impact on human population. In reality, the displacement that its forestry Project has brought no less inhuman. It is true as the Bank says that people are not made to leave their hearth by force. But when the government withdraws itself from the project area by abstaining from all its developmental initiatives, by shutting down its police post, by cutting off electricity and water supply, by closing down schools and health clinic and eventually by removing the village from its records, then people are left with no option but withdraw voluntarily. This therefore is the much-projected human face of the Bank.

On the other hand, Bhalapur teaches us that if primacy is given to the imperatives of the local needs then people would come forward to take initiatives not just in preservation but also in reclaiming what was lost. The lesson from Bhalapur lies in micro concerns. Mega projects help only the blind bureaucracy. If we ignore the lesson from Bhalapur, it is at our peril.