

Working Paper 177

**Peoples' Social Movements:
An Alternative Perspective on
Forest Management in India**

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Several studies were undertaken under the CIFOR research project on 'Creating space for local forest management' in India. One of the focus states was (undivided) Madhya Pradesh and the following studies were undertaken:

1. A study of the Nationalised NTFP policy of Madhya Pradesh (specifically looking at the experience of Tendu Patta Policy);
2. A study of the Non-Nationalised NTFP Policy of Madhya Pradesh (while the Policy so far has been of free trade there has been a lot of discussion for many years on finding ways of ensuring better returns and control by the gatherers. A study of Van Dhan Intervention in Bastar has been carried out in order to explore the implications and lessons from one such effort particularly in shaping the future policy);
3. A study of Social Movements in Madhya Pradesh (particularly the work of Ekta Parishad and Bharat Jan Andolan);
4. A study of Joint Forest Management program in Harda.

This paper is based on the findings of the study of Social Movements in Madhya Pradesh.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

| | |
|--------|---|
| BAM | Brothers to All Men |
| BJA | Bharat Jan Andolan |
| BJP | Bharatiya Janata Party |
| CAPART | Council for Advancement of Peoples' Action and Rural Technology |
| CBI | Central Bureau of Investigation |
| CIFOR | Center for International Forestry Research |
| CPI-ML | Communist Party of India/Marxist-Leninist |
| FDH | Frères des Hommes (Brothers of Mankind) |
| IFAD | International Fund for Agricultural Development |
| JFM | Joint Forest Management |
| LEHAR | Meaning 'wave', name of an NGO |
| NGO | Non-Government Organisation |
| NSS | National Service Scheme |
| NTFP | Non-Timber Forest Products |
| PESA | <i>Panchayat</i> Extension to Scheduled Areas |
| Pidit | People's Institute for Development and Training |
| SDM | Sub Divisional Magistrate |
| TSR | Tribal Self-Rule |

Glossary

| | |
|--|--|
| <i>Adhikaar abhiyan</i> | A campaign for rights |
| <i>Baiga mukti abhiyaan</i> | Baiga liberation campaign |
| <i>Chakka jam</i> | Stopping the traffic on important roads |
| <i>Dacoits</i> | A gang of armed robbers |
| <i>Dahn</i> | Paddy |
| <i>Dahn kosh</i> | A paddy bank |
| <i>Danda</i> | Stick, weapon |
| <i>Datoon</i> | Twigs used by villagers as a toothbrush |
| <i>Dharna</i> | Sit-in |
| <i>Gaon gandraj</i> | Village republic |
| <i>Gaon samaj</i> | Village community/society |
| <i>Gram sabha</i> | Village council |
| <i>Hakdari</i> | Legitimate right |
| <i>Hamare gaon, hamara raaj</i> | Our village, our rule |
| <i>Izzat</i> | Self-respect |
| <i>Jal, jungle aur jamin</i> | Water, forest and land |
| <i>Jhanda Haziri</i> | A constructive agitational programme of Bharat Jan Andolan |
| <i>Kabja</i> | Hold (of land) |
| <i>Lok Ayukta</i> | Special establishment police |
| <i>Mahila</i> | Women |
| <i>Mahila mandal</i> | Women's group |
| <i>Mandali</i> | Groups |
| <i>Morcha</i> | A hostile demonstration against the government |
| <i>Mukhia</i> | Leader |
| <i>Murgi</i> | Chicken |
| <i>Nigrani samitis</i> | Watch committees |
| <i>Nistaar</i> | Customary |
| <i>Padyatra</i> | Foot march or pilgrimage |
| <i>Panch</i> | Elected representative of a <i>Gram Panchayat</i> |
| <i>Panchayat</i> | Village council |
| <i>Patels</i> | Village headman |
| <i>Pattas</i> | Land titles |
| <i>Rachana, sangarsh aur bahishkar</i> | Creation, struggle and boycott |
| <i>Roti</i> | Bread |
| <i>Rupee</i> | Indian currency |
| <i>Samajh, sahas aur samarpan</i> | Understanding, strength and commitment |
| <i>Samiti</i> | An association formed to organise political activity |
| <i>Sangarsh samiti</i> | Struggle committee |
| <i>Sarpanch</i> | Head of a <i>Panchayat</i> |
| <i>Shila lekh</i> | Rock inscription |
| <i>Talaab</i> | Pond |
| <i>Tehsildar</i> | Revenue officer |
| <i>Tendu patta</i> | Leaf |
| <i>Theka</i> | Liquor |
| <i>Thekadar</i> | External contractor |
| <i>Van suraksha samitis</i> | Forest protection committees |
| <i>Vidhan sabha</i> | Legislative assembly constituencies |
| <i>Yuva</i> | Youth |

Introduction

Once the colonial state¹ had consolidated its control over large parts of India, it started looking towards the forests to gain access to natural and forest resources essential for 'development'. Interestingly, colonial rule had to face stiff resistance from the forest inhabitants and local communities, characterised by several peoples' movements and a tribal uprising against the colonial administration. These movements and uprisings were an assertion of the traditional rights of the tribal and local people over the forests and their resources. They also asserted the organic linkage of tribal culture, tradition and social systems with the forests. The colonial administration considered state monopoly rights over forests essential for achieving its own interests, thus the sharp conflict between the colonial state and the tribal people continued. The history of Jharkhand, Uttarakhand and the north-east is full of such peoples' protest movements and uprisings in forest areas against the colonial state. Indeed, such movements generated a prolonged debate within the colonial bureaucracy on whether to treat the customary use of forests by tribals as based on privilege or on right. It was settled by the principle that the right of conquest is the strongest of all rights (Guha 1989).

From the perspective of common people and tribals in India, the establishment of a democratic state in the post-colonial phase did not drastically alter the common property resources discourse. Forests were still viewed as resources on which state monopoly was essential for furthering the interests of the state and the nation. The benefits of this policy to the nation are being questioned and keenly contested in the contemporary debates on forest management, as the benefits did not reach the larger masses, the poor or the tribals. On the one hand, these policies immensely benefited a small section of elites and urban centres and on the other, state monopoly led to further marginalisation and alienation of forest dependent communities and decreasing space for tribals and their customary rights over forests. The sudden implementation of forest and environmental laws by the post-colonial state accentuated the marginalisation of tribals and forest dependent communities as the implementation was not backed by work on the ground and the elites used loopholes in the laws and its implementation mechanism to further their self-interest, which often ran contrary to the customary and traditional rights of these communities. Over the decades, and despite several attempts, the state has not been able to present alternative systems of forest management – particularly in the context of immense population growth – which effectively address the concerns of customary and traditional rights of forest dependent communities and adequately respond to the ever increasing needs of a market-driven urbanising and industrialising society. Rapid population growth and continued denial of rights of the tribals and forest dependent communities is increasing the pressure on forests as resources, and this is leading to a situation of conflict between forest dependent communities and the state that still limits the former's access, control, management and ownership of the forests.

The State of Madhya Pradesh has a very rich history of peoples' social movements and tribal uprisings in the pre-independence era. In 1876, the uprising of Rajmuria and Bhatra tribes in Bastar was strong and widespread; it was crushed by a strong colonial army sent from Orrissa. In 1910, a new forest policy was introduced which declared the forests of Bastar as reserve forests. The tribals, who were dependent on forests for their economic activity, did not accept this and felt that their traditional rights over the forests were being threatened. A large-scale tribal revolt began in 1910 and continued for more than a decade. Again, the state resorted to strong army action to crush the revolt. There is a history of several other peoples' movements spread across the tribal and forest areas of Madhya Pradesh. These movements may have been triggered by different factors, but most often the root cause was conflict over control of and access to the forests and their resources.

¹ In this paper the word 'state' is used in its juridical sense and the word 'State' denotes a constituent province of the Indian Union.

The struggles of the tribals and the forest dependent communities have continued in the post-colonial era and have touched various spheres of social and political existence. In spite of the substantially high population of tribals in Madhya Pradesh, they have remained marginalised in the power matrix and decision-making structures. Only a token representation has been given to the tribals, and it has completely failed in voicing the concerns of their communities. The modern state, in alliance with the industrial lobby, has increasingly viewed the rich forest cover and natural resources of Madhya Pradesh as a resource to be exploited. This continuing process of exploitation has further marginalised the tribals and forest dependent communities and has critically threatened their livelihood, culture and society. The tribals and forest dependent communities are actively protesting against the loss of their livelihood and the threat to their culture and society; these protests are being organised and articulated as peoples' social movements. Several such movements have emerged throughout Madhya Pradesh, organising the tribals and the marginalised communities against the state and the modern system that alienates them from their natural resources. Some of the more prominent ones include Ekta Parishad, Adivasi Mukti Sangathan, Kisan Adivasi Sangathan, Narmada Bachao Andolan, Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha and Bharat Jan Andolan. The core issue of entitlements and rights of tribals and local communities over the forest and natural resources has remained the primary conflict point between the state and these movements, and the forests are at the centre of this narrative.

Objectives of the Research

The primary objective of this research is to assess and understand the impact of peoples' social movements in Madhya Pradesh on the forest management space. As such, it is pertinent to analyse the extent of the influence these movements wield on the shaping of policies, plans and programmes which ultimately define the forest management space. It is also important to stress that if these democratic movements are unable to influence the forest management arena, either directly or indirectly, then a large section of the forest communities (tribals included) and their stakes, remain unrepresented. The impact and ramifications of this process of non-inclusion of a substantial number of forest people in forest management therefore needs to be analysed. To achieve these broad objectives the study will focus on the following points:

- developing an understanding of the peoples' social movements
- analysing the objectives and concerns of these movements
- understanding the relationship of these movements with the state
- assessing the impact of these movements on the forest management space
- evaluating the influence of these movements on the devolution policies of forest management
- identifying the potential role the movements can play in creating space for local forest management
- documenting the movements' alternative vision of forest management, providing space to forests and forest dependent communities

Rationale of the Study

The larger objective of the project is to analyse and evaluate the devolution endeavour of the state's forest management policies and to assess the impact of this endeavour in creating space for local forest management. The dimensions of this space are forest quality and the livelihood and well-being of the forest dependent communities. With these broad objectives in mind, the research project cannot merely focus on the initiatives of the state and an analysis of its impact. Especially in

a State like Madhya Pradesh, which has so great a number of peoples' social movements in forest areas, study of the movements themselves is imperative. The fundamental objective of these movements is the struggle for greater 'space' for the forests and marginalised forest dependent communities in the legal framework. The apparent impact of these movements on concrete forest management policies is minor. The marginalisation of these movements from the mainstream policy formulation arena makes the study of these movements all the more relevant because they represent sizeable sections of marginalised forest communities whose participation in the processes of forest management is essential to create space for local forest management.

Research Focus

Madhya Pradesh's political landscape is vibrant with the presence of several peoples' social movements. Prominent ones include Narmada Bachao Andolan – an environmental movement in search of alternative development paradigms, and Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha which started as a labour movement and has taken the shape of a peoples' movement seeking to create an alternative socio-political order. There are several other peoples' movements in the State, although they are not as widespread or as publicised as these two. Interestingly, most of these movements are spread over the tribal areas, which are also the green cover areas of the State.

To study the phenomenon of peoples' social movements and their impact on the forest management space in the State is a mammoth task, beyond the scope of this research project. Accordingly, it was decided to identify two fairly widespread and representative movements for a more focused study. Within the limited resources and available time, an attempt has been made to develop a macro understanding of these movements, their objectives, perspective and agenda.

The two focus peoples' movements are Ekta Parishad and Bharat Jan Andolan. Both are geographically spread across tribal areas of Madhya Pradesh and have a very significant mass following in these regions. They are not however limited to Madhya Pradesh; they have a substantial following in the tribal areas of neighbouring States. Ekta Parishad, a peoples' movement and a political front of several non-government organisations (NGOs), is extremely well organised and has a sizeable support base even in non-tribal areas. It has been struggling to establish control of local communities over their livelihood resources and their access to and control of natural resources (*jal, jungle aur jamin*: water, forest and land). Bharat Jan Andolan, well known for the tribal self-rule (TSR) movement, has spread rapidly in the tribal areas of Madhya Pradesh, especially in Chhattisgarh Region. It emphasises the village community's ownership of local natural resources, demanding that the state should recognise and accept this claim.

The paper is organised in two parts, presenting the two peoples' movements under examination. Part I is devoted to Ekta Parishad while Part II documents Bharat Jan Andolan. On the basis of a macro understanding of the movements, the study seeks to understand the forest management space they have managed to create and to draw conclusions about the current role and the potential role these movements may play in creating space for local forest management.

Methodology of Research

The following methodology was adopted for this research:

- The techniques of **participatory research** were used. The researcher spent some time living with the key functionaries of the movement. The researcher was able to participate in the day-to-day functioning of the movements and on the basis of an understanding developed through secondary literature undertook to critically evaluate and assess the movements.

- The method of **consultation** was employed to gather the views of leaders, functionaries, activists and workers of the movements. Some other NGO leaders and government functionaries were also consulted.
- An **analytical study** of the documents of these movements was undertaken. Certain government documents relevant for understanding the movements were also studied (See Select Bibliography).

By integrating the information gathered through these processes, a macro understanding of these movements was developed.

Limitations of the Research

Due to the limitations of time and resources, an extensive study of the movements was not possible and as a result only a macro understanding of the movement has been achieved. An attempt to analyse the operational and functional details has been made, but success has been limited. Such peoples' movements work through multilateral channels, of which only a few are operational at a given point of time; accordingly, the research will reflect only a few channels. It is difficult to study a movement in isolation: peoples' movements have a strong network and work in tandem at the national level (often at the international level) with like-minded groups. The study would have been richer if the environment of these movements was also touched upon. The movements have an extremely delicate relationship with the state, and they do influence the policies and agenda of the state through intricate and circuitous mechanisms. It is beyond the scope of this research to concretely analyse and understand these mechanisms.

1 Ekta Parishad

Ekta Parishad is a mass-based peoples' organisation working in 53 *Vidhan Sabha* (Legislative Assembly Constituencies) of Madhya Pradesh, with a membership of over 100,000 people. The support base of Ekta Parishad is fairly well spread out in Madhya Pradesh, with a clear concentration in the tribal and forest areas, especially in Chhattisgarh Region (Kanker, Raigarh, Sarguja and Bilaspur Districts in particular). Outside the Chhattisgarh Region, it has a strong presence in Chambal Region (Morena District) and Mahakaushal Region (Mandla and Balaghat Districts). Outside Madhya Pradesh, it also has a strong presence in the States of Bihar and Orissa.

1.1 Structure of the organisation

At the village level, an Ekta Parishad *mukhia* (leader) performs the basic tasks, mobilising the villagers around local issues in accordance with the larger objectives of the Parishad. An Ekta Parishad activist is appointed to work in a cluster of villages. These activists are paid workers of Ekta Parishad and are given around 1000 rupees a month. They number around 200 in Madhya Pradesh. The executive body of Ekta Parishad consists of these *mukhias* and activists, at a ratio of 75% to 25% respectively.

Beneath the *Vidhan Sabha*, Ekta Parishad is organised at the district level. Every socio-cultural region of Madhya Pradesh has its own regional committee and then a State-level *samiti* for looking after the affairs of Ekta Parishad. The present State Coordinator is Ransinh Parmar. At the national level, the Ekta Parishad coordination committee of all the States is headed by P.V. Rajgopal. The State and national office of the Parishad is located at Tilda, which is on the main Bombay–Calcutta rail line around 60 km from Raipur, Madhya Pradesh.

Ekta Parishad is not a registered society, although it has strong links with other NGOs at State, national and international level. Several NGOs, spread throughout the State, form an integral part of the movement. These are Prayog, Prasoon, Mahatma Gandhi Seva Ashram, Grameen Vikas Pratisthan, Navrachana Samaj Sevi Sansthan, Reals and Parivartan, which all work for empowerment of the local communities and people centric development through Gandhian means. Until now, the organisation has depended on external aid, but an attempt is currently being made to look for Indian funding.

1.2 Historical evolution

Veteran Gandhian, Subba Rao, was instrumental in the voluntary surrender and rehabilitation of *dacoits* in the Chambal Region of Madhya Pradesh in the 1970s. The young P.V. Rajgopal was also deeply involved in this effort. After spending a few years away from Madhya Pradesh, Rajgopal returned to the State in 1978. He spent two years in Bastar District and then moved to Tilda, in Raipur District.

Around the same time, FDH (Frères des Hommes – French activists who were the product of the students' movement in France and influenced by Jai Prakash Narayan, a well-known socialist leader from Bihar), BAM (Brothers to All Men) and Pidit (Peoples Institute for Development and Training) were also working in this region. Rajgopal and these groups agreed to work together, deciding to initiate their work from Tilda.

A decision was taken that only trained youth should become activists. Rajgopal took the responsibility of training rural youth. In 1982, Prayog was registered and training was conducted

under the banner of this NGO. Rajgopal, with his extremely innovative and effective training style, was able to motivate a substantially large number of rural youth, who returned to their villages and continued working as activists. Significantly, a very high percentage of these trained youth were women.

Over time, these committed trained youth and a few like-minded NGOs realised that the common people were becoming increasingly disempowered and that in order to fight against this trend, a common political platform was essential. This idea emerged in 1985, but it took another five years for it to take shape in the form of Ekta Parishad, which was formally established in 1990. Since then, the Parishad has been working as a mass organisation taking up issues from the grassroots and struggling against repression and exploitation in rural and tribal areas.

1.3 Objectives of the movement

Ekta Parishad mobilises people (especially poor people) on the issue of proper and just utilisation of resources for people-centred development. It demands that the entitlement to and control of livelihood resources should be in the hands of the local communities. Concretely, the demand is articulated as a demand for ownership, control of and access to *jal, jungle aur jamin* (water, forest and land). The primary objective of the movement is to achieve social, political and economic change through peaceful and democratic means, and in the process empower the marginalised people, placing them at the centre of the development process. Elements of this process of change and the intentions of the movement are detailed below.

- reorganisation of the village economy – the Parishad attempts to achieve fair land redistribution and access to forests for forest dwellers (the tribals), and directs its efforts for regaining control of local communities on local resources
- implementation of social legislation – the Parishad presses for minimum wages, release of bonded labourers, decentralisation of decision making and making the system more accountable to the people
- constant promotion of the participation of women in the processes of change
- creation and promotion of local leadership catering to the needs and aspirations of the poor and the marginalised
- ensuring the livelihood rights of the forest dwellers and empowering them to fight the exploitative system
- protecting the tribal culture and its way of life, especially the primitive tribes who are increasingly threatened under the contemporary ‘mainstream’ model of development
- protecting the forests from mindless exploitation by the industrial society and its corrupt and greedy functionaries. It is a long-term goal of Ekta Parishad to develop an ethos of conservation based on a synthesis of human rights for forest dwellers and conservation needs – a model that will be truly sustainable and not exclusionist like the present strategies of conservation.

1.4 Ideological position

Gandhian

Ekta Parishad has never pretended to be a Gandhian movement, yet somehow it has acquired this reputation. Rajgopal’s association with Gandhian ideology, activists and institutions goes some way to explain this image and Ekta Parishad does accept itself as a social movement with a Gandhian

perspective. It believes in *rachana, sangarsh aur bahishkar* (creation, struggle and boycott) through non-violent means. The Parishad also states that it must rediscover the radical Gandhi, which, it claims, has been conveniently forgotten by the nation. According to Rajgopal, Gandhi has been reduced to a symbol by the post-independence Gandhian movement dominated by upper castes and males concerned only with protecting their own interests. Ekta Parishad is trying to revive the radicalism of Gandhian thought. For example, Ekta Parishad organises the tribal communities in the Mahakaushal region of Madhya Pradesh for peaceful struggles for their rights over land resources but simultaneously also works at addressing the issue of providing livelihood options by initiating self-sustainable economic activities.

Christian

The movement leader was initially branded as a Christian missionary encouraging people to convert. At the outset, the church was supportive of the movement for soft developmental issues (rehabilitation) and for some critics, this was evidence enough to support the classification. Slowly the church has distanced itself from Ekta Parishad, which according to Parishad leadership, is because the agenda of the movement has become more radical.

Naxalite

By the mid 1990s, Ekta Parishad was accused of being the front organisation of the Naxalites.² Several key functionaries of the State government, and most often the local bureaucracy, still believe in this theory. Whilst it is true that in some cases Naxalites have been able to make inroads in the regions where Ekta Parishad is active, the Parishad explains that this is because they work in the most marginalised regions of the State, which are also the natural terrain for the Naxalites. Other NGO activists assert that Ekta Parishad has no links whatsoever with the Naxalites, but that they raise issues which create space for the Naxalites to enter the area. Rajgopal raises an important point while defending the organisation against this charge. He says that, 'there is a fundamental flaw in the framework of the government, if we work for the poor we are branded as missionaries and if we fight for the rights of the tribals and forest dwellers then we are branded as Naxalites'. He further adds that, 'this mindset of the government is deeply distressing and reflects its approach to the poor and tribals. Ekta Parishad is committed to people centred development model, which is pro-poor and pro-marginalised. It wants development to be democratic and decentralised, responding to grass root needs and aspirations'.

Forest and conservation

Ekta Parishad has a very well articulated ideological stand on the issue of forests and conservation. Its perspective is extremely significant and can have far-reaching implications for conservation paradigms. The Parishad believes in the coexistence theory of nature. According to this theory, there is no contradiction between the rights of the forest dwellers and the need for conservation. In fact, human rights are an integral part of conservation ethics; the Parishad motto is one of ethno-conservation. It is important to understand who has stakes in the forests and who has stakes in exploitation of the forests. The tribals have high stakes in the forests; their economic and cultural existence is tied to the forests. On the other hand, the urban areas, the political-business-bureaucratic nexus and the industrial lobbies have direct interests in the exploitation of forests. The

² An extreme Maoist group that originated in 1967 in West Bengal, employing tactics of agrarian terrorism and direct action.

Parishad wants to spread the tribal way of life, which is sustainable. For this to happen however, a radical change of social and economic order is essential.

Gautam Bandhopadhyay, Secretary of Prayog Samaj Sewi Sanstha, one of the member organisations of Ekta Parishad, states that the various vested interests have created unreal contradictions between human rights and wildlife rights, between tribals and tigers. The real contradiction is between two different world views: the tribal world view is based on survival, life, regeneration and conservation, whereas the mainstream modern world view is based on exploitation, consumption, surplus and profit. According to him, 'It is imperative to accept the tribal world view to save the forests and this world.'

According to Rajgopal, forest conservation cannot be seen in the isolation of its larger context, where corruption, exploitation and oppression are the defining features. There is a need to change and cleanse this larger environment to make it just and exploitation free. In the changed environment, the people will respect forests and consequentially the forests will be saved. It is critically important to build harmony between human and human, and human and nature.

1.5 Agenda issues

The Parishad has a wide-ranging agenda and it works systematically on several fronts in order to implement it. This section will take a cursory look at the movement's agenda items, paying extra attention to forest-related issues.

Training

Training of rural men and women has remained one of the major focus areas of the Parishad. Individuals are trained in problem solving, making the system more accountable to people and, importantly, organising and mobilising group efforts for regaining control of local resources. Village leaders are identified by Ekta Parishad activists and these individuals are sent for training. The trained people return to their villages and form a *dhan kosh* (paddy bank), around which groups are organised. Through this process and other similar techniques, political and economic space is created for the Parishad. The system of training has now been decentralised.

Women

Ekta Parishad takes up issues that directly affect women. It encourages the participation of women at the local elections and gives them leadership of local struggles. In several places, including parts of Chhattisgarh, it has organised struggles against the liquor contractors. Ekta Parishad has also formed women's cooperatives to manage land and forest, and recently it has initiated a programme of micro credit for rural women.

Tribals

Tribals are the main constituency of Ekta Parishad and also very important to its world view. The Parishad is constantly struggling against the state and other forces that are breaking the tribal society and economy. This struggle is centred on fighting the oppression and exploitation of the tribals and Ekta Parishad mobilises the tribals to assert their rights over their resources, such as the forests. It continually has to confront the Forest Department to ensure even the basic *nistaar*

(customary) rights for the tribals. Although not directly involved in the trade of non-timber forest products (NTFP), the Parishad works with the tribals to ensure fair trade practices. It has attempted to dislodge middlemen from the trading systems of NTFP, but with very little success.

Tribe-specific issues

Ekta Parishad also engages in certain tribe-specific issues. As mentioned earlier, the Parishad is especially concerned about and prioritises the primitive tribes who do not have clearly demarcated fields, as they live on the hill slopes and often practice shifting cultivation. The Forest Department claims that the primitive tribes are encroaching on forestland and tries to evict them forcefully; the Parishad is combating this denial of access for primitive tribes to their resources. Pandu tribe of Sarguja District is one such example. In the 1950s, the Pandus were given land by Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India, but even today this land has not been legally transferred to the tribe. The Pandus still practice shifting cultivation and are constantly harassed and denied access to resources which are legitimately theirs. Similarly, the Baiga *Mukti Abhiyaan* (Baiga Liberation Campaign) was initiated recently in Chhattisgarh. The Parishad is planning a proactive intervention against these unjust practices of the state.

Social legislation

Ekta Parishad takes social legislation very seriously and makes non-implementation of such a major plank in its struggle. It runs a State-wide campaign demanding minimum wages for the labour forces, which is most often not given. This struggle for minimum wages transcends all sectoral and regional boundaries. The Parishad is mobilising people to participate in political processes initiated by the implementation of *Panchayati Raj* Act. It has also tried to help the government in implementing these progressive policies, but so far, the experience has been that the government itself backs out after an initial fanfare. This was the case in the implementation of laws on bonded labour, as well as in evolving mechanisms to check interstate migration of agricultural labour. Similarly, Ekta Parishad welcomed the nationalisation of *tendu patta* (leaf) trade, but now it is fighting the corruption in the system to achieve the legitimate entitlements due to the tribals.

Local resources

The focus of the Ekta Parishad movement has been to gain access to and control of resources for the local communities, especially land, water and forests. The movement is supporting a struggle against Jindal industries in Raigarh, which are drying up the River Kelu and not leaving enough water for the local communities. A *sangarsh samiti* (struggle committee) has been formed to fight the government–industry nexus and to regain control over water resources for the local communities. Ekta Parishad is also organising protest against the alienation of local communities from village *talaabs* (ponds) by the contractors coming from outside.

Land rights

Struggle for land rights is one of the most significant and key activities of the Parishad. It has been struggling for regularisation of *pattas* (land titles) to the landless peasants and tribals who have been farming for decades on revenue or forestland. In spite of government assurances, these people are treated as encroachers and are constantly harassed and threatened with eviction. The Parishad believes that the right of these peasants and tribals over their land resource, irrespective of the legal

status of the land, is inalienable. It argues that the government is willing to give up thousands of acres of land for industry but it denies the poor of their only livelihood resource. For this reason, the Parishad demanded regularisation of 'land encroachment' until 1999.

The Parishad also demanded legal transfer of *pattas* to the legitimate owners, fulfilment of the State government's commitment to regularise 'encroachment' until 1980, and vigorous implementation of land reforms which has been thoroughly inadequate and incomplete. In more detail, the movement organised *adhikaar abhiyan* (a campaign for rights) for the regularisation of land *pattas*. The grassroots pressure applied by the Parishad forced the government to commit to regularisation of encroachment until 1980; it was also forced to have the survey of land holdings conducted by the *Tehsildar* (revenue officer) and the Revenue Department in 1993, rather than the Forest Department. Unfortunately the Revenue Department did not perform its task sincerely. Instead of conducting a fresh survey of land holdings, it relied on the data provided by the Forest Department, rendering the whole exercise ineffective. The Forest Department is now allowing plantation even on land that has been tilled by farmers before 1980. The promise of providing *patta* and regularising all pre-1980 land has not been taken seriously by the government. Only 10% of people have *pattas* for freehold land. On other land, where the people had *kabja* (hold), the struggle continues. Some *pattas* were provided to the tribals, but rich people bought these *pattas* by fooling the tribals. The government has not taken a single concrete step to regularise tribal land and therefore the Parishad demands the appointment of a special SDM (Sub Divisional Magistrate) for giving land to the tribals. The government claims that only 213 applications are pending for *patta* regularisation, whereas Ransingh Parmar, State Coordinator of Ekta Parishad, asserts that the movement has a list of thousands of tribals who have applied. He adds that with the intention of helping the government in regularising the *patta*, the Parishad provided them with a list of people who live on forestland; unfortunately the list is now being used to harass those people. Nevertheless the struggle continues. To intensify it, Ekta Parishad planned a six-month *padyatra* (foot march) from 10 December 1999 across the State, demanding land reforms and regularisation of land holding for the landless and the tribals.

Overall, the struggle for land resources for the poor and the tribals has had mixed results. It has been successful in obtaining *pattas* for a substantial number of people, although the list is incredibly inadequate. More significantly, by raising the emotive issue of land, the Parishad has been successful in mobilising and organising the rural and tribal communities for struggle. This singular pursuit of peoples' interests (in spite of the repression unleashed by the coercive state apparatus) has given strong legitimacy to Ekta Parishad in several regions of the State, including Chambal, MahaKaushal and Chhattisgarh.

The Parishad's struggle for land rights for poor people has led to accusations against the movement of encouraging encroachment and felling of forests for land grabbing. It is therefore charged that the Parishad is indirectly responsible for deforestation. Rajgopal strongly refutes this charge and states that the life of tribals is inextricably linked to the forests; they have high stakes in the forests and cannot afford to cut it down. Ransingh Parmar explains that it is actually the Forest Department-contractor nexus which cuts the forests for profit motives. Nathji, one of the prominent leaders of Ekta Parishad from Bastar, explains further that in Mandla, the district administration is accusing the organisation of cutting the forests, which, according to government records, were regenerated forests. In reality, the Forest Department had never carried out forest regeneration on this area of land; there was no forest in existence there at all. Such accusations thus seem to be ploys to cover up corrupt government practices.

Forest-related issues

Forests are critical to the survival of tribal economy, culture and society. For the government though, they are a source of revenue, and for industrialising society they are a mere resource to be exploited. These contradictory viewpoints always place the tribals in direct confrontation with the state–industry nexus, which surfaces in many different forms. Given that Ekta Parishad’s main constituency is tribals, it has to struggle constantly against this nexus even to ensure bare minimum rights to the tribals. The Parishad has been waging a long battle for the tribals to be recognised as protectors of forests and as legitimate claimants of forest resources. It is an extremely difficult battle because the Forest Department does not respect even the tribals’ basic rights, such as *nistaar*.

The Parishad opposes certain policies of the Madhya Pradesh Government which alienate the forest dwellers from their livelihood resources. For example, it opposes the demarcation of 2 km of land on the banks of Chambal River as a Protected Area. According to the Parishad, the real problem here is the high level of corruption within the Forest Department and the covert protection enjoyed by the forest mafia. In order to demonstrate that it is doing its duty, the department troubles the tribals for exercising their legitimate rights. The Parishad works hard to counter the corrupt practices of Forest Department functionaries and to empower the tribals to fight these practices. Another significant agenda of the Parishad is to fight the forest mafia; it fights the traders who exploit the tribals and form cartels to buy and sell NTFP. The Parishad is also deeply concerned about the deforestation and felling carried out by the mafia and is constantly working to expose such scams. The Parishad, in its attempt to protect the environment and forests, is putting up strong resistance to mining activities in the forest areas. If mining is essential in certain areas, Ekta Parishad demands that the right to mine should be given to local communities, who will form mining cooperatives (see Box 1).

In addition to the above efforts of confrontation, Ekta Parishad has a positive agenda too. It is encouraging the villagers to protect forests on their own, as well as promoting forest regeneration through various means (see Box 2). It is introducing the idea of each village having its own forest, to provide fencing material and certain items of daily use.

The Parishad is strongly opposed to the distorted perspective of development that allows forests to be felled for the creation of highways and railway lines. An emerging agenda of the Parishad is to oppose the World Bank Forestry Project, which is seen by the Parishad as leading to greater commercialisation and privatisation of forests. The Parishad feels that these projects are premised to further the agenda of the North and therefore the need is to critically oppose these projects and their attempt to break the village society and alienate the local communities from their forest resource.

Another significant agenda for the Parishad is to struggle for the rights of people living in Protected Areas, such as national parks and sanctuaries. It is constantly struggling for the *nistaar* rights of the tribals in the Protected Areas, opposing displacement and demanding adequate compensation and holistic rehabilitation.

Box 1 Peoples' movement for local resources in Markatola

Markatola Village in Kanker District is predominately tribal with a small *nistaar* forest. Bauxite India discovered minerals on the village land in the early 1990s and with a few of the richer villagers, decided to acquire that land for mining. Through contacts in the village and the local administration, Bauxite India attained a decision from the government that the village land (including the forest) would be given to the landless, and the land was subsequently transferred. However, the transfer was bogus – the 'landless' in question were not in fact without land and they came from other villages. Bauxite India then bought the *pattas* (land titles) from these so-called landless people, promising to use it for plantation. This was an illegal act, as a *patta* cannot be bought. After a short while, the company started cutting the forest, testing land and blowing dynamite.

Indu Netam, a committed activist of Ekta Parishad, lived in Markatola Village. She realised that something was wrong and tried to make inquiries, but the Forest Department remained silent and other government functionaries refused to help her. She was told that the *patta* was given on lease so that the trees could be cut. Indu did not accept this explanation and through the intervention of the collector, she obtained a copy of the list of leaseholders. The list included fraudulent names and names of people who did not belong to the village, but instead lived in cities like Jagdalpur.

Ekta Parishad started legal work against this infraction. Letters were sent to all responsible authorities but no action was taken. Indu mobilised the villagers against this exploitation of their resources by outsiders – they decided to struggle unitedly until the end, with a promise that they would neither split nor take bribes to support Bauxite India. A *dharna* (sit-in) was started near Kanker; all the villagers assembled there, except a few who stayed behind to guard the village. Bauxite India tried every possible ruse to break the movement – money, muscle and harassment by the police – but the struggle continued.

Mass support swelled for Ekta Parishad. The national press started running stories, which prompted interest from the local press. The administration was initially repressive but eventually it had to institute an inquiry. During this time, the villagers discovered that a few of their number had accepted substantial sums of money from Bauxite India and were trying to break the movement. These elements were purged from the struggle and a Jamin Jungle Bachao Sangarsh Morcha was constituted. This *morcha* came into direct confrontation with the then Forest Minister who was opposing the movement. Indu confronted the Minister directly in a public meeting; thereafter, extreme police repression began. All the activists involved in the *morcha* were sent to jail and cases were filed against them. Fortunately, support from outside had started pouring in and the inquiry report was also submitted. The fraudulent lease was cancelled, activists were released from jail and cases were dropped. Fifty-nine people involved in the fraud were then sent to jail.

This was a very significant victory for a peoples' movement, successfully taking on the nexus of industry and bureaucracy. It was also significant because local villagers succeeded in asserting their rights to their local resources. However, the battle is not over, as Bauxite India is trying new ways to enter the village and the villagers have not been successful in obtaining a cooperative license for mining due to obtrusive bureaucracy. Nonetheless, the villagers have decided that their right to their resources is inalienable and either they will themselves do the mining or let the forest remain.

Box 2 Protecting forests: a peoples' initiative

Ekta Parishad believes that protecting the trees is the responsibility of the people, not the responsibility of the government. The Parishad in Bhallapur Village (Rajnandgaon District) obtained tree *pattas* and vowed to protect them. It planted seeds of several species and protected the trees for many years; a small forest grew up over time.

The Ekta Parishad *mahila mandal* (women's group) was responsible for this forest regeneration. It had to face much harassment to protect the forest as the rich wanted the land for agriculture and others wanted it for grazing, but the *mahila mandal* kept its commitment to protect the forest. It established rules for protecting the forest and evolved a mechanism to guard it and punish any violators. The villagers are able to find fuel wood and fodder from this jungle. Ekta Parishad, through local peoples' initiative, has thus regenerated and protected a forest independent of government intervention. Interestingly, the group opposed to Ekta Parishad's *mahila mandal* has also acquired land for plantation.

In the adjoining village, Etagarta, Forest Department contractors were cutting trees. The village Parishad heard the story of Bhallapur and decided that they could not allow their forest to be cut, even if it was a government jungle. The villagers set about protecting the forest and made a protection committee. Six to seven people take turns to guard the forest and punish any violators. The consciousness is so strong that even the husband of one of the *mahila mandal* activists was punished for violating the forest. The villagers challenged the Forest Department – if the Forest Department could not save the forests, they would protect the forest themselves, and they have done so successfully. Similar stories of forest protection by the people and Ekta Parishad are true of another adjoining village, Guha Tola.

Kanker District contains several villages where the people have traditionally protected forests; they do not look to government to save their resources. These villages have developed ways to protect the forests. For example, some villages employ a guard and he is paid by collecting rice from every household in the village. In other villages, including Kutela, Kurubhat, Rani Dongri, Dodakarhi, Nav Dongri, the villagers themselves guard the forests by taking turns to keep watch. In all cases, it is clear that the tribals are capable of protecting their forests and they do not need government assistance for forest management.

1.6 Operational strategies

Ekta Parishad functions through multilateral channels and its operational strategy is multi-pronged. The organisation is not rigid about operational strategies – it frequently uses flexible techniques and in a few cases it employs new and innovative methods, such as using a combination of mass mobilisation, judicial intervention and part partnership with the State, as in the case of Task force created by the government in response to the land campaign of Ekta Parishad. It operates at two main levels: firstly at the micro level by mobilising people and building up a democratic mass movement; secondly at the macro level by influencing policies and programmes through advocacy and campaign activities. In addition to these levels, the Parishad is increasingly using judicial intervention.

The Parishad believes that its strength lies in the grassroots support it has and its priority is therefore to empower the masses and not the organisation. Ekta Parishad has a democratic process of functioning – the agenda is discussed locally and whatever emerges as the priority issue is taken up by the Parishad. The issues are identified by shared experiences and discussed in the general body of the Parishad.

To sustain this democratic culture and mass movement, the Parishad has to invest a considerable amount of energy in training and sensitising the activists, who play a pivotal role in the organisation. Rajgopal is an effective trainer as he has been able to create a very strong band of committed activists. Kanta, an Ekta Parishad activist trained by Rajgopal, says that, 'his training technique was extremely innovative as he only raised questions. He involved all the trainees, raised their spirits and made them believe that they can fight the oppressors. The trainees would

understand how the oppressors use education to their advantage. Then the trainees would go to villages in groups and learn how to work together; to live in groups, face hardships and more importantly experience reality. After three months in the village they would come back clear about their roles in the organisation'. She adds, 'Rajgopal was able to motivate all of them to such a high degree that everyone wanted to be activists in the initial years'. According to Kalawati, another activist, the training incorporated *samajh, sahas aur samarpan* (understanding, strength and commitment). However, with the growth of the organisation, the number of motivated individuals has declined, partly as a consequence of Rajgopal becoming busy with other issues.

Once trained, the activists are allocated areas where they go and work. One of the main tasks assigned to them is to identify local leadership and send them for training. Once these *mukhia* (leaders) are trained, they return to their villages and form *mahila* and/or *yuva mandali* (women's or youth groups), which gradually build up the support base of the Parishad. But the Parishad remains cautious – committees are made only where village support is greater than 60%, and the leadership of the organisation remains local. The Parishad makes the villagers contribute in terms of time and money and this serves to strengthen the bond between the movement and the people; for the members of Ekta Parishad, an annual fee of 5 rupees is taken. Ekta Parishad performs another major role of transferring information, which is otherwise lacking, to the villagers. Often the Parishad organises action on a wider level – block, district and State – and this offers an opportunity for people to meet others, as many actors from different regions are brought together.

Ekta Parishad is not a trade union, a political party or an NGO; it is a mass organisation. This mass structure is the strength of the movement and distinguishes it from a political party. As such, the Parishad makes micro changes in people's lives through mass action. Moreover, this mass action is not ready made. According to Gopinath (also from Prayog), the Ekta Parishad people have to live in the villages, win the trust of villagers and develop their consciousness and awareness; only then can confrontation and mass action be planned. The Parishad has to be constantly prepared against extreme repression and harassment in the form of court cases, police action, police detention, jail, muscle power from the vested interests, etc. The vested interests and the state functionaries often try to break the unity of the movement by offering bribes or dealing threats of repression to the villagers, but the Parishad's mobilisation is strong enough to withstand such adverse circumstances.

The strength of Ekta Parishad flows from its mass base, but it also operates at the macro level and tries to influence policies, programmes and agenda of governance. This is achieved by opening up channels of communication and dialogue with the state and the people who influence the state agenda through Ekta Parishad's links in the bureaucracy, politics, journalism and other fields. Primarily implemented through non-institutional mechanisms, opportunities for dialogue and intervention through institutional mechanisms are also utilised (for example, participating in a joint committee with the Forest Department on the World Bank Forestry Project). The Parishad also favours networking for solidarity action at the national and international level so that pressure created through such processes may also positively affect policies and programmes. A unique way of intervention at the macro level, in which the mass base of the movement is used by the Parishad to bargain for a more positive agenda and a climate for change with the mainstream political parties, is under experimentation.

1.7 Relation with the state

Given that Ekta Parishad is a mass organisation which raises peoples' issues, conflict with the state is inevitable. The Parishad realises that there is an inherent contradiction between the interests of the marginalised (poor, landless peasants, tribals, women, etc.) and the ruling elite (industrialist–bureaucrat–politician nexus) and therefore has no expectations of the state. Despite this, the Ekta Parishad does not view the state as a monolithic entity and recognises that several of its constituent

parts are sympathetic to mass movements and the peoples' agenda. Ekta Parishad attempts to make use of this good will in furthering its aims. On the whole, however, the state plays an antagonistic role for the Parishad and the movement constantly faces brutal police action and repression by the state machinery.

Ekta Parishad has previously entered into negotiations with the political executive, but this has amounted to little. When Sunderlal Patwa of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was Chief Minister, negotiations were begun to evolve mechanisms to end repression of activists, but the process was not taken to its logical conclusion and abandoned mid-way. Under Chief Minister Digvijay Singh, negotiations were held both at the formal and non-formal level for creating a pro-people environment, but in his second term, the mechanisms discussed have received no further attention.

Prayog, an important constituent of Ekta Parishad, was the nodal agency of CAPART (Council for Advancement of Peoples' Action and Rural Technology) throughout the 1980s. Similarly, Rajgopal was the Director of the Gandhi Peace Foundation, Delhi, in the early 1990s, and therefore a complete dissociation from the state is not possible. In spite of the primary contradiction between the state and Ekta Parishad, there are instances of shared spaces and processes.

Bureaucracy here can be broadly divided into two levels: upper and local. Ekta Parishad feels that the upper-level bureaucracy is not repressive and is more open to dialogue, whereas the local-level bureaucracy is most often repressive. Ransingh Parmar tries to explain the apathy of local bureaucrats: 'Maybe the local bureaucracy does not understand our concerns and objectives'. Overall, even at the upper level of bureaucracy, there is no sympathy with or understanding of Ekta Parishad's objectives. According to Gautam Bandhopadhyay, there are a few sensitive, well-meaning individuals in the bureaucracy who do help in their own way, through informal channels by providing space in State forums and policy formulations debates, but as a system, the bureaucracy is against the Parishad.

Ekta Parishad has always insisted that the bureaucracy should be sensitised to peoples' needs and agenda, but no steps have been taken to achieve this. It also demands that the government should form a special cell for dealing and negotiating with NGOs and peoples' movements, of which the well-meaning, sensitive individuals in the bureaucracy should form a part. This demand also remains unfulfilled. Ekta Parishad is constantly trying to locate negotiating space with the state, but the state does not respond adequately.

Ekta Parishad feels that the government does indeed make some good and progressive policies, but that implementation of these policies is either ignored or distorted. The state does not consult the people and its organisations while framing policy, yet expects these organisations to assist in implementation. When Ekta Parishad was helping in the implementation of laws against bonded labour, the government backed out; similarly Ekta Parishad offered support in developing mechanisms to implement policy to prevent interstate migration, but the help was rejected. Thus even if the peoples' organisations decide to help implement progressive policies, this is rejected because the real agenda of the state is often different from the rhetoric. In the few cases where the peoples' organisations are consulted for policy formulation, this is carried out at the abstract level, and when the concrete policies are framed, the state reverts to its own pro-rich agenda. Rajgopal, after years of experience, feels that the pro-poor policies are made with an understanding that these are not for implementation and the real agenda of the state is pro-rich and powerful.

The Ekta Parishad movement is undeterred by this fact; it still welcomes the pro-people initiatives of the state, such as Tribal Self-Rule, Minimum Wages Act, Land Ceiling Act, etc. and is willing to champion these with all its resources and mass support. Conversely, the Parishad strongly opposes the Madhya Pradesh Government water policy, liquor policy and industrial policy as they are anti

poor and merely accelerate the transfer of resources from poor to rich. For the Parishad, making the right noises is not enough; the intention is needed in the government to implement a pro-poor and a peoples' agenda. Importantly, corruption in the state system is so deep rooted that it short circuits the positive programmes and policies of the government. This corruption is systemic, run by mafia and supported by a nexus of politicians and bureaucrats with whom their interests converge. Ekta Parishad is committed to exposing and fighting this corruption. It has made significant progress in this direction by mobilising people and using judicial channels, as seen Malik Makbooja and Markatola scams.

1.8 Impact of the Parishad on state policies and programmes

It is extremely difficult to evaluate the direct impact of the Parishad on the government's policies and programmes. The activists of Ekta Parishad could not specifically mention a single policy or a programme on which the Parishad has had direct and comprehensive effect. They did however claim that several significant government policies had been changed or made due to Ekta Parishad pressure, but it is an impossible task to identify the quantum of their influence because their demands were never direct and several other actors were involved. Rajgopal says, 'irrespective of a few minor achievements we have not been able to shift state's policies in a progressive direction as it clashed with the interests of the state and the people it protects'.

S.R. Hiramath, a strong supporter of Ekta Parishad, who is the Convenor of the Jan Vikas Andolan movement active in South India, is more optimistic. He believes that peoples' movements positively affect government policies: although few policies are changed directly under the pressure of social movements, many other policies are affected by the pressure created by the constant coordinated efforts of mass movements. The larger environment, which affects policies, is certainly influenced and responds to this pressure. On the basis of this hypothesis, policies that have been affected (although indirectly) by Ekta Parishad's agenda and pressure can be noted.

Some of the policies and programmes which the Ekta Parishad feels it has been able to influence (whilst acknowledging contributions from other peoples' organisations) are as follows:

- Fishing rights to fisher folk have been granted all over the state due to the pressure of peoples' organisations.
- The *tendu patta* nationalisation was not itself achieved through pressure from social movements, but the movements had started raising significant questions about the *tendu patta* trade.
- Exposure of the Malik Makbooja scam and the consequent ban on all felling in Bastar District by the Supreme Court can clearly be accredited to Ekta Parishad (see Box 3).
- *Nistaar* rights for the villagers in Protected Areas were accepted due to the systematic movement of Ekta Parishad and other groups.
- Some tribal cultural rights (such as cutting a particular tree for religious reasons during festival season) were restored only after Ekta Parishad put pressure on the government.
- Regularisation of land encroachment prior to 1980 is a success story of Ekta Parishad's sustained campaign, but it fully recognises the role played by the World Bank which wanted revenue land and forest land to be clearly demarcated before the start of its forestry project.
- Ekta Parishad clearly sees a link between the pressure built by peoples' organisations and the deferment of the second phase of the World Bank's forestry project. These movements have created such strong pressure that the mid-term review of this project has not yet been shared (although it was completed over a year ago). Interestingly, Gautam Bandhopadhyay believes that Parishad pressure has affected changes in the Operational Directives of the World Bank regarding the human rights of the villagers in project areas.

Box 3 Malik Makbooja scam: exposing jungle mafia and protecting forests

In 1996, B.R. Naidu, the collector in Bastar, discovered serious violations of the Forest Conservation Act and Madhya Pradesh Land Revenue Code. Through this he unearthed a timber scam running into millions of rupees and thousands of trees. The timber mafia, with the support of powerful politicians and senior bureaucrats, was illegally felling hundreds of trees. Local tribals were being exploited and their resources looted.

In this scam, revenue officials had allotted land to tribals, falsely demarcating government land with trees as private land. The wealthy tribal people (part of the timber mafia) then bought the land at extremely low prices. The trees on these lands, of which the majority were teak, were felled and sold. Naidu discovered the involvement of his senior officials and tried in vain to expose the scam. Ekta Parishad and S.R. Hiramath of Jan Vikas Andolan heard of the scam and initiated judicial processes. Despite the crucial role played by the collector, he was transferred, but by that time the Parishad was able to garner evidence against the scam. Ekta Parishad relentlessly continued its struggle through all possible channels. Ultimately, the Court ordered a CBI inquiry and *Lok Ayukta* (special establishment police) was also approached. The Supreme Court gave a landmark ruling on 11 February 1997, banning the felling of all trees in the district, irrespective of any permission granted by the local administration, until further notice.

Some lower-level revenue officials have been dismissed but the powerful individuals involved remain untouched. The bureaucrat–politician–mafia nexus is obvious, yet no action has been taken.

The intervention of Ekta Parishad has ended all felling in Bastar. Importantly, the unearthing of this scam uncovered the timber mafia and their illegal felling activities. It also made people aware of the nexus between the mafia, bureaucrats and politicians and how they are exploiting the tribals and their forests. Irrespective of the outcome of the court case, the exposure of this scam has brought illegal felling onto centre stage.

1.9 Ekta Parishad, the state and the forests

Saving the forests is a primary concern of the Parishad, although its perspective on conservation is entirely different from that of the state. The contradictions emerge from different paradigms of development and are sharpened further in the operational aspects. Ekta Parishad believes that the community should manage the forests, and there are several successful examples in support of this, as cited in Box 2. It believes that the entry of the state in the forests alienates the people, and once the people are alienated, it begs the question of who will save the forests?

The government's current forest management approach works top-down through government-created *van suraksha samitis* (Forest Protection Committees). While lip service is paid to participatory planning and management, the people ultimately have to do what they are told and management is carried out according to the agenda of the Forest Department. Shuklaji of LEHAR (another partner of Ekta Parishad) asks, 'Why should the forest guard be made the Secretary of the *Samiti*? Why only women from well to do families of the village are made members in order to meet the requirement of women members? Also, what is the share of the people in these forests?' People who are close to the *samitis* secure employment opportunities generated as a result of the programme. The people who make the actual sacrifice in foregoing the immediate benefits from the forest or those genuinely dependent on forests for their livelihood are further marginalised. For example, bamboo workers cannot cut bamboo once an area is brought under Joint Forest Management (JFM); they often have to bribe the *van samitis* for their requirements to be met. Shuklaji concludes that the government's approach to forest management is breeding corruption, furthering the marginalisation of forest dependent communities, and making no headway in forest conservation.

Ekta Parishad is not anti forests, it is pro-tribals, and for the movement there is no contradiction between pro-tribal and pro-forest. On the contrary, it believes that only a pro-tribal approach can save the forests, but the Forest Department thinks otherwise. According to Gautam Bandhopadhyay, the tribals are in reality saving the forests, and he wonders why they should not be given medals for protecting the resources (forest) of the nation when the soldiers are given medals and praise for saving resources in Kargil (land). He continues, 'We tend to talk of conservation, but the government does not impose environment tax on urban areas, so why should the tribals pay for the 'development' of urban people and rural exploiters?' Such a tax has been imposed in Denmark and the Parishad believes that India will have to adopt similar policies in the near future.

The Parishad finds it wholly unjust for forests to be cut for industrial development or for building highways and railway lines while the Forest Department denies tribals the bare minimum access to their forests. This government approach has led to serious tension between tribals and the state in which the state has brutally crushed the protest of tribals: several tribals have been shot dead under state oppression; in 1998 such incidents occurred in Khandwa, Sheopur and Bilaspur.

Regarding the devolution efforts of the state, the Parishad questions government claims. For instance, the government said that the *Panchayats* would control the forests and have access to timber and fuel wood, but at the ground level this has not happened. The common people know nothing about JFM and not more than 1% of ground-level *van samitis* are functional. There has been large-scale corruption, funds have been misappropriated and no plantations have been made except in some showcase *samitis*. 'The government should consult peoples' movements before making policies otherwise they are bound to collapse', says Ransingh Parmar. Ekta Parishad believes that forests cannot be saved on borrowed money. Since the Forest Department has no money, it must ultimately rely on the people. They believe that conservation projects should be designed and implemented jointly by those seeking to save biodiversity and forests, and those working on the livelihood issues and human rights of the local communities. It is felt that government should therefore support and encourage organisations like Ekta Parishad who are committed to saving the forests without alienating the forest dwellers from their livelihood resources. Interestingly, S.R. Hiramath of Jan Vikas Andolan, who has strong ties with Ekta Parishad, disagrees. He says that, 'JFM is a good concept as the state has controlled the forests for the last 150 years; the community cannot be given complete charge immediately. The process of transfer of control should be gradual'. Nevertheless, he is in complete conceptual agreement with Ekta Parishad that forests cannot be saved without the tribals, as they have deep-rooted and traditional knowledge of forest conservation, whereas the urban mindset, Forest Department, traders and contractors will cut the forests in no time.

Ekta Parishad vehemently contests the Madhya Pradesh forest policy with the belief that it is anti-people and that it alienates forest dwellers from their livelihood resources. They believe that a forest policy cannot be worked out in isolation; the need is to work out a package of policies which are pro-people, and a progressive forest policy should be part of this effort. For example, only a progressive water policy with complete land reforms can make the forest policy successful, as the linkages between these sectors are strong. Ekta Parishad provides alternatives for conservation and forest management. It has attempted the regeneration of forests and has had some success in certain areas, such as those cited in Box 2.

Ratneshwar Nath of Ekta Parishad accepts that villagers are responsible for some felling in the forests, but says that this is negligible in comparison to the large-scale felling activities of the timber mafia. Nath states that while the villagers cut mainly for fencing, the large-scale felling carried out by the mafia is institutionalised and supported by the Forest Department. This corruption is the real deforestation danger and the Parishad is countering it through its grassroots movements and by seeking judicial intervention, as seen in the Malik Makbooja scam (Box 3). Through such

efforts, the Parishad has managed to save hundreds of acres of forest cover. However, dishonesty within the Forest Department has seeped to the grassroots level and even the lowest functionary of the department is corrupt. For example, forest guards from the department harass the tribals for a share in the crop or a *murgi* (chicken) as a bribe for basic access to the forests. Ekta Parishad mobilises the villagers against such extortion and provides leadership in the struggle of tribals for their food, fuel and fodder against the Forest Department.

Ekta Parishad has come to realise that the Forest Department and Madhya Pradesh Government are now marginal actors in the forest management arena, and that major players like the World Bank, representing the interests of the North, hold the key in deciding the priorities and model of forest management. The Parishad has thus sharpened its critique of World Bank intervention in Madhya Pradesh: they feel that the North has exploited local forest resources and is now delivering sermons to them; they believe that the World Bank is an institution dominated by the North with an agenda for furthering their interests, and the state in India has become an instrument of World Bank; for the Parishad, the World Bank is, in the garb of conservation and forestry project, trying to gain access to and control of forests in Madhya Pradesh. The real interest of the World Bank is to save biodiversity for patenting and profit motives and it is seeking to generate forests that will produce timber – again serving mainly the needs of North – but not for local communities to use. At the cost of alienating local communities from their forests, the World Bank is also promoting eco-tourism. All this is leading to increased oppression and displacement of forest dwellers. In short, Ekta Parishad opposes the entry of the World Bank in the forests of Madhya Pradesh and opposes the anti-tribals agenda of the World Bank and the Madhya Pradesh Government.

1.10 Employing democratic tradition for struggle

The tribal tradition of Jungle *Panchayats* unites the people from villages in the forest environs to resolve issues that are relevant to all of them. This democratic tradition and institution is part of the tribal ethos but was lost with the invasion of modernity. Ekta Parishad is committed to protecting tribal culture as well as the forests, and the link between these two objectives is central to their perspective on conservation. The Parishad innovatively decided to use tribal culture and its democratic institutions to oppose anti-conservation and anti-people projects.

To oppose the World Bank-sponsored Forestry Project, a Jungle *Panchayat* was called on 20 and 21 May 1998 inside the Sitanadi Sanctuary in Raipur District. Thousands of villagers from all 32 villages inside the sanctuary attended the *Panchayat*. It was a landmark day when thousands of forest dwellers registered their opposition to the Madhya Pradesh Forestry Project. The fundamental decisions made by the *Panchayat* were as follows:

- ‘We the tribe men and women of Sitanadi Sanctuary will remain united for our rights on forests and wild life protection. Since ancient times our ancestors have protected the forests and wild life, therefore, it is our responsibility to protect and preserve the forests.’
- ‘In order to protect the forest and wild life, we unitedly oppose the World Bank sponsored Forestry Project which is harmful to us.’
- ‘We will continue our effort unitedly and will continue the process of Jungle *Panchayat*.’

Source: George (1998) Documentation for Ekta Parishad

1.11 Linkages with other institutions

Political parties

Ekta Parishad has no direct or institutional linkage with political parties. With some parties there has been issue-based collaboration, but this is short lived, as political parties see Ekta Parishad as a threat to their support base. Initially, political parties opposed the Parishad, but since recognising the mass strength of Ekta Parishad, this has changed. In recent times, Ekta Parishad has been approached for support by political parties which did materialise for a very brief period in an issue-based understanding with the Congress, but it was not a formal understanding and did not last. Ekta Parishad has some links with the left parties, but again these linkages are extremely informal and delicate.

The church

Some church groups were initially supportive of the causes championed by the Parishad. A working understanding thus evolved, but the church gradually withdrew its support, perhaps as the movement's agenda became more radical.

The media

The media was initially very critical of the Parishad and saw its role as that of a Christian missionary. However, it slowly became more appreciative of Ekta Parishad and there are now certain individuals in the media who are sensitive to its perspective, although this is not transferred into systematic coverage or support of the media. While Ekta Parishad was exposing the Malik Makbooja scam, the local media was slow to respond and only became interested after coverage in the national press.

Other peoples' movements and NGOs

The Parishad has a solid relationship with other peoples' movements in Madhya Pradesh and also in other parts of the country, plus constant interaction with mass organisations the world over. On the other hand, the NGOs were initially supportive of the Parishad, but gradually withdrew from the relationship, probably because they did not wish to be identified with mass organisations pursuing radical politics. Ekta Parishad has been unable to build linkages with schools and colleges and has only limited interaction with NSS (National Service Scheme run by the government for motivating students primarily for national social service).

Rajgopal, talking about the movement's relationships with other institutions and sectors, says that Ekta Parishad has marginal links with several other actors, but the institutionalisation of relationships has not taken shape in the majority of cases.

1.12 Achievements and future directions

The achievements of Ekta Parishad have been described in detail in the preceding sections. They include exposure of the Malik Makbooja and Markatola scams, regularisation of land encroachment until 1980 and saving forest cover over thousands of acres. This section is thus devoted to the processes initiated and strengthened by Ekta Parishad for long-term action.

The movement has been successful in creating a large base of committed leadership at the grassroots. It is important to note that women constitute a major part of this leadership and their role has increased in all processes. The Parishad has significantly influenced the development debate by offering alternative perspectives (for example, in forest management and conservation) and by creating a pro-human-rights agenda. The Parishad has been able to make its presence felt at the national level and to affect the larger environment in favour of the tribals and the marginalised. The most significant achievement of the Parishad has been the creation of a mass base among the poor and the tribal communities. It has motivated them to intervene in the processes affecting their lives, empowered women to participate in the action for change and initiated mass-based action with little outside support. It has successfully spread awareness and consciousness amongst the masses and enabled them to initiate peoples' movements for their own rights. The movement has successfully articulated the concerns, aspirations and demands of the tribals and the marginalised.

After a decade in existence, the Parishad has grown geographically. It has grown in terms of the people it has attracted and the number of motivated workers, and it has helped people escape exploitation and repression. It has grown as a movement. This growth also means an increased demand for resources and greater peoples' participation. However, the Parishad has not been able to transfer leadership to the people; this remains with the facilitators. Decision making is still executed by senior Ekta Parishad functionaries, and although the people participate, this is not yet a self-reliant process. The feeling of ownership and peoples' participation should continue to grow. Significantly, the Parishad felt that the voluntary agencies would be able to initiate the change process in urban areas as they are more accessible, but this has not happened. The Parishad thus now intends to include urban areas in its area of operations.

Ekta Parishad undergoes much self-introspection. It knows that it is a mass organisation, but what is its legal position? What the shape of the organisation will/should be is a question which is raised often. The Parishad creates leadership from the local people and transfers the leadership of the movement to them. It realises, however, that it has to evolve mechanisms to keep a check on this leadership and sees creating incorruptible leadership as a challenge for the organisation. It would also like to generate and locate alternative funding sources, as the Parishad would like to move away from foreign funding which is restrictive and, at times, changes the culture of the organisation. Another area of concern is documentation: the Parishad feels that so much first-hand knowledge is being created, but it is being lost due to lack of documentation. The Parishad has already started working in this direction.

Rajgopal feels that the present models of peoples' organisations will become outdated and that the creation of new models of peoples' movements will be the biggest challenge for Ekta Parishad.

2 Bharat Jan Andolan³

Bharat Jan Andolan is a peoples' movement with a mass base, active in the tribal areas of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, Maharashtra and Rajasthan. The movement has a very loose organisational structure and is sporadic in nature. However, its presence is very strong in Ranchi Region of Bihar, Nagari–Sihawa Region (Raipur District) and Sarguja District of Madhya Pradesh. The Andolan takes up the issues of peasants and tribals, although its mass support comes primarily from tribal regions. This can be explained by the substantial success of its movement for tribal self-rule; it has recently started focusing on issues of peasant and agricultural labour. In Madhya Pradesh, the Andolan has a very strong support base spread across 70–80 villages of Raipur District (Nagari–Sihawa Region) and 40–50 villages of Sarguja District. The movement initially had a strong support base in Bastar District, but according to its National Coordinator, Dr. B.D. Sharma, it has slowly lost ground in that region. Dr. Sharma claims that the movement is spreading rapidly in other parts of Chhattisgarh, although it is in its nascent stage in these parts.

2.1 Historical evolution and structure

In October 1992, activists and representatives of various peoples' movements held a meeting to improve coordination and building alliances on issues for tribals. This meeting was attended by highly respected environmental activists, tribals rights advocates and representatives of social and mass movements such as Medha Patkar, Pradip Prabhu, Dr. Vinayan, George Palli, Gian Singh and Dr. B.D. Sharma, among others. The meeting was the initiative of Bharat Jan Andolan and represents the beginning of the organisation as a peoples' movement. All the attending groups and individuals pledged support to Bharat Jan Andolan and became partners of the movement. In its first manifesto (1992), the Andolan was not clear about its focus. In 1993, the *Panchayats* became the institution of decentralisation through the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution. The Andolan thus focused its energies on tribal self-rule: the constituents of the Andolan and peoples' movement representatives present at the first meeting united to form the National Front for Tribal Self-Rule (TSR). Pradip Prabhu was elected convenor and Dr. Vinyan secretary of the Front, although its activity as such was short lived. The Andolan proactively struggled for tribal self-rule over the years, but the participation of the organisational members and other social movements gradually declined. Although they have not formally dissociated themselves with Bharat Jan Andolan, their support has become negligible. Initially, a few church groups were also involved with the movement, especially in Bastar and Sarguja, but they too have slowly withdrawn from the Andolan.⁴ After attaining substantial success in incorporating their demands in the provisions of the *Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA)* act, the Andolan is now focusing on the legitimate entitlements of the peasants.

³ To undertake a research study on Bharat Jan Andolan within the limited time and available resources was an extremely difficult task. The movement lacks a formal structure and is primarily dependent on Dr. B.D. Sharma for articulating its concerns and perspective. Dr. Sharma writes plentifully and often suggests that his writings can be referred to as the literature of the movement. There is a strong temptation for a researcher to base the research on the available literature, which is rich and extensive. However, the experience of field visits to the Bharat Jan Andolan areas of operation and meetings clearly suggests that this literature can be used as reference, but for a comprehensive analysis, the research has to be more broad based. This research has therefore used the literature for conceptual clarity, but the larger part is based on interviews and field experiences.

⁴ According to Dr. Sharma, this happened because these organisations did not see a future for themselves if the TSR was implemented in letter and spirit. The TSR would lead to empowerment of the tribals and reconstruction of the *gaon samaj*. Once this was achieved, the space for NGOs and others would shrink. Secondly, the dominant feeling in BJA is that its agenda is too radical and leads to conflict, which is not acceptable to other groups or the church. Finally, Dr. Sharma's dominant personality must also have played a role in this declining support.

The structure of the Andolan is extremely loose and flexible. An executive committee was once formed, but it steadily became defunct and the organisation became dependent on Dr. Sharma for decision making. Dr. Sharma is National Coordinator for the Andolan; each State has a State coordinator, and in the regions where the movement's presence is strong, there is also a regional coordinator – for example, the Regional Coordinator for Chhattisgarh is Shri Ramkumar. However, these organisational hierarchies do not act as effective channels of execution – the Andolan is heavily dependent on Dr. Sharma and the village workers. The Bharat Jan Andolan workers are chosen from local communities and they work voluntarily as activists. Each worker is assigned a village as their base and they are also responsible for mobilising support for the Andolan in the adjoining villages. The workers receive intensive training before they are entrusted with a full-time assignment. The training has two components: the first is led by Dr. Sharma in his training camps and the second is an apprenticeship phase with a worker in the field. Workers are seldom sent back to their own village after training but are given a new group of villages as their area of operation. There is a very high degree of interaction and dialogue between the workers and Dr. Sharma, and due to this direct communication, the intermediate level of leadership has not emerged.

The Andolan is not a registered society. Dr. Sharma believes that if they seek legitimacy from the state by registering the Andolan as a society, then their endeavour and mass movement to delegitimise the state will weaken.

The financial needs of the Andolan are extremely limited. All the workers volunteer their services and their daily needs are taken care of by the village in which they live. Supporters of the Andolan also contribute voluntarily to the movement. These contributions vary in form, but most are in *dhan* (paddy). In addition to this, Dr. Sharma contributes his pension to the movement and mobilises some financial support from sympathetic and supportive individuals. Out of principle, the movement does not accept any organisational grants or aid.

2.2 Objectives of the movement

The objectives of the Andolan are very broad and cover the entire spectrum of socio-economic and political issues. These macro objectives also reflect the nature of the Andolan. The movement has concretised these objectives in the form of certain specific programmes, but Bharat Jan Andolan remains largely a movement for the comprehensive restructuring of society.

The Andolan aims to build an equal and exploitation-free society based on human values to replace the present capitalist and neo-imperialist order. In order for it to establish '*hamare gaon mein hamara raaj*' (our village, our rule) as a symbol of a non-centralised system, control of local resources – *jal, jungle aur jamin* (water, forests and land) – must be given to the local village communities to ensure comparable compulsory education and primary health services to all. The movement also seeks to re-establish the primacy of the peasant and to ensure for the peasant just entitlement by attaining acceptance of the peasant as a skilled worker. It aims to reclaim the expropriated resources of the villages by guaranteeing the right to work in villages, and through this effort will attempt to bridge the gap between rural and urban areas. Bharat Jan Andolan also demands community ownership of industries in order to make the structural changes truly democratic. It plans to bring liquor, the symbol of consumerist culture⁵, under the people's control and to unilaterally end foreign debts and attack the multinational corporations.

⁵ The movement believes that liquor (*theka*) vitiates the atmosphere of villages and unlike traditional consumption of liquor, these *thekas* encourage consumerism and individualism instead of social cohesion.

At the ground level, the Andolan focuses primarily on five objectives. These are:

1. to ensure that the *Panchayat* Extension to Scheduled Areas act is shaped according to the Andolan perspective and implemented as such;
2. to link the objective of tribal self-rule to this act. As the axis of the movement, the slogan *jal, jungle and jamin* has become the mobilising call for Bharat Jan Andolan;
3. to extend the demand for self-rule to non-tribal areas. This objective has taken the form of *hamara gaon, hamara raaj* and is presently the most significant agenda of the Andolan;
4. to give concrete shape to the demand of right to work in rural areas through the Jhanda Haziri movement (see Box 7);
5. to pursue the broader objective of rebuilding the *gaon samaj* (village society) and fighting the forces that are disintegrating it.

In addition to these objectives, Bharat Jan Andolan intends to focus on the issues of the peasant and of agricultural labour. The movement has already started preparing for this fresh focus and popular mobilisation on unilateral termination of peasant debts and demand for recognising the peasant as skilled labour has already begun.

2.3 Perspective and ideological formulations

Village community

The village community is the functioning unit of the village. It is the village's most fundamental structure; caste and tribal structures and identities are secondary.⁶ This village community is ideally inclusive and binds all villagers together. According to Bharat Jan Andolan, the village community will be at the centre of change, but it seems that tradition and ethos have no place in the modern law. Breaking tradition and intruding on the space of the village community, the modern state has forced it to be governed by a law which the villagers do not comprehend. This leads to a complete communication gap between the people on the one hand and the law and the state on the other. The problem is further accentuated in the tribal areas where the only communication between the two sides is through coercive means; the police *danda* (stick) has become a symbol of this communication by force. This often results in the feeling amongst the common people that it would be better if the state could be dismantled. The primary objective of the Andolan is thus to struggle against the forces that are attacking and disintegrating the village society. It seeks to re-establish the primacy of the village society and to create space for the village community in the rational bureaucratic structures and the legal framework of the state.

⁶ Dr. Sharma's stand on women has often been questioned as he has frequently been quoted as saying that the rights of the tribal women must stay confined within the traditional tribal cultural framework. Upon questioning, Dr. Sharma has said that he is convinced that the primary threat to rural society (and also the tribal society) is from the forces which are breaking the village community and so this contradiction should be resolved first. He agrees that within a society there will be oppressive relationships but they will, he claims, not be as exploitative. Dr. Sharma believes that the channels for resolving such relationships would be different.

Box 4 Lack of communication between modern law and tradition

The lack of communication between modern law and tradition has created an oppressive environment for the rural people in Madhya Pradesh. These rural people do not understand the formal rules and laws. Unfortunately, the laws are made from the perspective of modern urban societies which do not allow for the sensibilities and world view of the traditional rural societies. This has an adverse affect on the traditional processes of conflict resolution and social organisation in rural communities. Furthermore, the intended benefits of the laws do not accrue to the people. If two people in a village fight, and one person ends up with a broken hand, the village community would direct the culprit to take care of the medical expenses of the injured person and work on his fields until he recovers from the injury. This would represent justice for the traditional village community. The modern system of law, however, would require a police case and a prolonged judicial process, which might take years. Initially the victim would have to obtain medical treatment from his own resources and make personal arrangements for his fields, probably by hiring agricultural labour, and the offender would face police harassment and years of court appearances, which might end in a jail term or a monetary fine several years after the incident. In the final analysis, both people lose out, whereas the traditional system would have resolved the dispute and dispensed immediate justice.

An alternative system

Describing another focal point of the movement, Dr. Sharma quotes A.O. Hume (founder of Indian National Congress: ‘We have to start trusting the people and not the system’. The Andolan considers repression by the state as a primary issue and is struggling hard against it. It believes that the need is for a paradigmatic shift. In the new system according to the Andolan, a fundamental feature is that ownership will belong to the community, not the state, and it will be over all resources. It will also ensure a corresponding paradigmatic transformation in the legal system. The movement raises fundamental issues, and not merely those related to economic benefit and resource distribution. Indeed, according to Ram Kumar, a leader of Bharat Jan Andolan, the Andolan is not a struggle for *roti* (bread) but for *izzat* (self-respect). The economic incentives and largesse distributed by the state do not satisfy the movement’s target and so they continue to fight all the agents of the state, including the *Sarpanchs* (head of a *Panchayat*) and *Panchs* (elected member of the *Gram Panchayat*).

The Andolan proposes an economic, social and political alternative to the present system and strives to make these changes a reality. According to George Palli⁷, the economic alternative is the most significant. He says that, ‘traditionally in India people controlled the means of production – land, water and forests. The British changed all this and alienated people from their resources, unfortunately in the post colonial India this alienation continued’. The need is therefore to restore ownership of the means of production to the community. The political alternative is of a non-centralised system, different from a decentralised system. In the decentralised system the powers are with the centre which is then devolved to local levels, whereas in the non-centralised system, whatever can be managed at the local level should be managed at that level. In this non-centralised system, only undertakings like railways and defence should have centralised management. Once the stated alternative political and economic systems are operationalised, an alternative social system would naturally emerge. In this alternative social system there would be no dependence on the state and no competition amongst each other. The new social system would be based on the village community system and it would build a communitarian social system.

The hope and optimism for the movement comes from the perspective that in rural areas, and in tribal areas especially, people still express concern about the future of their children, unlike urban areas where people are concerned about their own future. This provides the basis on which to build the alternatives already discussed. It is important to highlight that in the tribal areas, the *gaon samaj*

⁷ Mr. Palli has been a member of the Andolan from the beginning. He works in Bihar.

has not yet disintegrated, and this leads to conflict between tribals and the state. The state does not respect the *gaon samaj*, accentuating the tension in tribal areas. Dr. Sharma raises a significant issue when he explains that in colonial India, the Governor had the right to implement laws that he deemed fit for the tribal areas. Consequently, very few laws were implemented in these areas. In post-colonial India, despite the making of the 5th and 6th Scheduled Areas, a fundamental mistake was made: the provision of the Governor's consent was changed and according to the new law the Governor could stall the implementation of any law in tribal areas. However, inaction by the Governor would mean that laws would automatically be operationalised in these regions. In the regions where this has happened there is now a high degree of tension and dislocation. The *Panchayat Act* was the first law that was not directly implemented in the scheduled areas. This uniform implementation needs to be re-examined and the issues of forests, forest laws and forest management need to be re-evaluated and reworked according to this perspective.

Forest management

Forest management in India is still executed according to imperial paradigms. According to Dr. Sharma, the Forest Department acts as a revenue department rather than as foresters. This prompts the question of why the Forest Department is concerned with who owns and who uses the forests when their role is to protect the forests. Unfortunately, control of the forests has been taken from the forest dependent communities and forests are now being openly exploited by the Forest Department, timber mafia and contractors. The tribals, faced with alienation, may be cutting a few trees for their own needs, but the amount is insignificant.

For Bharat Jan Andolan, the new forest management strategy needs to be twofold. Firstly, the tribals should be given alternative employment opportunities. Secondly, the responsibility of forest management should be given back to the forest communities. It believes that the Forest Department should not accept Joint Forest Management (JFM) as an adequate measure, as it does not give ownership of the forests to the communities; it is merely an extension of the Forest Department. The key to forest management is the ownership of the forests by the local communities – once the communities develop a sense of ownership they intervene when the forests are exploited by any party. Sanctuaries, national parks and forest protection should be a people's affair; keeping people away is not a solution. The Andolan seek to bring forest dependent communities onto the centre stage of forest management, not as partners but as owners.

2.4 Ground work and operational strategies

Most of the social movements believe in first creating the organisation and then starting to spread the ideas. According to Dr. Sharma, the ideas, not the organisation, should reach the people first. In this sense, the books written by Dr. Sharma play a vital role: very often the villagers read the books and then invite the Andolan to their areas. Once the idea is spread and accepted in a region, an activist of the organisation goes to live there and identifies young people to send for training. The training is given personally by Dr. Sharma and often other important figures of the movement, like George Palli, are also present. They receive intensive training in the laws and the Constitution to enable them to negotiate with the state. The trained youth then work as full-time volunteers in assigned villages. An intermediate level of leadership of the movement has not however emerged and at times this poses a problem in coordination and management. Dr. Sharma does not agree with this criticism and does not see the lack of intermediate leadership as a lacuna of the movement, as he believes that the activists of Bharat Jan Andolan are equipped to handle the situation at the grassroots where the movement has focused its energies.

One of the first tasks of the Andolan workers is to make people understand the importance of a united *gaon samaj* and the reasons for its disintegration. Once the villagers understand the role of the media, market and the state in breaking up traditional society, the movement automatically takes roots. The idea of *gaon gandraj* (village republic) and *hamara gaon, hamara raaj* is very appealing to the masses and captures their imagination. It encourages the people to want ownership of the resources and not merely a share. Dr. Sharma claims that the movement coined the slogan *jal, jungle aur jamin*. Once the village accepts the Andolan, a *shila lekh* (rock inscription) is made at the entrance of the village, which proclaims *hamara gaon, hamara raaj*.

The villagers of Madhya Pradesh State are highly mobilised and organised for a struggle. It was the focal point of the Lal Topi movement, a radical socialist movement active in the 1960s and 1970s against the state demanding land reforms and peasant rights.⁸ Some critics of the Andolan believe that Bharat Jan Andolan is now occupying the space created by the Lal Topi movement. Dr. Sharma's response to this is that a social movement does create space for struggle and mobilisation and possibly the Andolan did benefit from the already existing space. Nevertheless, the people are today responding to Bharat Jan Andolan as they feel that it has the potential to resolve the challenges they face.

When the Andolan began, representatives of all the social movements working for peoples' rights were invited. Environmental groups, such as Narmada Bachao Andolan, and church groups had also joined. The latter were linked to the church but joined as secular groups. Gradually all these groups became inactive. Bharat Jan Andolan's perspective is that movements should be self-liquidating and the organisation should never become more important than the movement itself. Unfortunately, NGOs play the triggering role but desert the mobilised and sensitised people when the contradictions between the interests of the poor and marginalised on one hand and the elites expropriating classes on the other becomes very sharp. The Andolan will not back out and provide the leadership when the contradiction is acute, nor will it fall in the state trap and get caught in resolving the minor contradictions like several other NGOs working on watershed management, sanitation, etc. Similarly, church groups withdraw when contradictions become sharp and open confrontation is imminent. Over the years, the issues have become clearer and the focus of the movement has been honed. The Andolan has gradually been able to mobilise and organise the people in its areas of support, to the extent that most of the villagers have lost their fear of the police and its repression. The movement takes the path of struggle. Rallies and *dharnas* (sit-ins) have been organised: in 1997 the Bharat Jan Andolan rally in Delhi mustered the support of over 25,000 people. Such activism frequently leads to confrontation with the police and jail for the activists. But according to George Palli, the movement is not linear; it has its ups and downs. Dr. Sharma, however, believes that the movement is gaining ground rapidly and he sees it as a process: the people, who think that others will come and make things happen, cannot be expected to mobilise and organise themselves in a day.

Significantly, the process has begun, although George Palli at times feels that it is taking too long. He feels that the movement has been successful in reaching out to the tribal people but has not been able to reach out to the peasants and the industrial sector. This is reflected in the support base of the Andolan, which is largely tribal. Women also support the Andolan, especially in Nagari Region. Few women are full-time activists or volunteers, but George Palli is still optimistic as he feels that at least they have been able to share a dream with the youth – the group which constitutes the major mass of the Andolan. The movement has a twofold strategy. It works at the grassroots and builds up mass support and pressure on the government for implementing the people's demands. It also works on the macro level, influencing policy formulations through various channels in the bureaucracy, politics and the government. In this advocacy and networking role, Dr. Sharma's contacts and background prove invaluable.

⁸ This movement was focused in the Nagari Block of Raipur District.

At the functional level, the movement comes into conflict with the elected representatives of the *Panchayats*. Dr. Sharma says, 'where ever there is a conflict in the village regarding the movement; it should ideally withdraw because they want the unity of the Gaon Samaj'. However, this is not always possible for pragmatic reasons, such as sustaining the momentum and the necessity to respond to faith of the already mobilised people. Interestingly, such conflict with the *Panchayats* has led to strong support for the movement from the old village Patels. The Andolan forms *mahila* and *yuva mandali* (women's and youth groups) in the villages. They also undertake anti-liquor programmes, which have been very successful in several areas, such as Nagari-Sihawa in Chhattisgarh. The supporters of the movement take the slogan *hamara gaon, hamara raaj* very seriously: they refuse to pay land revenue and take electricity connections without paying for them. The villagers are also fishing on their village lakes and ponds, and are refusing to pay back the government and bank loans they have taken. Such actions are not just self-interest, rather an attempt to set right and reverse the process of loot of tribals and rural areas initiated by the urban, industrial and state nexus. The Andolan has been successful in its demand to have the Bhuria committee report accepted for tribal self-rule. It has thus successfully achieved one of its primary agenda items (see 2.2 Objectives of the movement).

Box 5 *Hamara gaon, hamara raaj* (our village, our rule)

Bharat Jan Andolan is most vibrant in the Nagari Block of Raipur District. The story of the Andolan began in Chanagaon Village. A few young men of the village had a fight with the village *Sarpanch* for which they were jailed. Soni, an Andolan activist, came forward and ensured the youths' release. This initiated the association of the village with the Andolan. Through Soni, the villagers were exposed to Dr. Sharma's literature. After reading the books the villagers felt that he was taking up their issues and articulating their demands. They were so impressed by the ideas of Dr. Sharma that they decided to call him to their village. According to Ganpat, the day Dr. Sharma came to Chanagaon was a turning point for the village. Several of the villagers heard Dr. Sharma speak and concluded that outsiders and the state had exploited them enough, and from now on they would live by *hamara gaon, hamara raaj*.

The village first raised its voice of protest against the expropriation of water resources from the adjoining Mara Silli dam. The irrigation department pumped out all the water to feed the Bhillai Steel Plant. The villagers claimed the water as their resource and insisted it could not be taken without their permission. After prolonged activity, the collector relented and agreed to leave 25 feet of water in the dam for the villagers. With the success of *hamara gaon, hamara raaj* in Chanagaon, several neighbouring villagers also joined the movement. Bangrum Nalla Village challenged the Forest Department and was successful in ending the exploitative Forest Department writ. This movement rapidly spread to several other villages. The supporters of all these villages went to Nagari Block and organised a *chakka jam* (stopping the traffic on important roads), demanding work for two persons from each family in the villages. The movement, after a sustained struggle and the intervention of Dr. Sharma, managed to attain some employment for the villagers. These villagers have stopped paying land revenue and refuse to pay when the government officials come to the villages. They have also taken illegal electricity connections. In most of these villages a *shila lekh* proclaiming *hamara gaon, hamara raaj* and the supremacy of the *gram sabha* (village council) has been erected. In a village meeting, the villagers of Chanagaon decided that the *Thekadar* (external contractor) was not entitled to the rights of fishing in the village *talaab* (pond). They decided that the village community was the supreme authority and with its consent they could fish in the *talaab*. Once they started fishing, the *Thekadar* filed a complaint as he had legal sanction from the *Panchayat*. This led to serious conflict between the villagers and the police, and the judicial process is still ongoing. This often results in the supporters going to jail, but mobilisation is to such a high degree that they have become fearless of the police.

The women of these villages are also deeply involved with the movement and have taken part in *chakka jams* and protest demonstrations to the block headquarters. Many women have also been jailed for their activism but their enthusiasm remains strong. After joining the movement, villagers have started questioning government officers and even the police. Unfortunately the *Sarpanch* of Chanagaon does not support the movement, which has led to serious differences within the village. In other villages of the region, the *Sarpanchs* support the movement, which gives it great strength.

The Andolan is now raising the issues of the peasants. The movement believes that agriculture prices are depressed for the benefit of the urban areas and they demand that this distortion in the economy be balanced. Agriculture is the main occupation of the country, yet the peasantry still does not receive its legitimate entitlements. The struggle is thus characterised by the *hakdari* (legitimate right) of the peasant, who should be paid the wage of a skilled labourer and the distortions in favour of the organised sector should be ironed out. As an unorganised sector, agriculture has suffered for too long and the Andolan will take up this issue more effectively and forcefully in the coming years.

2.5 Publications of the movement

Dr. B.D. Sharma writes extensively and on a wide spectrum of issues. His writing is simple and focuses on the real issues of the tribals and rural communities. The sharp analysis and radically new propositions keeping the rural communities at the centre evoke a very favourable response in the local communities. Sahyog Pustak Kutir (in Delhi) publishes these books, and is for all practical purposes part of the movement. The books play a vital role in propagating the ideas of the Andolan: in several villages, the villagers⁹ read the books first and then approached Dr. Sharma about bringing the movement to their region. The books also play the crucial role of providing information to the villagers. For a peoples' movement to be successful, it is essential that information, which often is used as power, should reach the grassroots. Dr. Sharma's books fill the information void and provide details of laws and the Constitution to the grassroots, enabling them to counter the state apparatus. The Andolan also publishes a monthly journal, Gaon Gandraj, formerly entitled Bhoomkaal. Reaching the villages every month, the journal provides regular information to the grassroots and, more importantly, keeps the contact alive.

2.6 The personality factor

George Palli says that a joke is often made that Dr. Sharma is Bharat Jan Andolan and Bharat Jan Andolan is Dr. Sharma. He explains on a serious note that Dr. Sharma is pivotal to the movement: he provides leadership and, more importantly, develops new ideas, analysis and formulations. Dr. Sharma himself admits that the Bharat Jan Andolan cannot be taken as a representative case due to his leadership. His wide-ranging contacts in various spheres of society place the movement in a unique position. Suresh Kumar, an activist, says that Dr. Sharma is a reference point for all the villagers but the grassroots are independent to take their own decisions.

Dr. Sharma helps the movement in negotiating with the state in three vital processes. The first is that his stature is used by the movement to soften the response of the coercive apparatus of the state. The movement, when entangled with the police and court, often resorts to Dr. Sharma. Secondly, through his contacts he is able to bring the state to the negotiating table and often work out a favourable solution to local issues and problems. The local and district bureaucracy usually respect him and make concessions for the movement. The successes of the Jhanda Haziri programme are an example of this. The third process is critical for the success of the movement. Dr. Sharma is able to influence the larger macro-level policy environment through his contacts. He has the unique advantage of being in touch with the grassroots and articulating their demands at the highest policy formulation fora. He has had direct access to people like Ashok Mehta, Rajiv Gandhi, Digvijay Singh, K.L. Bhuria etc. The implementation of the Bhuria committee report on *Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas* and various amendments in the Madhya Pradesh *Panchayat Act* are an example of the wide reach of Dr. Sharma (see Box 6). George Palli says that while it is true that the state has to take note of social movements, in this case the dividing line between Dr. Sharma's influence and the pressure from grassroots is too thin.

⁹ On the basis of the limited information it can be said that these people are primarily opposed to the existing Panchayat representatives or the traditional leadership of the village. Another factor explaining the interest is the history of certain social movements in the area. However, it needs to be underscored that the interest is heartfelt.

Box 6 Influencing the *Panchayat* Act

Dr. Sharma says that he has been pursuing the *Panchayat* Acts since 1972. He suggested to the Ashok Mehta committee that the *gram sabha* should be given the real powers, but this was not accepted. Later, during Rajiv Gandhi's regime, he advised the then Prime Minister to give the real powers to the *gram sabhas*. This advice was also ignored although Rajiv Gandhi accepted it for Scheduled Areas. The 1993 *Panchayat* Act gives only deliberative powers to the *gram sabha*. Due to the pressure built by the movement and, more importantly, due to the personal rapport of Dr. Sharma with the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, the Madhya Pradesh *Panchayat* Act was amended. After the amendment, the decisions of the *gram sabha* have become binding on the *gram panchayat*.

Dr. Sharma has played a very significant role in the *Panchayat* Extension to Scheduled Areas act. He says that this is the most revolutionary act passed by the Indian Parliament. The act provides space to the community in the legal framework and the most significant clause is 4(d), which gives legitimacy to the culture and tradition of the local communities. It also clearly says that the *gram sabha* is 'Competent...', giving it real powers, unlike the earlier *Panchayat* Act which said that 'the state endows the Gram Sabha...'. The Joint Select Committee of Parliament objected to accepting the *gram sabhas* as the primary bodies and suggested making the *gram panchayat* as the primary body instead. Fortunately, with the help of a sympathetic tribal parliamentary speaker, this revolutionary act was passed without any changes. For the Andolan and for the demand for tribal self-rule, this has been the most significant development and achievement. Dr. Sharma agrees that it was not the pressure of the Andolan and of similar movements alone which forced the issue, rather a complex and unique mix of circumstances and factors paved the way for this revolutionary bill to be passed. His access to the Bhuria committee and several other politicians, the presence of P.A. Sangma, a tribal, as the speaker of Parliament and the presentation of the bill just before its dissolution (leaving little time for discussion), all played a major role.

2.7 Relation with the state and other institutions

The state

The Andolan relation with the state is not good and cannot be expected to be good. There can be little collaboration between the two as the basic objectives of the movement and the state are in harsh conflict. The movement talks of changing the culture of dependency on the state and asks for ownership of the resources to the community, which contradicts the perspective of the state. Despite the contradictions, the movement is entirely peaceful and non-violent. It uses public pressure to bring the state to the negotiating table. The success of the Jhanda Haziri programme (see Box 7) and the growth and success of the Andolan in the Nagari Block (Maram Silli Dam struggle) are examples of this. However, the police will invariably try to repress the movement by using strong-arm tactics such as force or the threat of jail. In some cases, police action can be harsh but on the whole, surprisingly, it is not overtly repressive. Andolan activists have even stopped officials from entering Andolan villages, but in spite of such activism, state repression remains lenient. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, the contacts of Dr. Sharma play a role; secondly and more importantly, the strategy of the movement pays dividends. The activists are trained so soundly in the practice of Indian law and the constitution and this gives them a strong defence. To the lower level of bureaucracy and the police, an activist armed with knowledge and information and working according to the Constitution becomes, to some extent, acceptable. The *Panchayat* Extension to Scheduled Areas act, which gives the community substantial rights, has been extremely helpful to the Andolan supporters.

The movement, in its next phase, is focusing on peasants and demanding the unilateral cancellation of bank loans. The conflict between the bank and the movement supporters is already brewing and it is likely that this conflict will also involve the state as an interested party.

The Andolan has good relations with the Madhya Pradesh Government, largely due to the relationship between Dr. Sharma and the Chief Minister. The upper level of bureaucracy includes a few officials sympathetic to their causes and there is generally more tolerance shown to the Andolan at this level. The lower level of bureaucracy lacks this sensitivity, and the conflict is perpetual and obvious. According to George Palli, the movement is too small to influence and affect policy; it has to grow and it will take time to reach the level of mobilisation where the people can force the issue with the state. Presently, the policy changes are a contribution of Dr. Sharma and his wide network of contacts.

Box 7 Jhanda Haziri: forcing the state to implement its agenda

Bharat Jan Andolan successfully launched the Jhanda Haziri programme – a constructive agitational programme that is supported enthusiastically by the people. The government has a stated and legal commitment to provide 100 days of employment to two persons from each family living below the poverty line during the lean agricultural seasons. Unfortunately, this clause has not actually been implemented.

The Andolan has taken up this issue and wants the state to fulfil its commitment. In each Andolan village an attendance register is maintained: every villager living below the poverty line signs every day to register their presence. A copy is sent to the district government demanding work for all those who signed. This daily routine is called *Jhanda Haziri* (literally meaning flag attendance) because the register is kept on a platform under the flag of India. Such action applies pressure to the district administration and also mobilises the village community. The programme has been successful in securing employment for a lot of people in the Nagari Block of Raipur District.

Explaining the strategy, Dr. Sharma says that this should not be construed as dependence of the village community and the Andolan on the state. It is actually an assertion of the right to work in the village itself and, more importantly, a notional return of the expropriated resources from the urban areas to the villages.

Political parties

Mainstream political parties are generally against the Bharat Jan Andolan. Congress is by and large opposed to the movement, although Digvijay Singh, Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, is personally very supportive. Similarly, the left does not support the movement. Only the Communist Party of India/Marxist-Leninist (CPI-ML) claims that it is in favour of the movement, but this is nothing more than lip service. Dr. Sharma says that the Andolan are ideologically closest to the left but they do not accept the movement's formulations.

NGOs

Although the NGOs will not say that the Andolan perspective is wrong, it is felt that the contemporary NGOs have become like businesses; they are not people oriented and do no grassroots work. Nevertheless, some NGOs, which are still committed to a people-centric ideology, do support the movement through various channels, such as providing infrastructure facilities.

The church

The Andolan was initially supported by a few church groups and peoples' movements, but they have gradually withdrawn.

Other peoples' movements

Dr. Sharma states that the Andolan does not believe in formal association or dissociation with other peoples' and social movements as there are very few groups struggling against the state for peoples' rights.

2.8 Bharat Jan Andolan and the forests

Bharat Jan Andolan demands complete ownership of the forests for the local communities. It believes that the future of the forests is only safe in the hands of local communities and is thus fighting against the alienation of local communities. Once the local communities have complete charge over the forests, they are able to protect the forestland on their own, as has already been witnessed in several Andolan villages. Presently, the Forest Department plays a very repressive and dubious role. It does not allow the local communities to exercise their rights, such as collecting dry wood, twigs, etc. In some places, repression is so strong that the forest guards ask for a bribe even for *datoon* (twigs used as toothbrush by the villagers). The basic *nistaar* rights of the local communities are not respected and when confronted, the Forest Department tries to mislead the villagers by referring to laws that do not exist, such as stopping tribals from collecting *datoon*.

Box 8 Whose forests are these? A fundamental question

Bangrum Nalla Village in the Nagari Block of Raipur District is surrounded by a forest. The Forest Department has made a *van nigrani samiti* (watch committee), as it is a protected forest. Nevertheless, the exploitation of the forest and felling of trees has continued. The felling was being carried out by a Forest Department Thekadar. Once the Andolan took root in the village, it started to question this illegal felling of trees, and the villagers once caught the contractor red handed. They seized the wood and started protesting until the Forest Department agreed to a meeting. The villagers insisted that the venue for the meeting would be the place where the trees were cut. The Forest Department reluctantly agreed. During the meeting, all the Forest Department officials were present, including the Ranger and Sub-Divisional Officer. The villagers said that they would let the department cut trees if the officials could answer some fundamental questions. They asked the officials to name the trees in the vicinity and gave them some leaves to identify. The forest officials were unable to recognise the trees, nor were they able to identify the leaves. On asking the villagers the same questions, all the villagers, including young boys, were able to identify the leaves and name the trees. The villagers then asked the officials, 'Whose forests are these – yours or ours?'

Since this incident, the Forest Department no longer intervenes in the forest, although the honeymoon period may be short lived. Nevertheless, the illegal felling has also been stopped. The villagers say that their intervention was essential, as the forests are their life.

In addition, the Forest Department is one of the major culprits of deforestation and felling. If not involved directly, it often supports the contractors and the timber mafia. The Andolan is mobilising the people to question these corrupt practices and to assert their rights over the forests. Some *gaon samajs* are presenting an example of protecting the forests as their duty and not in exchange for benefits from the government; gradually they are asserting their rights over their forests. However, it is true that when the Forest Department is actively exploiting the forests, some members of the local communities want to copy this model of exploitation that they have seen for so long, but forest exploitation by villagers remains minuscule. The Andolan is struggling against this, but once the local communities understand their stakes in the forests, they protect them; they are brought closer to the forests as owners rather than partners and they find solutions to the problems of deforestation and felling. Dr. Sharma says that creating an alternative paradigm is a process which has been initiated by the Andolan, but it will take time to filter through. The present forest management is an extension of the logic of trusting the system rather than the people. The World Bank-funded Madhya Pradesh Forestry Project that is being implemented by the State government is based on the same premise. It hopes to protect the forests and work for their conservation and regeneration

through new procedures and techniques. Despite all the rhetoric on drawing lessons from the traditional knowledge base of the people and giving heed to what they need the forests for, the project is pushing its own understanding of the problem and its own solutions. The Andolan leadership feels that the creativity of the common people needs to be trusted. When the forests start to become scarce, people are naturally drawn to protect them. Population growth poses a threat to the forests, but the communities collectively evolve techniques and solutions for such challenges.

According to Dr. Sharma, the social movements demanding the regularisation of encroachment on forest land by the tribals should fix a date for a ceasefire. The state should then sincerely assess the needs of the tribals and provide alternative employment opportunities to them. This should resolve the tension between these groups and the state, and stop the continuous process of felling. The key to resolving the problem of land encroachment is provision of viable economic alternatives or employment. The Andolan has been able to instil a sense of conservation in the villagers. In Sarguja, a Christian activist of the Andolan saw that some church functionaries were encouraging felling. He opposed it and said he would not allow anyone to cut down the resources of the future generations.

Dr. Sharma maintains that the state cannot be entrusted with the right to protect the forests, as it is effectively not protecting the forests anywhere. On the contrary, the state protects the exploiters of the forests. He asserts that ownership of the forests has to be returned to the *gaon samaj* because once the villagers feel that the forests are theirs, they take adequate protective measures. Villages like Dongripara, Bangrum Nalla are examples of this. They also realise that the forests are their source of sustenance and resources. A number of villages have made their own *nigrani samitis* for protecting and guarding the forests. They have made *jungle samiti* or *yuva samiti* (forest or youth associations) outside the purview of the government, as in Jhipatola (Nagari Block), Orgiya and Nayapara (Bastar District). In these forests, villagers refuse entry to Forest Department officials and they oppose any kind of exploitation. After initial resistance, the department has accepted the situation; once it realises that the village is part of the Andolan, it does not intervene.

2.9 Achievements of Bharat Jan Andolan

Dr. Sharma maintains that it is too early to assess the successes of the movement, as it is still very young. It is also difficult to assess the success of a peoples' movement as it initiates a process of change but does not necessarily oversee the transformation. Bharat Jan Andolan has initiated the process of change; in the course of the movement some distortions may emerge but this is natural and will not affect the larger process of change. At the concrete level, the greatest achievement of the movement to date has been the creation of space for the community in the legal framework, as reflected in the *Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas* act. The demand for tribal self-rule has been largely fulfilled by this act which gives due recognition to the community, its tradition and ethos. Bharat Jan Andolan has also been successful in affecting the *Panchayat Act* of Madhya Pradesh by influencing its amendments. This was possible through the various channels of operation of the Andolan in which the personal relationship between Dr. Sharma and the Chief Minister played a vital role.

A major contribution of the Andolan to helping the tribals' situation has been the re-establishing of the *gaon samaj* as the functioning and primary unit of the village. The villagers have accepted the idea and they are mobilised and organised for the cause. The slogan *hamara gaon, hamara raaj* has appealed greatly to the local communities and they have started demanding community ownership of resources, especially *jal, jungle aur jamin*. The Andolan has successfully mobilised the people towards self-reliance and self-dependence. Through innovative programmes, the Andolan has forced the state to implement its stated agenda of public welfare (the success of the Jhanda Haziri programme is an example of this – see Box 7). The Andolan has gradually mobilised the people to

such an extent that their fear of police and state repression has disappeared. This is a major achievement on behalf of the Andolan, considering the level of poverty, low human development and exploitation in its areas of operation. The villagers understand that the Andolan does not represent a struggle for state resources but a fight for *izzat* (self-respect). Significantly, the movement is spreading rapidly to tribal areas throughout the Central Indian State. It can therefore be safely assumed that it has been able to capture the imagination of the tribal communities. Finally, the fact that the Andolan is sustaining itself without any support or resources from outside is triumph indeed. The sustenance of a movement on peoples' resources alone reflects the deep-rooted strength of the Andolan within the community.

2.10 Limitations and criticisms

The functioning and ideological formulations of the Andolan have led to some limitations and certain specific criticism. The movement is criticised for presenting a model of development to the people through its ground-level programmes with the result that people ultimately ask for a share in the state exploitation of resources. Illegally taking electricity connections or the forcible encroachment on government land in the name of *hamara gaon, hamara raaj* reflects this mindset. This short-term approach to long-term issues without appreciating the larger dynamics can have adverse consequences for the Andolan and for the people involved. The movement needs to consider providing alternative paradigms of governance and administration to the people.

Another major criticism of the movement is of political duplicity to the people it mobilises. The Andolan presents the success of programmes like Jhanda Haziri as the result of the people's involvement, whereas in reality, it is due to Dr. Sharma's contacts. However, changes in the administration may prevent future cooperation, and this will of course have a demoralising effect on the movement and the long-term impact on the space for a peoples' movement will be adversely affected. In addition, the movement establishes the united *gaon samaj* and the *gram sabha* as the supreme institution, but in villages where the *Panchayats* are not supportive, the Andolan creates an alternative *gram sabha* which in effect divides the *gaon samaj*. It also weakens and delegitimises the institution of *Panchayats* which have created space for the communities in the legal framework.

The movement is too heavily dependent on the personality of Dr. Sharma. For a vibrant and sustainable peoples' movement, this is not a healthy development. Due to this dependence, the movement has not been able to establish the second rung of leadership, the lack of which is detrimental to the movement. An intermediate line of leadership is essential for the success of any movement, and especially a peoples' movement where the weaknesses of lack of institutional structures can be offset by a strong line of leadership providing stability. Furthermore, a structured organisation has not been built and the nature of the movement remains sporadic and spontaneous. When faced with a long, drawn-out struggle, as the Andolan is, strong organisation becomes imperative. However, in accordance with the spontaneous character of the movement, the Andolan is spreading rapidly and often to entirely new territories. The spread to States like Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Orissa is a recent phenomenon. However, this rapid spread to places and regions where the ground has not been prepared for the movement is a threatening development. It is unfortunate that the Andolan has been unable to maintain its initial linkages with other social and peoples' movements and to some extent, the way in which the Andolan functions is responsible for this break. Finally, despite the claims, the Andolan is primarily limited to a particular geographical spread. The entire focus of the movement is on certain pockets of villages in the tribal areas of Madhya Pradesh and Bihar, and so in this sense, it is still at a very premature stage in the context of macro socio-political processes, although significant at the local level. The movement talks of peasants, workers and tribals as its constituency, however it has been able to make inroads only among the tribals, and this is emerging as a serious limitation of the Andolan.

3 Conclusions

The primary objective of the study was to understand the impact of social movements on the forest management space in Madhya Pradesh. The two case study organisations have demonstrated their potential to affect policies and programmes of the government. More importantly, the study clearly brings out the lacunae of the present forest management paradigm and presents an alternative paradigm of forest management, which according to both the movements is the only sustainable and acceptable solution. It is important to stress that this alternative paradigm has very clear merits for certain specific issues should not be ignored. Indeed, in a democratic society it becomes imperative to listen to this alternative perspective which is backed by a substantial mass base. Social movements are offering viable alternatives, but often due to the exigencies of a mass movement, much of them rely on rhetoric, therefore the need is to analyse further their demands and perspectives. However, the social movements are clearly able to identify the shortcomings of the contemporary discourses of forest management; apparently they do present a more viable, just, humane and sustainable paradigm for forest management. The solution may lie in finding common spaces and a constructive synthesis of the two alternatives.

Both Ekta Parishad and Bharat Jan Andolan have clearly stated views and perspectives on forest management and other issues. Their discourse has not been restricted to the theoretical level and concrete examples from the grassroots are available as evidence. Interestingly, on forest management and most of the other issues, the two movements have strikingly similar positions. They believe that forests and people cannot and should not be isolated from each other and that local communities have inalienable rights to local resources, including forests. To evolve a sustainable forest management system, which would protect and improve the quality of forests, only an integrated approach can work. In this the local communities should be the owners, not just partners. They also believe that the present system of forest management is responsible for felling and deforestation, and a paradigmatic shift is essential to reverse this process. The new framework should keep the people at the centre. The perspectives of both the movements in this respect also share similar concerns. Nevertheless, the movements are unique and take different paths on the operational level. It is beyond the scope of this research to compare the two movements, but Swamiji of Biswas Sanstha, Khariar road, who is widely respected in development circles and has worked with international NGOs such as Oxfam, pointed out that the two movements have strikingly similar goals but radically different functional and operational strategies. However this only makes the movements complementary to each other, implying that the two movements should come together and work in alliance to enhance their efficacy in fulfilling their objectives. Bharat Jan Andolan believes in creating a bang leading to spontaneous support for the Andolan, and it has been successful in doing so. However, it is unable to sustain such momentum due to its weak organisational capacity. Ekta Parishad, on the other hand, is extremely effective in organising and sustaining a peoples' movement. Working in alliance, Bharat Jan Andolan could initially create the space for a peoples' movement and then Ekta Parishad could work on that space to create a sustained and effective peoples' movement that sharply articulates the views and concerns of the underprivileged and marginalised.

The perspective of a social movement is essential to our understanding of complex problems such as those outlined in the study. These movements are able to demystify and present a comprehensive critique of the contemporary and mainstream paradigms. Significantly the movements also articulate the interests and concerns of the marginalised communities and people. Nevertheless, their perspective also needs to be evaluated with reference to certain specific concerns, of which environment is one. To conclude this study it would be pertinent to take note of two or three

critically important points. According to Dr. Vinayak Sen¹⁰, it is essential for sustainable forest management that forests are made economically viable units. The new model should be able to generate economic interests in the sustenance of forests, otherwise it will be difficult to save the forests. He says that the state and other institutions like banks should work for this. Ilina Sen¹¹ further adds that excluding humans from the forests is neither just nor sustainable; however the need is to develop material interests in the forests. She says that the demand for land for agriculture needs to be addressed and viable alternatives should be worked out. According to Shri S.C. Behar¹², who has had a very close association with the bureaucracy as well as the social movements and the NGOs of Madhya Pradesh, so far people have faith in only one model of food security, and that is through agriculture. He goes on to add that until alternatives are given to people, forest conservation will be a difficult issue. Most of the experts outside these peoples' movements agree that the state has to play a positive role in forest management, although it must drastically reorient and sensitise itself to peoples' needs and demands.

¹⁰ Dr. Sen works with developmental groups in Nagari Block.

¹¹ NGO functionary based at Raipur

¹² Former Chief Secretary of Madhya Pradesh and present adviser to the Chief Minister

Sources

The researcher spent time living with Ekta Parishad and Bharat Jan Andolan activists. The process of collecting information was continuous and ongoing. However, below are the names of key informants and persons interviewed for this research.

- Bharat Jan Andolan:
 - Dr B.D. Sharma
 - Ram Kumar
 - Ganpat
 - George Palli
 - Sunil (Sahyog Pustak Kutir)
 - Swamiji (Khariar Road)
- Ekta Parishad:
 - P.V. Rajgopal
 - Gautam Bandhopadhyay
 - Ratneshwar Nath
 - Kanta
 - Ramesh Sharma
 - Indu Netam
 - Rajesh Ranjan
 - Gokaran
 - Naresh
 - Babu
 - Ran Singh Parmar
 - Rahul Ramgundam (Jawaharlal Nehru University)
- Other key persons:
 - Dr Shukla (Lehar)
 - Dr Hiramath, Jan Vikas Andolan
 - Illina Sen, Roopantar
 - Dr Binayak Sen, Medical Doctor working on developmental issues
 - S.C. Behar, former Chief Secretary of Government of Madhya Pradesh
 - Prabhat Jha, Samarthan
 - John Samuel, National Center for Advocacy Studies
 - Basant, Gandhian activist from Bihar
 - Rakesh Nath Tiwari, Samarthan

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