

# People in Conservation

*Biodiversity Conservation and Livelihood Security*



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## Index

### Opening Words

- Guest Column
- Reflection
- Observation

### News and Information

- Gram sabhas pass resolution demanding cancellation of mining projects' in Gadchiroli district in Maharashtra
- Tribal leaders join hands to save tribal land in Maharashtra
- Tribal people are not backward: Oram
- Indian forests 'particularly vulnerable' to coal mining: report
- Odisha PVTG group moves OHRC over police excesses

### Signs of Hope

- Optimizing Women's assertion of Forest Rights: An Initiative from Odisha
- The Lesser known spirits

### Ideas don't die

- Remembering Dr. B. D. Sharma

## Opening Words

The Forest Rights Act (FRA) was enacted in 2006, but successive governments have never made adequate efforts to implement it. Rather things have been moving in the opposite direction. The NDA government has introduced two dangerous moves by declaring a cut-off date for claiming of rights and also to involve corporates in plantation activities in degraded forest areas. Both these steps are contrary to the original rules and provisions of the FRA as they endanger the rights of communities.

Social activists have pointed out that attempts were being made to dilute the Environment Law (Amendment) Bill 2015. Environment impact assessment and public hearings form the only basis for communities to participate in the development process and now this very right is being taken away from them. Such dilutions do not bode well for the future of the environmental and social movements.

It is no secret that the Scheduled Tribes and other Forest Dwellers, Recognition of Forest Rights Act, 2006 and the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 which were meant to transfer the rights over resources back to people have not been implemented. It is important to note that the comprehensive report of the high level committee (HLC) on the status of Adivasis submitted in 2014 says that the implementation of these Acts has been weak and ineffective, despite the provisions being promising.

Activists fear that the NDA government is keen to alter the spirit and basic features of these Acts. The fate of the altered Land Acquisition Act, 2013 is hanging in the legislature and the basic tenets of Forest Rights Act, 2006 are being diluted through executive orders to avoid being answerable to the people of the country. Earlier in July even as a parliamentary panel recommended that the TSR Subramanian report on revising and amending environment laws be scrapped, the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) pushed ahead with the creation of a framework based on the report's recommendations.<sup>1</sup>

On November 26, 1949, the Constitution Council signed and passed the Constitution of India. Sixty-six years after we gave ourselves this Constitution, the right to life and

dignity of India's indigenous peoples, the Adivasis, are being threatened not just by militarization and state violence but also by a failure of the nation to enforce the Constitutional Scheme contained in its Fifth and Sixth Schedules. So has India betrayed its Indigenous people?<sup>2</sup>

In this climate of despair it is quite easy to lose hope. But if one scans the horizon where struggles are being waged whether for implementation of the FRA, or against large dams or power projects - one sees that people are not about to give up. Recently hundreds of landless farmers, agricultural workers and laborers from across 20 States assembled at Jantar Mantar in Delhi on a joint platform 'Bhumi Adhikar Andolan' (Land Rights Movement) and observed December 15 (Forest Rights Day) as 'Chetavni Divas' — a day of challenge and warning. One may well ask, what is it about these people who don't stop struggling for a better, more Just and environmentally sustainable future? Is it empty hope or is there something more to it? I suspect that the one quality that those who struggle for a better world have in common, no matter what ideology they may individually adhere to, is courage. It is courage that enables them to, as the great Martin Luther King Jr said, "Carve a tunnel of hope through the dark mountain of disappointment". It is because they realize that "History will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people."

To the brave people who refuse to be silenced, this issue is dedicated.

**milind**

1. <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-government-hires-top-firms-to-implement-tsar-subramanian-report-on-environmental-laws-2124979>

2. <http://www.eyearcollective.com/has-india-betrayed-its-indigenous-peoples-the-adivasis/>

## Guest Column

### Restitution of Rights and Accountability in Conservation

Dr. Prakash Kashwan<sup>3</sup>

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Restitution of indigenous rights in forests and land are important means to addressing long-standing issues of justice and equity (Fay and James 2009; Sikor and Lund 2009). Restitution entails “rectifying past injustices by reinstating rights or providing alternative land where original landholders were evicted by war, conquest, forced collectivization, or other expropriation deemed unjust” (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2008). Forest and land rights recognized in this way are specific and encoded in the statute, which provides a sound legal basis in case such rights need to be pursued in a court of law. Restitution policies also often leverage international conventions and treaties, especially those related to indigenous rights (Colchester 2000). As opposed to forestry decentralization policies, which in most cases turn out to be acts of deconcentration, where “powers are devolved to appointees of the central government in the local arena” (Ribot et al. 2006, p. 1865; also see, Agrawal and Ribot 1999), restitution policies often entail much stronger rights, including full ownership of restituted properties in some cases. Consequently, forest restitution does create possibilities of deforestation and land use change (Fay and James 2009). However, longstanding research on forest conservation shows actual effects of a policy depend on a number of other covariates. Indeed, research from a large number of forest sites show that stronger rights are often associated with greater community benefits, which are often associated with lower deforestation (Chhatre and Agrawal 2009).

Restitution and effective realization of rights is a political affair, not just a technical matter of designing appropriate institutions and tenure arrangements. Marginalized groups need to fight for establishing the legitimacy of their rights within political and policy arenas (Webster and Engberg-Pedersen 2002). While policies on forest restitution in post-socialist countries triggered a pluralistic process of institutional realignment (Sikor et al. 2009), in post-apartheid South Africa restitution policies face formidable challenges from the conservation authorities (Steenkamp 2001; Kepe et al. 2005). The current generation of restitution reforms occur within two key contextual features not witnessed in earlier

rounds of comparable policy instruments, viz. land reforms: One, while government forest bureaucracies, many with significant colonial legacies (Peluso and Vandergeest 2001; Cooke 2003), have resisted reforms in the past, they are far stronger at this moment because of the global support for forest conservation programs, including protected-area based conservation (Brockington 2002). Privileging of nature conservation policies over other equally pressing societal goals, makes forestry agencies less accountable to democratic governments. Two, forestry decentralization policies offer strategic leverage to forest authorities interested in distracting attention away from restitution policies. Such a “Machiavellian scenario” (Brockington 2002, p. 132), allows the forest bureaucracies to obfuscate, or even deny, the facts of historical and continued dispossession of indigenous communities.

### India's Forest Rights Act: Restituting Rights Democratizing Forest Governance

Adivasis, literally, ‘original inhabitants,’ constitute 8.4% of India's population, and roughly a quarter of the estimated total population of indigenous people worldwide. While the history of India's adivasi communities differs significantly from the native Indian communities of the Americas (Beteille 1998; Karlsson 2003; Baviskar 2007), in so far as Indian government refers in its official documents to the ‘historical injustice’ meted out to the adivasis, and recognizes adivasis’ customary rights to forests and forestlands (MoEF 2004), the present discussion falls squarely in the domain of the ‘UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous People’ of 2007 (Springate-Baginski and Blaikie 2007). In 2004, the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF)<sup>4</sup> acknowledged the problem (MoEF 2004):

“Even after independence in 1947...consolidation of government forests continued...However, no effective steps were taken to simultaneously settle the rights of tribals and other forests dwellers. Absence of records of rights which never existed for these people, becomes the main constraint in resolving this issue. As a result, the rural people, especially tribals and forest dwellers who have been living in the forest since time immemorial, have come to be erroneously looked upon as encroachers of forest lands.”

In addition, India also maintains 156,934 sq. km. of forest area under a network of 90 national parks

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4. The name of the ministry has changed since the NDA came to power in 2014. It is now called Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC).



and 501 wildlife sanctuaries sought to be managed as exclusive nature reserves (GOI 2005). Most of these protected areas have been reserved since India's independence in 1947, exacerbating conflicts between forest departments and the communities living in and around these protected areas.

According to the ministry's response to a parliamentary query, between May 2002 and March 2004 it evicted 152,400 hectares of forestland cultivations (Bijoy 2008, citing Lok Sabha Starred Question No. 284, dated August 16, 2004). In particularly grotesque instances, forest departments and police personnel reportedly fired at tribal women and children in the state of Uttar Pradesh (Dreze 2005), and used elephants to crush mud-thatch dwellings of adivasis in the states of Maharashtra and Assam (CSD 2004). Given this context, when India's United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, supported by left parties, came to power in 2004, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh instructed the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, not the MoEF, to draft a comprehensive legislation on the subject (Asher and Agarwal 2007).

The legislation introduced to remedy these historical injustices, the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (popularly known as, and henceforth, the Forest Rights Act - FRA) is among one of the few legislations around the world that integrates the goals of conservation and community livelihoods (Lele 2009). The act is aimed at "address(ing) the long standing insecurity of tenurial and access rights" of forest dwellers (GOI 2006). FRA recognizes household land rights, which have been under sedentary cultivation for a long time, but were erroneously included within boundaries of public forestlands. By also recognizing community rights to forests and forest conservation, the FRA is an attempt to address concerns of restitution measures leading to increasing deforestation (Dorondel 2009). The FRA also contains important procedural rights; Gram Sabha, the assembly of all adults in a village as per the statute on local governance, to deliberate upon and make recommendations about the legitimacy of land and forest rights (Bijoy 2008). Despite the importance of FRA for simultaneous pursuit of social justice and conservation, the ideology of exclusionary conservation complicated the political dynamics preceding and following the promulgation of FRA.

### **Why do forestry agencies and wildlife activists oppose the FRA?**

MoEF's reaction to the Prime Minister's initiative was surprisingly combative; it argued that the act

would "destroy India's forest land, and failure on the development front should not be compensated by gifting away the country's forest heritage" (Ganapathy 2005; emphasis added). This was clearly a misrepresentation of the proposed bill as it was aimed at recognizing existing cultivations, and, therefore, would not involve any deforestation by design. Moreover, in the affidavit that MoEF filed in the Supreme Court of India in July 2004, the ministry argued against the apprehensions articulated by some conservation groups that recognition of forestland rights could lead to deforestation (MoEF 2004): "....it should be understood clearly that the lands occupied by the tribals in forest areas do not have any forest vegetation.... [The MoEF circulars were meant] to remedy a serious historical injustice. It will also significantly lead to better forest conservation." Yet when the FRA was introduced, the ministry and the state forest departments continued to oppose FRA. The documents from the Prime Minister's Office accessed by researchers stated: "The Ministry of Environment and Forests is trying to consciously sabotage the Tribal Rights bill which is for the basic survival rights of the poorest section of society" (Rajshekhar 2009, p. 31).

One probable reason for MoEF's opposition to FRA is potentially linked to territoriality (Sikor and Lund 2009; Fay 2009), i.e. the fear of losing control over a part of 23 percent of the country's geographical area that is presently under the jurisdiction of the ministry. Demands by MoEF officials for a greater share in the federal budget, and a greater say in policy making, are often made by citing its supervision over such a vast territory (GOI 2006a). Some of the state forest department officials were also worried that following in the footsteps of the disinvestment of public sector industrial units, some of them may be given "voluntary retirements." (Interview, Range Forest Office, and 12 August 2009). That the MoEF and its various arms responsible for wildlife conservation do not rely on an objective assessment of FRA's impact on wildlife conservation is evident in a number of ways. First, while there might have been a genuine fear that the FRA would lead to opportunistic land claims and deforestation, these fears have been found to be misplaced; extensive survey of media report and the compilation of data about FRA land claims, at national, state, district, sub-divisions, and village levels, shows that the FRA has not led to large number of opportunistic land claims (Kashwan 2013). Even so, neither the MoEF nor the forestry agencies have acknowledged these facts, let alone introduce appropriate changes the ministry's position vis-à-vis the FRA.

In a recent press release international indigenous rights advocacy group Survival International revealed that

between 2010 and 2014 the tiger population in the BRT Tiger Reserve in Karnataka state almost doubled, from 35 to 68.<sup>5</sup> Noticeably, BRT is the first reserve in India where local resident adivasis (Soligas) won the right to stay according to the provisions of the FRA. Survival claimed that the Indian National Tiger Conservation authority tried to suppress this information because it discredits government policy to create exclusionary tiger reserves, which displace and dispossess local residents. Arguably then, the forestry agencies' and officials' opposition of the FRA is linked mainly, if not exclusively, to the territorial interests of these agencies and officials in continuing to control territories of state forests and protected areas.

The pressure created by FRA activists and the real alternatives that the FRA presents for India's forest governance have prompted the MoEF and forest department to rediscover the much acclaimed Joint Forest Management (JFM) program. However, such moves come across as extremely cynical attempts to avoid having to recognize the much stronger rights that the FRA provides (Kashwan 2013).<sup>6</sup> Even as field research suggested that JFM contributed to the regeneration of native and planted species (ibid.), state forest departments continued to undermine the autonomy of JFM committees and the federations of JFM committees in various states (Kashwan 2015).<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the Indian delegations at international negotiations for climate change strategically invoke the imagery of thousands of communities protecting millions of hectares of public forests (MoEF 2004a), as if the MoEF and forestry agencies are genuinely interested in promoting community-based forest conservation. Unfortunately, wildlife conservation groups have also tended to not confront the apparently misplaced priorities of government forestry and wildlife agencies. Instead, they often take "the path of least resistance," hoping that somehow they can leverage the state's exclusionary control over forests in favor of conservation (Cerneja and Schmidt-Soltan 2006). Such hopes have proved in vain, as one of the prominent tiger activists has acknowledged in a recent book (Thapar 2015). Despite the recognition of the failures of exclusionary conservation, new proposals by wildlife activists often tend to rely on a combination

of expert-led conservation strategies that seek to involve local communities imagined in the avatar of noble savages (Sylvain 2014; De Bont 2015). Such sugarcoating of entrenched inequalities and injustice in populist slogans are unlikely to serve the cause of conservation.

## Conclusion

Ongoing debates in India about the means and ends of conservation and comparative examination of similar policies in countries with very different political context shows that political empowerment of forest-dependent people is likely to improve accountability of policymaking, which is closely tied to the success of wildlife and forest conservation. Promoting enduring and just conservation requires addressing two fundamental issues: first, the dominant discourses of exclusionary conservation need to give way to a more inclusionary and Just vision of conservation; second, the top down efforts of wildlife conservation groups that rely on state control of forests and forestland must give way to interventions that aid politically mobilized groups of citizens capable of holding government agencies and officials to account. Accountability of conservation agencies and actors is arguably the most important pre-requisite for legitimizing and sustaining biodiversity and wildlife conservation.

## References

The full list of references cited above is available at [goo.gl/Ub9iGq](http://goo.gl/Ub9iGq).

## Reflection

### Environmental Justice in a Land of Sacred Animals Dr. Felix Padel<sup>8</sup>

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The issues of tribal rights and conservation of ecosystems need to be seen as fundamentally interdependent. Conservationists tend to understand better than anyone the long-term processes of deforestation and erosion of ecosystems; but when they make corporate deals that involve moving Adivasis out of sanctuaries and adjoining areas where they have long lived in symbiosis

5. Survival International, "Revealed: Tiger numbers INCREASE when tribe stays in tiger reserve." December 9, 2015. <http://www.survivalinternational.org/news/11004>
6. A full-text of the article is available at [https://www.academia.edu/1958733/The\\_Politics\\_of\\_Rights-based\\_Approaches\\_in\\_Conservation\\_Land\\_Use\\_Policy\\_2013\\_](https://www.academia.edu/1958733/The_Politics_of_Rights-based_Approaches_in_Conservation_Land_Use_Policy_2013_)
7. Some scholars suggest that the performance of JFM has been much better on account of community empowerment in the state of Andhra Pradesh (see, Fleischman 2012).

8. Currently visiting Professor at JNU; author of many books and articles, including 'Ecology, Economy: Quest for a Socially Informed Connection' (with Ajay Dandekar and Jeemol Unni, 2013). The author may be contacted via email [felixshmr@gmail.com](mailto:felixshmr@gmail.com)

with nature, they alienate their best allies. When people in positions of power speak of 'environmentalism as a road block to development', it is clear that the common enemy of both indigenous communities and sensitive ecosystems is the ideology of money-based development that is actually destroying both. Indigenous cultures, like mountains, rivers and forests, developed over many centuries, and represent prime examples that we need to learn from of living in symbiosis with nature, which means setting limits to what we take from nature, based on understanding nature's processes of regeneration.

The Dongria movement to prevent Vedanta mining Niyamgiri's bauxite-capped summits is a classic example of this symbiosis. In the words of a Dongria woman, 'We need the mountain, and the mountain needs us'. As Lado Sikoka— a key Dongria leader and spokesman, speaking at the Belamba Public Hearing near Lanjigarh in 2009 put this – 'People say there's crores of money on top of Niyamgiri. It's not money up there, it's our Maa-Baap, and we'll fight to defend her. It's as if the demons of mythology have come back to life in the form of these companies.'

Odia text books describe Odisha as very poor, but 'rich in minerals' which are 'lying unutilised' – the implication being that as soon as they can be extracted, the state will become rich. A terrible fallacy, when one understands how the mining industry works by extracting profits that are always distributed through a ruthless hierarchy, leaving mining areas as impoverished wastelands. India's poorest areas are those where mining is happening or has happened (Rich Lands Poor People, CSE 2008).

By contrast, Dongria understand that their mountains are sources of water, and therefore of life. Once mined, their life-giving power is destroyed – a fact clearly visible in the desiccated landscape around Panchpat Mali, the mountain in Koraput district where Nalco works India's biggest bauxite mine, where local Adivasis testify that perennial streams have dried up. Dongria have maintained over centuries a taboo on cutting trees on their mountain summits, understanding how this enhances their life-giving waters. 'Taboo' is a word that came into English from the Maori and Polynesian languages, in which Tapu means 'sacred' as well as taboo. The word epitomizes the restraint that tribal cultures exercise against taking too much from nature.

Scientifically, the aluminum in bauxite bonds with rain water as it falls during the monsoon, which the bauxite deposits on the mountain-tops hold like a sponge, as a source of perennial streams. This is why every bauxite-capped mountain in Odisha and Andhra has its own movement of Adivasis prepared to die, like Lado,

defending their mountains. The minerals up there are not lying unutilised: they play a vital role in the ecosystem. Many people understand how India's water situation is badly affected by industry taking too much and polluting rivers, by dams and over-use of groundwater. We also need to understand the vital role of mountains as sources of the country's streams and rivers. Movements against excessive mining are not 'anti-development' at all. They are safeguarding the ecosystems that life depends on for future generations.

Recent moves by the Orissa Mining Corporation, on behalf of Vedanta Resources, to mine the neighboring mountain of Khandual Mali, near Karlapat - even petitioning the Environment Ministry to re-open the possibility of mining Niyamgiri, despite the Supreme Court mandated Gram Sabhas in 2013, where Adivasis and Dalits voted unanimously against mining – are sinister in the extreme. The Kond Adivasis around Khandual Mali have expressed determination not to allow mining there; and the forest between Karlapat and Niyamgiri represents one of the last full expanses in central Odisha, with elephants and other apex species.

Among hundreds of similar movements in India right now, we should mention movements to protect several other remaining areas of superbly forested mountains which steel companies want to mine for iron ore: the Khandadhara range in north Odisha, Raoghat range in Kanker district of Chhattisgarh, and Saranda Forest in Jharkhand. Vast and vital conflicts over coal mining, in these three states as well as the Singrauli region of MP, also hold millions of lives in the balance, now and in India's future.

We all know about murders by the sand-mining and cement industry mafias, in Gujarat, MP and other states, and movements by communities throughout the country to put a stop to the depredations of these entities. From displacement of Santhals in Birbhum district, West Bengal, where stone crushers are invading tribal landscapes, to Kerala and Tamil Nadu, today's construction boom is based on devastating the ecosystems that life depends on. Critical economists such as Amit Bhaduri highlight the worsening poverty associated with a high GDP, and economists need to take a much stronger stand, pointing out the inevitable crash that follows high investment pouring into a country to loot its resources. When the debt bubble crashes, who will take care of millions of subsistence farmers presently losing their food and water security?

The issue of dams remains critical too. Was the Polavaram movement, against a monster dam threatening a population of over 2 lakhs with displacement,

undermined by a secret deal allowing the formation of Telengana? It is painfully clear that political parties that supported the movement at first withdrew their support over the years, leaving countless numbers of families to face the slow agony of dispossession. Thousands of Adivasis over the border in south Chhattisgarh have demonstrated against renewed plans for the Bodhghat project on the Indravati that would destroy some of the last pristine river ecosystems in peninsular India, as well as Adivasi livelihoods, again in the interests of steel companies.

In the Northeast, the dams issue is crucial. The Agartala and Dimapur declarations in February and May 2013 asserted the rights of local communities to decide how their natural resources are used. Dams in Sikkim, Arunachal, Assam and Manipur are all strongly opposed to by local communities, who understand the real costs of these dams far better than most politicians, who are affected by the 'MoU virus' based on advance payments by construction and power companies, including large bribes. Dawa Lepcha, an elder who has been part of a relay-fast against the Teesta dams, commented in 2009, 'The entire Teesta river is being tunneled. The main river of Sikkim is disappearing. Is this development?'

Similarly with plans for new nuclear power plants, at Jaitapur (Maharashtra), in Gujarat, MP, West Bengal and Andhra. The death these spread, and the economic as well as environmental madness and deception at the heart of the nuclear industry, fuel movements against new power plants that are unstoppable. How much power does the country truly need?

Real development would mean the transformation of decision-making processes leading to empowerment of local communities, and harmonization between priorities of the economy with those of ecology. As a Muslim fisherman belonging to coastal Kachchh, asked me recently, "Why can't people bringing coal from Australia, blackening our land and polluting our seas, understand that they're ripping the entrails out of Mother Earth?" The sacredness of Mother Earth, Flowing Water, Elephants, Bears, Monkeys, Tigers and other elements of nature is an ancient tradition in India. Our decision-makers need to listen to this tradition and the communities who still stand by it at the grassroots.

## Observation

### Women as centres of power

Shruti Ajit<sup>9</sup>

In recent times, with a major shift in the conservation circles towards a more decentralized and participatory form of governance, women are still finding ways to be included into the decision making bodies. In India, the 73<sup>rd</sup> and the 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments in the Constitution ensured that 33% of seats at various levels of Panchayati Raj Institutions are reserved for women. Apart from this, the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 [otherwise called the Forest Rights Act (FRA)], is an important piece of legislation under which women are given equal rights over forest resources, on par with men. In order to ensure inclusiveness, the FRA also includes a section on Community Forest Rights (CFR)<sup>10</sup> which provides rights to communities to govern, protect and regulate access to forest resources. This acknowledgement of women as equal stakeholders in managing and accessing the 'commons' is important. The Act also paves the way to ensure that women have equal access to resources, specifically land titles given in the form of joint titling. The CFRs have also led to several women coming forward to provide their time and energy to conserve forests by forming patrolling groups<sup>11</sup> that keep an eye on the forests to prevent any misuse of resources they provide. These provision is a significant move towards gender equity in the otherwise restricted access to land rights that women in India enjoy.<sup>12</sup>

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9. Shruti is currently working on the Community Forest Rights-Learning and Advocacy(CFR-LA) process. You can mail her at shrutiajit16@gmail.com
  10. Section 5 of the Forest Rights Act states that "The holders of any forest right, Gram Sabha and village level institutions in areas where there are holders of any forest right under this Act are empowered to –
    - (a) protect the wildlife, forest and biodiversity
    - (b) Ensure that adjoining catchment areas, water sources and other ecological sensitive areas are adequately protected
    - (c) ensure that the habitat of forest dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers is preserved from any form of destructive practices affecting their cultural and natural heritage
    - (d) ensure that the decisions taken in the Gram Sabha to regulate access to community forest resources and stop any activity which adversely affects the wild animals, forests and the biodiversity are complied with..."
  11. Please see: SAVING FORESTS: WOMEN SENTINELS OF GUNDURIBADI?, Sonali Patnaik [HTTP://WWW.VIKALPSANGAM.ORG/ARTICLE/SAVING-FORESTS-WOMEN-SENTINELS-OF-GUNDURIBADI/#.VOTM-1R941I](http://www.vikalpsangam.org/article/saving-forests-women-sentinels-of-gunduribadi/#.VOTM-1R941I)
  12. Although the Hindu Succession Act, 1956, states that a woman could inherit land, yet socio-cultural structures seldom let a woman claim her portion of the inheritance that should have been rightfully hers.



Despite these provisions women continue to struggle, for access to their resources, for a place in the decision making institutions, for inclusion in the overall governance structure - the process which was initially termed as "participatory". Thus an institutional fix while being necessary, may not be sufficient to address the unequal gendered forms of decision making especially with regards to forest governance.

### Problems of an Institutional Fix in Forest Governance

The implementation of a progressive Act like the FRA, with Community Conservation and decentralization lying at its core is not fully realized due to what Bina Agarwal, calls 'Participatory exclusions'<sup>13</sup>. While she conducted her case-study at the level of participants in the Joint Forest Committees (JFM), her observations hold true for CFR committees and the Gram Sabhas formed under the FRA as well. The term 'participatory exclusions' is the phenomenon in which certain sections of the community are excluded from the decision making process within the context of participatory institutions. While participatory form of development is jargon that has been used by international agencies and civil society since 1980s as an ideal/ model for decentralization and citizenship,<sup>14</sup> this model has been under constant criticism due to its failures (which occur due to external factors - social or political in nature).

Agarwal categorizes these forms of exclusions into five - nominal, passive, consultative, activity specific and active and interactive.<sup>15</sup> These gradations reflect the levels of participation of women within these institutions. Although they may be present for listening or for the sake of membership, when it comes to the decision-making process, women's inputs are seldom taken into account. This is seen specifically in cases of financial decisions.

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13. Agarwal, B. (2001). Participatory Exclusion, Community Forestry and Gender: An Analysis for South Asia and a Conceptual Framework. *World Development*, 29 (10), 1623-1648.

14. Hickey, S., & Mohan, G. (2005). Relocating Participation within a Radical Politics of Development. *Development and Change*, 36 (2), 237-262.

15. Nominal refers to participation where you become a member but are never involved in any processes involved. Passive takes place when women attend the meetings but are just silent spectators in the democratic processes. Consultative is where women are approached for opinions with respect to a particular issue or for the purpose of decision making, yet most of the times these opinions are never seen of utmost importance and are overlooked at the time the decisions are made. Activity based as the name suggest is where women are asked to be involved in the community governance pertaining to specific activity and nothing beyond that. The last one, active and interactive is something that is rarely found. But places where women are active participants and have their opinions considered while decision are being made, is where the participatory form of development achieves its goal of inclusiveness and resting on the values of citizenship.

Most of the time, women's participation is put in the first four categories where they are just passive stakeholders, often shying away from the decision making processes. From just attending the meeting or becoming a mere member of the Gram Sabha to becoming participants in specific activities, their role does not transcend the 'deliberative democratic process'. In an interview with some women from Gadchiroli district in the state of Maharashtra (these interviews took place when they were participating in the national consultation on women & FRA, in Bhutaleshwer, Odisha, in Sept.15) about how active they are involved in the activities of their Gram Sabha, most of them responded as being in the third category that Agarwal talks about, which is that of the consultative position. They say that they often take part in the meetings, putting forth their experiences and opinions as an anchor for coming to a conclusive decision, yet it is the men who take the final decision.

There are several case-studies and news reports that put forth the prevalent situation in most villages which have a female Sarpanch. Women are often treated as proxies by their male relatives or spouses to become the female Sarpanch based on reservations.<sup>16</sup> While she becomes the head, her bother/father/husband is the one who ends up calling the shots. While everyone is aware of who really is wielding the power, this practice continues to dominate the rural landscape. Thus a policy that was meant to empower women is now further desecrated through mechanisms of gendered power and politics.

A step towards the improvement of women's participation in forest governance was the appointing of female forest guards. Unfortunately, cases have come to light, wherein female guards have had to face discrimination from their male counterparts in the forest department. Apart from this, interviews seem to confirm the fact that appointing women guards in the departments has not really fixed any conflicts that remain between the locals and the bureaucracy.

Land rights being given to women in the form of joint titles are a progressive move. However this becomes a setback because these women cannot then apply for individual claims due to misinterpretation of the act by authorities. Moreover, joint titling does not hold for single mothers (women who have separated from their partners but have not been formally recognized) or in some

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16. Uttara Chaudhuri, M. S. (2015). Women as Proxies in Politics: Decision Making and Service Delivery in Panchayati Raj. *Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy*, 1-3. Retrieved from <http://www.thehinducentre.com/thearena/currentissues/article7761306.ece?css=print>



cases where the women have had multiple husbands. Another drawback is that more often than not, women are unaware that it was a joint title and that she had every right to the claim .

Lastly, social structures often stop women from participating in the institutions of democratic processes. Often in villages, women become silent spectators because of the patriarchal construct that prevails. They are pushed into the background in the context of “rearing the cattle”, “feeding the child” or “working in the fields” – which is of bigger importance than participating in the sabhas or meetings! Women themselves feel that the men of their houses will represent their voice, but how often is a women-centric issue taken up by these local institutions, is a matter worth studying.

Forest governance with respect to decentralised mechanisms will work only if inputs from everyone are taken into account. While we have seen examples of institutional fixes of installing female Sarpanchs and issuing joint titles for ensuring land rights for women, these solutions will only be successful if external factors like the social structure and the equations of politics and power are also considered. There have been several cases where women’s active participation has led to better forest management and conservation. A woman in a leadership position without becoming a proxy for someone else has, in several studies, shown a better rate of service delivery and unbiased conflict resolution. These success stories should be shared at every level (government organisations, civil society, Gram Sabhas), with villages far and wide, so that women find inspiration and motivation to step up for active participation in decision making bodies, and question existing social structures. Furthermore, there should be gender sensitisation in the bureaucracy which will then encourage more women to join male dominated offices like the Forest Department and also help in engaging with the village communities. The institutional fix aims to make space for teams of women to work hand in hand, for they have an equal or sometimes even a higher stake in their forests.



## News and Information

### **Gram sabhas pass resolution demanding cancellation of mining projects’ in Gadchiroli district in Maharashtra**

Representatives of 259 gram sabhas of the Gadchiroli district in eastern Maharashtra have passed a resolution demanding cancellation of all mining projects here, claiming that it is destroying places of worship of tribal peoples and impacting the environment adversely. The resolution was passed unanimously at the district level meeting of gram sabhas held at Girola village in the district. The gram sabhas also demanded abolition of Police Act, 1880, which they termed as “anti-tribal”.

Several other important resolutions were also passed that included demand for effective implementation of PESA (Panchayat Extension to Schedule Areas) Act, that for all pending claims of forest lands to be cleared immediately and titles to ownership of such land to be handed over to land holders under Forest Rights Act, 2006, and habitat rights to Madiya Gond population be accorded at the earliest, it said.

**Source:** [http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/gram-sabhas-pass-resolution-demanding-mining-proj-cancellation-115121800293\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/gram-sabhas-pass-resolution-demanding-mining-proj-cancellation-115121800293_1.html)

### **Tribal leaders join hands to save tribal land in Maharashtra**

On September 2, 2015, tribal leaders from the Congress and the NCP came together to save tribal land. Former NCP minister and working president of Akhil Bhartiya Adivasi Vikas Parishad Madhukar Pichad led a 50-member delegation of tribal leaders to the Governor of Maharashtra and demanded that tribal lands be protected at all cost. They also demanded that no new castes/communities be included in the Scheduled Tribes, that Kelkar Committee recommendations regarding separate tribal districts be implemented, that land belonging to tribals be protected under Forest Rights Act, that scheduled areas for tribals be re-organized, creating autonomous districts under Schedule VI of the Constitution, etc.

Talking to reporters later, Pichad said that the State government is contemplating to bring introduction of a new policy which would make sale of tribal lands to non-tribals easier and all the tribal leaders are against the change. “We strongly oppose this. The Constitutional

provisions and various rulings of the Supreme Court have directed the Centre and the State governments to safeguard the lands of tribals," he added.

**Source:** <http://www.freepressjournal.in/tribal-leaders-join-hands-to-save-tribal-land/>

### **Tribal people are not backward: Oram**

A three-day student parliament to discuss issues concerning Northeastern and tribal students, as well as girl-students was inaugurated in New Delhi on October 1, 2015 by union Tribal Affairs Minister Jual Oram.

Students from different universities across the country participated in the event that aimed at changing the perception of people about themselves and initiating government action for their welfare. "People doing studies or surveys on tribal people fail to understand how to define tribal. All tribes do not come under the schedule caste (SC), schedule tribe (ST) or other backward caste (OBC) categories or ask for reservation. People living in cities have developed a wrong image of them," Oram said.

Underlining the need to set up more educational institutes in tribal areas, the minister said that tribal students had the highest dropout rate at school level which was worrisome. Oram cautioned the students to not lose their cultural identity, "UNESCO shared their concern over 24 tribal dialects that are on the verge of extinction in India. Our department is now trying to restore those lexicon, culture and tradition in the records. But, this is not good for any state or diverse country like India. We have to assimilate our culture and have to pass it to other people and generations," he said.

**Source:** <http://www.thestatesman.com/news/delhi/tribal-people-are-not-backward-oram/94101.html>

### **Indian forests 'particularly vulnerable' to coal mining: report**

Forest areas across the globe, larger in size than a country like Portugal, is at risk from coal mining, with five countries, including India, being "particularly vulnerable", according to a new report.

The report, "Double Jeopardy: Coal's threat to Forests" by forests and rights NGO Fern said "India and Colombia, coal mining threatens more than 250,000 hectares (over 617,763 acres) of forest which is equivalent of 400,000 football fields."

The report claims that granting land rights to forest communities can keep forests standing and coal in the ground. It cites the case of India, where the Forest Rights Act (FRA) has been a vital safeguard against wiping out forests for coal, notably in the struggle between the UK company Essar and the Indian government on the one hand and local tribal people on the other, over the former's plans for an open cast coal mine in the Mahan forest in Madhya Pradesh.

It said that burning coal and destroying forests both release carbon into the atmosphere. So when forests are cleared for coal mines the threat to the planet intensifies.

**Source:** <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/indian-forests-particularly-vulnerable-to-coal-mining-report/articleshow/50044163.cms>

### **Odisha PVTG group moves OHRC over police excesses**

The Dongria Kondh adivasis, a PVTG people, alleged that an anti-mining movement leader, Drika Kadraka, committed suicide due to harassment by the local police. They alleged that they were being subjected to mental and physical harassment by the police and are being targeted by the State Government since they are continuing their fight against mining.

Taking a serious view of this matter the Odisha Human Rights Commission (OHRC) has directed the Chief Secretary and Kalahandi-Bolangir-Koraput (KBK) Chief Administrator and Home Secretary to submit their replies within six weeks.

The commission's direction came after around 100 members of the Dongria Kondh community, under the banner of Niyamgiri Surakhshya Samiti, submitted a petition at the OHRC alleging that the Rayagada Police has resorted to rights violation of the indigenous people since they continue to oppose mining in Niyamgiri hills.

**Source:** <http://prameyanews7.com/en/dec2015/odisha/8631/Odisha-PVTG-group-moves-OHRC-over-police-excesses-Odisha-PVTG-Odisha.htm>

### **KVASU to launch project for tribal people**

The Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (KVASU) will soon implement 'Wayanad 2030', a comprehensive project conceptualized during a workshop held at the university headquarters in November 2012. The project will be launched in select tribal settlements and Model Residential Schools (MRS) in the what district.

The three-year project is aimed at livelihood enhancement of tribal settlements in the district through need-based package of inputs. "The project also envisages food, economic and nutritional security of the tribal population, strategies to increase the enrolment ratio among students in higher education sector, and socio-educational development through teachers' training programmes as well as educational awareness schemes for parents," said B. Ashok, Vice Chancellor of KVASU.

**Source:** <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/kvasu-to-launch-project-for-tribespeople/article7644215.ece>



## Signs of Hope

### Optimizing Women's assertion of Forest Rights: An Initiative from Odisha

Women play a critical role in the conservation and management of forest resources simultaneously deriving their livelihood from the forest. In the context of India, Agarwal<sup>17</sup> (1994) mentioned that women's rights under forest tenure reform are not given priority and which resulted in discrimination within the family due to inheritance laws and alienation of rights and control over property. Further an extensive study undertaken by Bose<sup>18</sup> (2011) among the Bhil community of Rajasthan revealed that the Bhil women have low level of on ground participation vis-a-vis control over, formulation of rules relating to the forest management and its commercial exploitation despite them having the maximum work relating to conservation and management of the forest.

In time of socio-political change, the question still persist, can tribal women independently own forest? To address this question, Forest Rights Act 2006 (FRA) mandated for participation of forest dependent people especially women in political decision making regarding their various affairs and is critical for their social as well as economic wellbeing.

### Empowering provisions for women under the Forest Right Act 2006:

- ✓ Section 2(g) of the act provides for the **full and unrestricted participation of women** in Gramsabha (village council meeting).
  - ✓ Rule 4 (2) provides that "The quorum of the Gram Sabha meeting shall be not less than one-half of all members of such Gram Sabha: **Provided that at least one-third of the members present shall be women**
  - ✓ Rule 3 (1) provides that **not less than 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the members of the FRC shall be women**
  - ✓ Rule 5 (c) requires that **at least one of the three PRI members** nominated to the Sub Division Level Committee shall be a woman.
  - ✓ Similarly, Rule 7 (c) requires that out of the three members of the district Panchayat to be nominated to the District Level Committee by the district Panchayat, **at least one shall be a woman.**
- Section 4 (4)** - title issued jointly in the name of both the spouses and title in the name of a single headed household.

17. AGARWAL, B. 1994. Gender, resistance and land-interlinked struggles over resources and meanings in South-Asia. Journal of Peasant Studies

18. See: [http://www.cifor.org/publications/pdf\\_files/articles/ACIFOR1104.pdf](http://www.cifor.org/publications/pdf_files/articles/ACIFOR1104.pdf)



Women have by-and-large been denied a role in the decision-making policies affecting the natural environment upon which they rely so heavily (Coleman, 2013). There are few major issues<sup>19</sup> :

- Lack of awareness regarding the role of women in the implementation of FRA 2006,
- Social pressures and power dynamics leading to lack of confidence among the women in the community,
- Recognition of rights without proper verification and demarcation of land, titles not conferred in the name of women etc.

Understanding the above-mentioned issues, led Vasundhara to formulate an approach that can truly bring women into the rights assertion scenario. Hence, emerged a process bringing together the various stakeholders who can contribute towards empowering the women hailing from the forest dependent communities.

### **SAMBHAVANA: Empowering Women in Right Based Framework**

In the above context, a programme named "SAMBHAVANA" was designed. SAMBHAVANA fosters the possibility of action by women by generating an awareness in them about women's role in the assertion of land rights and the necessity of their participation in pre-and-post claim processes under the Forest Rights Act 2006. SAMBHAVANA was first initiated in the district of Kandhamal in collaboration with the district administration.

There is special reference to FRA provisions for women and their role in relation to ensuring the triple ideal of tenure rights, ecological rights and livelihood security. The dialogue and consultations through SAMBHAVANA were aimed at leading to a process of networking and federation building amongst the women groups which can create enabling spaces for the groups to work towards achieving legal recognition of forest rights of women. This process links up with the earlier process of networking at the state level which had formed a state level group of women leaders and organizations to work on this issue. The process of consultations and federation building will go hand in hand with a participatory process of documentation of the status of FRA with specific focus on women and their participation and case-studies highlighting impact of the FRA process on women. As a result of Vasundhara's continuous engagement in Jamjhari G.P. of Kandhamal District, where women along with the men were engaged in creating forest fire controlling mechanism in the previous year resulting in regeneration of the forests, many women have emerged as community

19. See: <http://indiatogether.org/sentinels-of-gunduribadi-women>

resource persons spreading across the message about the importance of women's participation in assertion of rights under FRA and also strengthening their role in effective management of forest. And this process in being replicated in other districts of Odisha.

As a collaborative approach, Vasundhara along with other state based organizations working towards the right of women and FRA, organized a National Level Consultation<sup>20</sup> in the month of September, 2015 at Bhubaneswar (Odisha) where participants across 6 states of Odisha namely, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Jharkhand and Andhra Pradesh including some eminent groups like Ekal Nari Sanghathan<sup>21</sup> and WGWLO<sup>22</sup> came together and shared information on the challenges<sup>23</sup> women have been facing in terms of FRA. Some of the issues shared are:

- Rights not being conferred in the name of women,
- Passive participation of women in gram sabha due to socio-cultural pressures,
- Lack of representation of women in Gram sabha, SDLC and DLC,
- Implementing agencies insensitive towards the rights of women under FRA.

(Women participating in mapping exercise for determination of their forest rights. Kandhamal Photo: Sonali Pattnaik\_Vasundhara 2014)



(G.P. level meeting under SAMBHAVANA at Jamjhari G.P. where women title holders, women FRC & PRI members & ITDA officials participated. Photo: Vasundhara\_2014)

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20. See: <http://www.orissadiary.com/CurrentNews.asp?id=61822>

21. See: <http://www.strongwomenalone.org/>

22. See: <http://www.wgwlo.org/>

23. See: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289534063\\_Report\\_on\\_National\\_Consltation\\_-\\_Women\\_Forests\\_Forest\\_Rights\\_India?ev=prf\\_pub](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289534063_Report_on_National_Consltation_-_Women_Forests_Forest_Rights_India?ev=prf_pub)

## The Lesser known spirits

In the Satluj valley of Himachal Pradesh, in Karsog tehsil of Mandi District lies a small picturesque village called Nanj. Nanj is home to Nek Ram Sharma. Nek Ramji, as we know this gentle demeanoured middle aged man with salt and pepper hair and resolute eyes, is a farmer with a deep respect and commitment for his people and the environment. And it is with this motivation alone that he started his journey first with being part of Rashtriya Saksharta Mission and later Himachal Gyan Vigyan Samiti, spreading the message for people to look critically at blindbeliefs in their day-to-day cultural and social lives. As a farmer he turned to organic agriculture early on, always critical of the chemical inputs and seeds pushed by the government. This was the late 80s and 90s.

More than 30 years on, this crusader has come a long way motivating several youth, women and men from his own village and neighbouring villages with several transformative initiatives dealing with both constructive and resistance work. In collaboration with Millet India Network (MINI) today Nek Ram is working on millet based bio-diverse agriculture with farmers of 25 villages in the Karsog Tehsil. With the active participation of local villagers and field level forest department staff he started a conservation initiative in more than 20 villages, converting stretches of Chir Pine forests to Oak jungles, the most famous being Ban-Banauni. Says Rahul Saxena of Lok Vigyan Kendra which was extending support to this initiative, "Ban-Banauni was once an Oak forest but over time it got converted into a Chir Pine forest as a result of over exploitation/mismanagement of the Oaks and forest department plantations. Nek Ramji was the catalyst behind getting the women organised to pressurise the Forest Department staff into initiating pruning of pine trees (to reduce the problematic leaf litter that catches fire and discourages undergrowth). They then planted grass and livelihoods supporting trees".

While Nek Ram had always demonstrated leadership in renewal and livelihood initiatives, defying the mainstream but constantly engaging with the official departments, little had he himself or the people of his village and community expected that his leadership would put him into direct confrontation with the State. In 2010 the Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam announced the 750 MW Hydroelectric project on the Satluj river. The project was to be supported by the World Bank, and its 38 kilometre long tunnel would affect more than 70 villages including Nanj, Nek Ramji's own village. Tunnels of hydro-projects in Himachal have adversely impacted the geo-hydrological regimes of the slopes located above the tunnels. The fight started with the non-inclusion of the

70 villages in the list of project affected people of the EIA report. He rallied together with Shyam Singh Chauhan, a local Zilla Parishad leader, to form the Satluj Bachao Jan Sangharsh Samiti and mobilised a massive demonstration at the Environment Clearance Public hearing for the project. The authorities were forced to re-organise the hearing at a later date. The Samiti then petitioned the World Bank on the social and environmental impacts of the project. An independent mission to assess the project was sent to the area and Nek Ramji ensured that the team visited the area to be affected and had a direct interaction with the people to hear their concerns", adds Prakash Bhandari of Himdhara, Environment Research and Action Collective. "A quality we admire in him is his ability to be democratic, never claiming spaces singularly, always taking along people as leaders and collaborators".

The World Bank's withdrawal from the project and the subsequent reduction in the size of the project was the final blow. Today SJVNL has been forced to re-design the project, entirely scrapping the tunnel component.

It is important to highlight the holistic nature as well as impact of the work that Nek Ramji has been taking up relentlessly in his area, more so in today's context, where the "sangharsh aur nirmaan" (struggle and construction) paradigm of people's movements seems to be fading. Those working on alternatives and constructive initiatives have their own networks while resistance movements have their own forums. But Nek Ramji's journey indicates that at the grassroots these separations do not really exist. Nek Ramji has an interesting perspective to offer on this, "I am just a farmer and for us all these questions are linked with basic survival dependent on land and forests. So I would not even make a separation of "sangharsh" and "nirmaan". Both are the same. Both are a struggle. Getting people to come together to come back to millet cultivation and consumption at a time when they are disappearing is also a "struggle" and part of the movement to challenge the system of commercial monocash-cropping."

He winds up with these few words and in the passing mentions a stone crusher that has come up close to his village causing nuisance to the locals. They have already organised several meetings, complained to the local authorities and are now considering filing a case at the National Green Tribunal. The fight for survival continues with an unfaltering spirit at the helm.

**Author:** Manshi Asher (manshi.asher@gmail.com) is member of Himdhara, Environment Research and Action Collective, Himachal Pradesh.





## Ideas don't die

### Remembering Dr. B.D. Sharma

Former IAS officer, former chairman of National Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Commission and former vice-chancellor of North Eastern Hill University Dr Brahm Dev Sharma, popularly known as Dr B.D. Sharma, breathed his last at his residence in Gwalior on 6th December 2015. He was 86. He was ailing since last one year.

Dr B.D. Sharma joined the Indian Administrative Services in the year 1956. He was basically a student of Mathematics with a doctorate in the same subject. He was posted as Collector and District Magistrate to Bastar district, the largest tribal tract of the country. While serving in the central government and also state government, he was responsible for the formulation of adivasi policies, particularly what is known as the ST sub-plan strategy. He was also instrumental in bringing back the Fifth Schedule, as the vital instrument of policy for the very survival of adivasi people, on the national agenda.

Dr Sharma resigned from government service in 1981 when differences on vital issues of policy arose. He became the Vice Chancellor of North Eastern Hill University and worked in that position from 1981 to 1986. He occupied the highest constitutional position concerning adivasi people, as the last commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes during 1986-91. Thereafter separate National Commissions were constituted for SCs and STs.

Since 1991, Dr Sharma had been with the tribal people and was actively participating in tribal movements. He led the Bharat Jan Andolan (Indian People's Movement) which was formed in October 1992 as its National Coordinator. Its presence is very strong in the Ranchi region of Bihar, Nagari-Sihawa region in Raipur District and Sarguja district of Madhya Pradesh. The Andolan works on issues affecting peasants and adivasis.

In 1993 when the Panchayats became the institutions of decentralization through the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution, the Andolan focused its energies on tribal self-rule. The Andolan is not a registered society because Sharma believed that if they seek legitimacy from the state then their endeavor and mass movement to delegitimize the state will weaken. All the workers volunteer their services and their daily needs are taken care of by the village in which they live. Dr. Sharma contributed his pension to the movement and mobilized financial support from sympathetic and supportive individuals. Out of principle, the movement does not accept any organizational grants or aid.

Most social movements believe in first creating an organization and then starting to spread the ideas. According to Sharma, the ideas, not the organization, should reach the people first. In line with this thought, 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. The idea of 'gaon ganaraaj' (village Republic) and 'hamara gaon, hamara raaj' (Our Village, Our rule) 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. The movement coined the slogan 'jal, jungle aur jamin' (Water, Forest and Land). 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'.

Dr Sharma had been pursuing the Panchayat Acts since 1972. He had suggested to the Ashok Mehta Committee that the gram sabha should be given real powers, but this was not accepted. Later



pressurized by the movement, 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 played a very significant role in the the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act, which is the most revolutionary act. 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 local communities.

Dr.B.D.Sharma wrote extensively on the debt burden being forced upon the peasants even by the institutional credit channels by imposing compound interest, penal interest and by confiscating productive assets of peasants, all of which are illegal. The peasant needs no mercy from the rulers as in the case of loan waivers, provided they were given loans not on usurious terms but reasonable terms.

Dr. B.D. Sharma wrote extensively and on a wide spectrum of issues. His writing is simple and focuses on the real issues of the adivasis and rural communities. Bureaucracy functioning is often antagonistic to people's rights and entitlements. But Dr B.D. Sharma was a rare bureaucrat who gave up a government position and dedicated his lifeto the tribal and rural cause and joined hands with them to fight for their rights and entitlements.

The adivasi people and rural masses have lost a steadfast friend in the passing away of Dr.B.D.Sharma and they will always remember him.



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