

THE IDEA OF POLITICAL IN GANDHIAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS:

A STUDY OF EKTA PARISHAD IN MADHYA PRADESH

*Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in the requirement for the
degree of*

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled "*The Idea of Political in Gandhian Social Movements: A Study of Ekta Parishad in Madhya Pradesh*" submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University in my own work. The thesis has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University.


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CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this thesis be placed before the examiner for evaluation.


Dr. Narender Kumar


Dr. Manindra Nath Thakur

DEDICATED TO MY PARENTS

MRS.REKHA SHARMA & MR.MUKESH SHARMA

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INTRODUCTION

The thesis analyses how the idea of 'political' is being framed by Gandhian Social Movements in contemporary times through a study of Ekta Parishad. It is an attempt to put forth how Gandhi's 'political' has been shaped in the present. The primary objective behind tracing the idea of 'political' by Gandhi and then by Gandhians today is to highlight this idea's progress and the need for it today. 'Political' has primarily been interpreted as one based on vote bank politics, elections and party systems. This kind of 'political' has established itself as a permanent and sole idea of how politics is to be understood. The need of the hour is to question such an assumption. One of the reasons why it needs to be questioned is that this kind of politics is divisive and does not give space to the marginalised sections. Further, the most visible rationale is that this kind of politics is not able to resolve contemporary issues pertaining to feelings of alienation among communities, burgeoning violence in all spheres, environmental degradation, rigid societal divisions in the name of caste, class, religion and so on, escalating political corruption, administrative neglect and so on. One can notice that the political sphere has largely been taken over and has been made a monopoly of a nexus built between the politicians and capitalists. Although this nexus is not as simple as it seems because it involves various other national and international institutions, the long and short of the story is that the contemporary idea of 'political' is being manipulated to leverage the interests of those involved in it. One of the most disheartening realities that this kind of politics has produced is reigning violence in every sphere and that too, subtly and explicitly. The vicious circle of violence that we are caught up in, is being sustained by the idea of 'political' that we are presently following. The thesis, thus, reflects upon how a Gandhian 'political' could be pitched in so as to make substantive and radical shifts.

This research also pertains to studying social movements in order to understand and analyse the role of Gandhian ideas and strategies in contemporary India. Social movements have been interpreted differently by different scholars. This does not mean that they are all unique and absolutely different. Although they are diverse even within themselves, they do share features that are in common with other social movements as well. Not only do they have commonalities with other social movements, but they also overlap with other categories like 'collective action', 'protest' and so on. Apart from this feature of commonality and difference, it should be noted that social movements do not only represent resistance; they also stand for creativity, for change. Moreover,

they reflect the problems in the present context and offer hope for a new, better world. Having very briefly explained the features of social movements in general, some of the definitions are necessary to make the concepts more clear.

One of the definitions that can help in creating a good understanding of social movements is by Della Porta and Diani. They argue that social movements are “informal networks, based on shared beliefs and solidarity, which mobilize about conflictual issues, through the frequent use of various forms of protest” (Crossely, 2002, 6). The point to be noted here is that this definition highlights the feature of shared beliefs and solidarity. This means that members of any movement, in order to qualify as members, must subscribe to a set of beliefs that are different from those shared by the wider population and sufficiently homogeneous so as to describe them as a single movement. Such an affinity does not indicate that there can be no disagreements within the movements. Internal disagreements do form a part of the movements but a certain amount of tacit agreement between the movement’s participants need to exist on the points that they disagree to. In other words, they must agree over what they are in disagreement about; otherwise, the movement may fall out. In addition to it, the movement has to develop a relationship with the wider society too. This relationship should be such that the arguments that movement levels at the social order it opposes, slowly resonate with the assumptions and beliefs of the wider society. The next article complementing the above literature is Rajendra Singh’s ‘Social Movements Old and New, A critical appraisal.’ In this article, Rajendra Singh explicates ‘collective action’, which is a term relevant to the understanding of social movements. According to him, only those conflicts convert into collective actions which emerge out of collective discontent, denial and deprivation shared by a large number of people to find themselves in the same situation and have the same consciousness of being deprived to such an extent that they join together to identify the adversary responsible for their misery and initiate remedial action (Singh, 2001, 30). Here it has to be taken into consideration that different movements' sharing of basic assumptions is a matter of degree.

This feature points towards the heterogeneity with which social movements are identified. Koopmans reflects this point when he defines social movements as “characterized by a low degree of institutionalization, high heterogeneity, a lack of clearly defined boundaries and decision-making structures, a volatility matched by few other social phenomenon” (Crossely, 2002, 7). Heterogeneity suggests that leaders of social movements have a limited mandate to speak on behalf

of the movement. These leaders cannot assume that fellow movement participants share their specific perspectives on events. Although this does not mean that they never meet a common ground but to suggest, rather, that we cannot take it for granted as a stable and self-evident feature.

In addition, the definition also talks about a low degree of institutionalization. In this context, extending the understanding of 'collective action', starting with Neil Smelser, it can be noted that collective action is not a uniform and clearly defined class of phenomenon (Smelser, 1962). It is a mechanism that men create to move from the periphery of the system to its center (Oomen, 1990). They can be of two types: institutionalized and non-institutionalized (Singh, 2001, 29-32). Institutionalized collective action can be group participation in events like ceremonies and festivals, whereas non - institutionalized collective actions can be riots, rebellions, reforms, revolutions and revolts. The non-institutionalized collective actions hold importance in the study of social movements as only these involve conflict. They can take the form of protest, agitation, strike, satyagraha, hartal and gherao. At this point, we can see the relevance of the Gandhian non-institutionalised method of satyagraha. Here, a 'revolt' signifies a challenge to the political authority aiming to overthrow the ruling government; a 'rebellion' indicates an attack on the existing authority with no intention of ceasing the state power; a 'reform' does not aim to challenge the political system rather it tries to introduce some constructive changes in the system to make it more efficient, functioning and responsive; a 'revolution' takes place when a section or sections of society decide to overthrow the established regime and its socio-economic structure and replacing it by an alternative social order (Shah, 1990, 26).

Since both revolution and social movements anticipate a common goal of social change, they often get confused with each other. Social movement may or may not be mobilization against the state and it may or may not involve violence. Revolution, on the other hand, involves a complete recasting of existing social structure with new social, economic, and political order. Social movements do not involve all the sections of society, whereas a revolution necessarily involves all the sections of society. But social movements have a tendency to transform themselves into a revolution and when it does so, it doesn't remain a movement; rather, it becomes a type of collective action (Singh, 2001, 26-27). Neil Smelser defines 'collective movement' as collective efforts to modify norms and values, which frequently (but not always) develop over a longer period

of time” (Smelser, 1962). This brings us to 'change' being one of the characteristics of social movements. Blumer in his definition of social movements makes this point. He states that

social movements can be viewed as collective enterprises seeking to establish a new order of life. They have their inception in a condition of unrest, and drive their motive power on one hand from dissatisfaction with the current form of life, and on the other hand, from wishes and hopes for a new system of living. The career of a social movement depicts the emergence of a new order of life (Crossely,2002, 3).

Blumer's use of the term 'career' indicates the temporality of social movements, which mean that they do 'move' or change. The fact that movements are 'in movement' show that even their characteristics will consequently change. Part of the 'movement' in social movements is a transformation in the habits that shape our everyday lives. One of the associated arguments that come across clearly in the text by Mitra Das titled as, 'Social Movements, Social Change and Mass Communication' is that movements cannot arise when the existing social order is accepted by people. For the want of revision or change of the existing social order the collective action of people might result in the development of the social movement. Thus, change is a necessary factor for social movement. Social change can occur without social movements but social movements cannot occur in the absence of social change (Laner) (See Das, 1981, 127-143). Thus, social movements are connected to social change in a dual sense as it is the social change that forms social movements and social movements emerge to arrest change in some segments of society.

An important reference in this context is Ghanshyam Shah's 'Social Movements in India-a review of the literature'. Throwing light on the term 'movement', Shah states that the term 'movement' has been in demand among the social actors in society. T.D Weldon classifies 'movement' as a 'hurrah!' word in his book 'The Vocabulary of Politics' (Shah, 1990, 16). It is seen that in today's society, any protest or struggle by the members of the society is understood as a 'movement'. The word 'movement' has been interpreted differently by various social activists, political scholars as well as leaders. Some scholars have used the term 'movement' to mean organization or union or to mean historical trend or tendency (Shah, 1990, 16). Like scholars, political leaders and social reformers also use the word 'movement' loosely to name their activities as 'movements' though such activities are limited to just formation of organizations consisting of very few members (Shah, 1990, 16). Thus, Shah emphasizes the seriousness of the term 'movements' and shows how it has been misused. Actually, movements are continuous sustaining processes that are carried out collectively in the form of action over a long period of time.

This directs us to the source of creativity that social movements are. Eyerman and Jamison include this feature of social movements in their following definition: “Social movements are... best conceived of as temporary public spaces, as movements of collective creation that provide societies with ideas, identities, and even ideals” (Crossely, 2002, 4). This definition specifies more clearly that movements are a source of creativity and what they tend to create are identities, ideas and even ideals. They problematize the ways in which we live our lives and call for changes in our habits of thought, action and interpretation. In fact, they themselves manifest social change. Just as a society never stays stable, similarly, movements also flow and create ripples of change in society. Following this quest, the nature of contemporary Indian society is also to be considered.

In this context, Rajendra Singh rightly observes that the “contemporary struggles [of the Indian society] are not so much about seeking material gains such as the ownership of land or a share in industrial products, as about the redefinition of norms and values; acquisition of cultural goods and collective symbols; political rights and social justice; and a contest for seeking a public space to act and to be recognised as actors” (Singh, 2001,16). Agreeing with this observation, the research work focuses on analyzing if the contemporary social movements based on Gandhian principles are able to place values and methods of resolving conflicts in the present society that is struggling with finding a way out of clutches of different forms of violence. Although the literature on social movements encompasses various characteristics of social movements, the link among social, economic and political is not laid down clearly. In the course of this research, attempts will be made to understand this link.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The central question I intend to address in this research is as to why do the Gandhian social movements face a dilemma between political and social? Can we consider the de-totalisation of ontology¹ separating social from political advocated by the Gandhians a source for this dilemma? Gandhian social movements like Narmada Bachao Andolan, the anti-corruption movement led by Anna Hazare, nonviolent movement led by Ekta Parishad all seem to have been facing the problem of how to balance the social and the political. It can be noticed that these movements contribute to

¹ ‘De-totalisation of ontology’ is used here to highlight the disintegrated view of being, which denies cohesiveness among different realms pertaining to political, social, spiritual and economic that thinkers like Gandhi take cognizance of, while chalking out a political philosophy embedded in a holistic lens used to understand reality.

a rise in the 'anti-political' movements. These movements reflect the anger that exists against the institutions of representative democracy. They do not aim at overthrowing these institutions but express their dissatisfaction with the functioning of the institutions. The common feature that all the anti-political movements share is that they target all three traditional faces of democracy: the established parties, deliberative institutions and practices. In these movements, it is the urban middle class that is at the forefront, although other sections too get involved, however, the centre stage is taken by the middle class. The dissent of the middle class presents an irony here because it is the same middle class that constituted the biggest support for the neo-liberal regime under the leadership of the same parties that they stand against. It is not the neo-liberal economy that they directly target but the democratic institutions like the political parties. In India. For instance, the anti-corruption movement led by Anna Hazare, though, attacked the most pervasive problem in India which is corruption but reduced it to the simplistic characterisation of corruption as inherent to politics and politicians.

The corruption that lies in the non-political sphere is omitted by this movement. Even if it eschews this aspect, the anti-political stance that it takes has not proved to be an element that could contribute to the efficiency, sustainability and strength of the movement. One of the reasons that can be observed here is that though this movement highlighted the significance of moral struggle, it did not combine this factor with the political struggle which is important today. The worrying aspect is the indifference of civil society as it looks on, tired of politics that has now been reduced to antics. A great movement now looks helpless adding to the cynicism of power. Strangely, politics seems to be unforgiving to everyone except professional politicians. The institution of the political party that the movement goes against, is the very institution today that is legitimately allowed to identify the politics of the country. It would not be wrong here to consider that politics in India seems to be unforgiving to everyone except professional politicians. It is also important to identify that Indians still believe in political parties. The fading of the movement because of thin support qualifies this observation. It is not that the Anna Hazare movement did not make political statements or raise political demands. But, it just touched the political realm in a superfluous way. The need of the hour is to find a political alternative by being in the political sphere. In order to question the misuse of political power and a defined set of meanings of 'politics' dominating over alternative meanings of politics, it is necessary that the new narrative is formed by being in the political realm. The emphasis is not here on exclusive attention on the political sphere but on

developing a holistic view of politics that is in tandem with the other spheres pertaining to economic, moral or spiritual and social issues as well.

It can be observed that the separation of the social and the political has made social movements fall in either of the two categories: one is that of those movements that follow Jayaprakash Narayan and the other is that of Vinobha. As already mentioned, the followers of JP focus on the political realm while Vinoba's followers consider the 'social' as a cornerstone of viewing reality. My research's focal point is on understanding why most of the contemporary social movements have an inclination towards the approach advocated by Vinoba and will such an exclusive approach prove to be efficient in the long run. The research work will also ponder over how certain movements like Ekta Parishad can help in correcting the de-totalised ontology. These movements have been trying to follow a totalised ontology as presented by Gandhi. Do the movements in the grassroots reflect this dilemma in their everyday practice? How do they try to resolve it? Does the resolution lead to any innovation in Gandhian philosophy and strategy of social change? These are some of the secondary questions that will be guiding my research.

METHODOLOGY

The thesis is based on qualitative analysis. I have used a post-positivist approach as it eschews methodological monism. Following this approach, I have undertaken the exercise of meaning-making through content analysis. I have also used the interpretive research method by taking detailed field interviews with the aim of understanding different perspectives of the subjects for the purpose of theory building. Through this method, the field chapters clearly underscore a connection of the subjects with their social and historical context. In addition to this, a participatory approach has been used to study Jan Andolan, 2018, a Gandhian March. This method enabled me to connect with the stakeholders, who already were part of my qualitative research work. It is also to be noted here that Gandhi's political philosophy has been a guiding and binding theoretical frame forming a reference point for the entire thesis. Thus, this research is based on empirical, theoretical and philosophical frames. The entire field work represents the empirical level of research. With the help of this empirical work, an attempt is made to theorize the idea of 'political' by Gandhian movements and at the philosophical front, the research continuously impinges on an understanding of a totalised ontology.

In order to understand Gandhi's political philosophy, the first two chapters focus upon a reading of Gandhi's idea of 'political' and various interpretations of the same. Both the chapters are an interrogation and also a way of theorizing how Gandhi drew his political principles right from his childhood till his leadership in the National Independence struggle. The third chapter is a mix of content analysis and observations from the field. This chapter has been written from the lens of Ekta Parishad itself. Self-perception of Ekta Parishad is critically examined through different kinds of sources. One of these sources included those works that members of this movement or those closely associated with it have produced, another source from which the chapter borrowed were online, especially from its official website, many of the articles and books on or related to Ekta Parishad available online were also referred to. Apart from these sources, general observations made throughout the field research were used to corroborate self-perceptions of the movement. The fourth and fifth chapters are premised upon primary sources from field research. In the fourth chapter, observations from the first part of the fieldwork are elucidated. The first part of the field research included visiting different centres of Ekta Parishad. Centres in Bhopal and Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, and Tilda, Chhattisgarh were visited in this part. The reason behind choosing these centers is that major pre-election meetings were held in these centers on a consecutive basis. These meetings were attended by the leaders of the movement, national coordinators of the movement and also all the grassroots members of this movement from Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

The centres visited were basically ashrams that followed the Gandhian way of living. I stayed with the rest of the members in the ashram and observed their lifestyle in the ashram. In all the ashrams I covered the meetings held within the members and also with different politicians. I understood how they used creative tools like songs, banners and posters, slogans, prayer meetings, and plays. Thus, the chapter is based on general observations that were collected during the stay in the ashram, interviews based on targeted as well as snowball sampling, participation in activities of the ashram like prayer meetings, play performance, group singing and group discussions. The interviews that were as aforementioned based on targeted and snowball sampling were conducted with the help of structured and unstructured format. While the structured questionnaire was for members who belonged to the grassroots, those at the higher positions like the leader, national coordinators and heads of the ashrams were asked questions in an unstructured manner. The rationale behind this was that those at the grassroots had a very formal approach towards me. They would wait for me

to question and then only would give an answer. A structured questionnaire helped me to elicit their views in an organised manner and also make scope for those aspects that they might have avoided covering. An unstructured approach of questioning was adopted while interviewing the leaders and the heads of the ashrams as it was observed that they knew how to take the conversation further. Both kinds of questionnaires helped in understanding nuances. There was no specific timing allotted for the interviews prior to the actual conversation. As mentioned earlier, through a snowball sampling approach I could interview many people as one person would help me reach out to the other. Purposive sampling was primarily employed to choose from the higher positions.

As I already had some idea about the leader and national coordinators, I knew that selective sampling would be helpful in keeping the interview precisely on-point. It was due to this reason that numerous narratives could be noticed coming from the grassroots members, while proper explanations about tools, strategies, visions and policies came from leaders and national coordinators of Ekta Parishad. The chapter is primarily organized on the lines of issues covered with the help of the aforementioned avenues observed and participated in. There are no fixed dates mentioned because of the qualitative and continuous nature of the work in different places of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh through different mediums. The fifth chapter discusses the last phase of a field study which is primarily based on my participation in Jan Andolan, 2018. Many sources are referred to understand those events that preceded Jan Andolan, 2018. The Mahila Bhu Samvad Yatra, for instance, is traced through online sources. Although the events post this Yatra led by women were attended at Gwalior office. While those events that succeeded Jan Andolan, 2018 are based on primary sources. I participated in the pre-events of Jan Andolan. I stayed in the Gwalior office of Ekta Parishad with the media team. Every day I visited the Mela Maidan where members would stay and from where the March had to begin. I took interviews of those in the Maidan for the media team. I stayed with them throughout the day in different tents, attended the singing and dancing events and also had food with them. This allowed me to get familiarised with them further. Many of the members were those that I had interviewed in the first phase of my interview. In this phase I had a comparatively easier access to the grassroots members. Instead of following a structured questionnaire, I followed a flexible approach in striking a conversation with the members there. Being familiar with them helped in talking to many of those whom I had not known earlier. Thus, snowball sampling was adopted in this phase as well. In this phase, an

emphasis was given to observing the entire event. I was an observer of the ‘people’s parliament’ that preceded the beginning of the March.

I also worked as a part of the media team during the two days of ‘people’s parliament.’ I walked with 25000 landless people from Gwalior, Mela Maidan till Morena, where the March culminated. Throughout the March, as a participant and as a research scholar I observed and experienced how a Gandhian Movement conducts a Satyagraha March. On the day of culmination, I attended the public meeting that was held with Congress representatives. After Jan March, I attended a workshop in Madurai, Tamil Nadu where I got the chance to analyse the conduct of members outside the ashram. This workshop helped me understand the movement’s nonviolent orientation clearly as the primary objective of the workshop was to communicate about nonviolent activism. In the post-Jan Andolan phase, a few telephonic interviews were conducted based on structured questionnaires. Online participation in the movie screening event helped in understanding how the movement uses technology to spread its message. The songs mentioned were borrowed from one of the members of Ekta Parishad.

CHAPTERIZATION

The first chapter titled ‘*Idea of ‘Embedded Political’ in Gandhi*’, focuses on Gandhi’s idea of ‘political.’ It elucidates Gandhi’s course of encountering those elements in his life that later on becomes his core political principles. These basically refer to self, truth and ahimsa. This chapter primarily argues that Gandhi’s idea of ‘political’ that had these three foundational values was evolving as he grew up and delved deeper into these values with every changing phase of his life. Further, his emerging idea of ‘political’ was based less on any textual understanding and more on his life events which he experienced. It is because of this reason that Gandhi’s idea of ‘political’ is different from the liberal idea of ‘political.’ He experienced how politics was divisive, hence, viewed everything in binaries and also eschewed the notion of a ‘spiritual self.’ It was because of this reason that Gandhi looked at the idea of ‘political’ from a holistic lens. In the chapter, it is extensively explained that Gandhi’s holism in formulating the idea of ‘political’ can be noticed at two levels. One of the two levels is that of the interconnectedness of the social and political realm. The second is at the level of developing an inextricable link between truth and nonviolence.

In the second chapter, *'Embedded Political': Evolution from Local Struggles to National Movement*, an attempt is made to take the discussion further with the major aim to decipher how Gandhi's idea of 'political' evolved with his entry into the Indian context. The chapter delineates Gandhi's leadership in political movements at the local and national levels. Through these struggles, the chapter presents how with each specific movement Gandhi emerged as a political strategist, political leader and also as a political innovator. He carried on with the holism that he developed through his experiences in the early stages of his life. To this, he added various dimensions like that of constructive work that made social and political inseparable. His politics, as shown in the chapter, kept on getting more inclusive, especially with respect to encompassing the marginalised and downtrodden. Moreover, his idea of 'political' emphasized breaking barriers between Hindus and Muslims, Indians and British which lucidly explicates how he connected 'us' and 'them.' This also presents how his politics was based on a very careful differentiation between the deed and the doer. An element of ethical concern which the present political system has been sidelining glares from such a differentiation.

The third chapter titled, *'Self-Perception of Ekta Parishad: Between 'Social' and 'Political'*, is a beginning in the formulating the Gandhian idea of 'political' through the case study of Ekta Parishad. This chapter is basically building upon how Ekta Parishad perceives itself and how it views itself connecting the social and political. It is an introduction to the movement from its own standpoint. The purpose that this exercise serves is to comprehend how a Gandhian movement chooses to take forward the legacy of Gandhi's values and ideas in a contemporary context that gets reflected in its mission and vision of the future. It comprehensively discussed how this movement makes sense of nonviolence as a way of life and as a means of resistance. In addition, it focuses on the social make-up of the movement, its modus operandi in the course of a struggle, the strategies and tools it uses and how it keeps on connecting the 'social' and 'political' throughout its campaigns. So as to make these points clearer it tries to put forth how Ekta Parishad explains its different movements like Jan Samvad Yatra, Jan Satyagraha and Jai Jagat. Therefore, it can be said that the chapter is an attempt to understand the nuances of the movement's self-perception.

The fourth chapter, *'Ashram's Leaders and Activists: Capturing the Dynamics of 'Social' and 'Political'*, intensively focuses on observing, first hand, the meaning of 'political' by Ekta Parishad

with the help of fieldwork in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh and Tilda, Chhattisgarh. While in the third chapter, it was explained how Ekta Parishad views itself to be taking along ‘social’ and ‘political’, the aim of the present chapter is to identify in what ways, implicitly or explicitly, do these perceptions play out on the ground and to what extent. With the help of interviews, participation in meetings and general observation, the chapter interrogates the movement’s commitment towards Gandhian techniques and principles, how it carries them out in its day-to-day operations and also what meaning have they given to them. A sharp idea of how injustice in different forms is prevailing around them, how nonviolent tools like dialogue, contribution, campaigns and how internal discussions among members help in unraveling the ‘political’ that this movement is trying to create with Gandhian values as its foundation.

The fifth chapter, *‘Participating with Ekta Parishad: Blueprint of ‘A Gandhian Political’*, is a further exploration of how the movement is trying to build up its own ‘political’ as against conventional politics. The chapter is primarily framed on the basis of in-depth observations made during my participation in Jan Andolan, 2018, led by Ekta Parishad. In this chapter, an attempt has been made to put forth how a Gandhian march in contemporary times makes its way, how it is perceived by different sections of society and how it focuses on the issue as well as on the Gandhian principles to achieve its immediate as well as long-term objectives. In the chapter, an attempt has been made to trace the preceding as well as succeeding events that took place so as to spread the message of Jan Andolan. Thus, it is a comprehensive analysis of how Ekta Parishad builds its movements and then keeps it alive through various means. The chapter, thus, discusses Mahila Bhu Samvad Yatra and also about various means through which Ekta Parishad creatively spreads its messages. In the course of explaining all these aspects, the chapter continuously interrogates the meaning of ‘political’ that this Gandhian movement is constructing.

Thus, this research is an attempt to offer a new and an alternative lens of viewing ‘political’. To reiterate, central questions that it addresses are: why do the Gandhian social movements face a dilemma between political and social? Can we consider the de-totalisation of ontology² separating social from political advocated by the Gandhians a source for this dilemma? The dilemma

² ‘De-totalisation of ontology’ is used here to highlight the disintegrated view of being, which denies cohesiveness among different realms pertaining to political, social, spiritual and economic that thinkers like Gandhi take cognizance of, while chalking out a political philosophy embedded in a holistic lens used to understand reality.

mentioned here is studied at three levels: empirical, theoretical and philosophical. The thesis is an empirical analysis of Gandhian Social Movements with the primary goal of deciphering the idea of 'political.' For theorizing, it takes Gandhi's conception of 'political' as a reference point and aims to observe deviations and innovations made to this concept. From here, it impinges upon the philosophical undercurrents of the idea of 'political' as a totalised ontology. The five chapters are a mix of these three elements.

CHAPTER 1: IDEA OF ‘EMBEDDED POLITICAL’ IN GANDHI

1. INTRODUCTION

The chapter primarily traces Gandhi’s journey of framing his idea of ‘political’. It begins with analyzing Gandhi’s early life and goes on to focus upon his first satyagraha in South Africa. The chapter attempts to produce those nuances of his life which proved to be the building blocks of his understanding of what politics is, according to him. Gandhi did not envisage politics for India that would be embedded in selfish, narrow and solely material interests. For him, the meaning of politics was not limited to the boundaries of the nation’s interest-only, although this was one of his concerns but he wanted that the influence of his politics should be on the entire humanity. The chapter is broadly divided into five sections. The first section elucidates the complexity that the idea of politics by Gandhi encapsulates. The second section begins with unfolding the roots of Gandhi’s journey on framing his ideas of politics right from his childhood till his satyagraha in South Africa. This section reads Gandhi’s understanding of politics with the help of his progress in knowing about self, truth and nonviolence in each of the three phases. The third section discusses the idea of Gandhi’s ‘political’ with the help of contemporary scholars. The last section sums up how Gandhi’s idea of politics has been largely formed by the events that took place in his childhood till his satyagraha in South Africa.

Gandhi wanted his ‘political’ to be expansive and universal. It is due to this reason that the fundamentals of his idea of politics were derived from life’s most accessible, pervasive and common resources. For instance, the starting point of reaching towards his idea of politics was ‘self.’ His conceptualization of swaraj incorporated self-rule for liberation of self. According to him, the greatest ability that a human possesses is not his or her power to change the world but to change himself or herself. He desired that change should come from within and not from the outside. It may seem at the outset that by changing oneself, the change can happen only at the social level. This may be true when viewed from a narrow perspective, but when it is seen from the lens that Gandhi saw it from, a very different picture gets drawn.

For Gandhi, the ‘social’ is closely related to the political as he focused upon cultivating such social values that would transform the human from within which would further base her or his political role on these values. Hence, it can be said that he wanted a ‘political’ which is embedded in moral or ethical values embedded in the social. In other words, a society that has imbibed moral or ethical

values will form a political system that is made to support and further such values. At this point, it needs to be noted that as the self starts adhering to moral values and society starts to adopt the path of selflessness, the economic sphere also begins to redefine itself. A redefinition becomes important because the foundation of economic values starts building on the base laid by such moral values which inform the social. Therefore, profit motive gives way to the motivation of doing good for all and selfless service ascends over selfish activities.

The second source that Gandhi took to be extremely necessary was religion. One may ask from where do we, as an individual as well as a society, get our values? And how to judge if we are going by such values that are making us walk on the path of morality and emancipation? For Gandhi, moral values could be derived from having faith in religion. This argument may make Gandhi moving towards idealism and metaphysical sphere, thus, making it impossible to understand the significance of politics here. But, as will also be explicated in the chapter, Gandhi understood religion not as organized institutions created to divide and demarcate people under different names but as faith or spiritual energy which informs and guides every human action. He refuted the view that religion was a monopoly of the spiritual gurus and moksha could be attained only in the afterlife. He believed that religion gave freedom to every human to understand it from her or his perspective and humans can attain moksha in this very life through their actions. According to him,

If politics were artificially separated from everything else, especially from religious values and faith, it would either become a game played according to its own amoral rules that might be given a moral disguise, or else it would become an illegitimate usurper of the religious emotions and needs of men. He felt that much mischief had been done throughout the world by the divorce between public and private conduct (Iyer, 2000, 42).

From the above sentences it can be deciphered that in order to introduce morality in the sphere of politics, religion, that is mostly considered as a private affair, needs to be taken into account. Therefore, politics, which is primarily a sphere of action, would also be guided by and would be a way of achieving moksha, when actions are performed in consonance with the same moral values and means propounded by different religions. Thus, Gandhi's understanding of 'political' is holistic as it binds the social, economic, religious and political realms of human life together.

Gandhi's understanding of the idea of politics is holistic also because it places all the interconnected realms in the frame of truth and ahimsa or nonviolence. He argued that the major goal of every human activity is guided by the search for truth and as nobody knows the ultimate

truth, everybody is bound to be having fragments of truth. In order to keep continuing the search and to reach as far as possible in this search everybody needs to respect each other as without their support the relative truths would remain in isolation. It is by understanding others' relative truth that I can move forward in my endeavor to know my truth better. This makes following the path of ahimsa indispensable. Ahimsa, again a very intrinsic component of human's life, is a core principle of Gandhi's idea of politics. The chapter explicates how Gandhi saw ahimsa to be a value which encompasses social, spiritual as well as political spheres.

The chapter argues that in conceptualizing truth and nonviolence, self and the other, Satyagraha and swaraj, he establishes an inextricable link between the political and spiritual. While explicating his motive behind writing his autobiography, he states right in the beginning that his life is a series of such experiments which do not restrict to the political, but also are largely influenced by the spiritual. He considers that his lesser known spiritual experiments help him possess the power for his political work. The energy that he derives from the spiritual realm gets manifested in concrete form in the various nonviolent struggles that he upheld at different junctures of his life.

The time from Gandhi's stay with his family during childhood, till his higher education in England marks a rudimentary development of ideas about truth, nonviolence and religion. "Gandhi was thirty before his first major political triumphs in South Africa, and nearly fifty before he emerged as a national figure of unrivaled stature on the Indian stage. His ideas were honed during religious Indian childhood and by his early encounters with the British Empire in its numerous incarnations and guise ("Gandhi's World from Gandhi: The Historical Life," 2011, 11). These ideas got strengthened only after Gandhi faced the harsh realities pertaining to gross discrimination in South Africa. It was for the first time, he paid heed to the difficult social and political realities of people residing there. The next section focuses on understanding how Gandhi's childhood paved the way for him to walk towards forming his conception of politics.

2. FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES: SELF, TRUTH AND AHIMSA

This section focuses on exploring how self, truth and ahimsa contributed to Gandhi's idea of 'political'. The section argues that these were the fundamental elements on which Gandhi laid the foundation of his idea of 'political'. Gandhi's journey towards developing the idea of 'political' was evolutionary in the sense that it kept evolving with each phase of his life. The most important

phases discussed are his childhood during which Gandhi was introduced to these foundational components only in incipient form. It was through his experiments in England that he further developed his connection with the three. In South Africa, Gandhi applied his understanding of the three as principles of his Satyagraha for the first time. While the mentioned phases are explicated and analysed in the present chapter. Gandhi's leadership in India at local and national levels are discussed at length in the next chapter. It was in India that Gandhi as a political leader led movements at the local level, made sense of the prevailing politics and political issues. These were the movements at the national level that formed the culminating ground for comprehending Gandhi's idea of 'political' in practice.

2.1. GANDHI'S CHILDHOOD: UNFOLDING THE ROOTS

As explained in the previous section, Gandhi's idea of politics dwells on the holism of different realms. Following this argument, the present section probes into the possibility of how far the milieu of Gandhi has played a role in forming his political philosophy. Through a thorough analysis of Gandhi's childhood, the section aims at understanding how Gandhi encountered those elements that later on became the core of his political ideas. It is true that these elements may be present in an incipient form but as will be observed in this section that they did affect his consciousness. At this juncture, it is important to caution that in no way the section argues that Gandhi's childhood enabled him to have a linear path towards identifying his political ideas. Gandhi had internal conflicts which he addressed as contradictions and also conducted various experiments to understand himself throughout his adulthood. But as he mentions about Tolstoy that, in truth, what seems to be a contradiction is not really a contradiction, but it is progress and as Sudhir Kakkar, a prominent Indian psychoanalyst while writing on Gandhi argues aptly that Gandhi is also referring to himself when he talks about Tolstoy in these lines, it can be asserted that Gandhi had been evolving with each stage of his life. A somewhat similar method is applied by Erik Erikson in his book 'Gandhi's Truth: On Origins of Militant Nonviolence.' In this book, he focuses on the origins of Gandhi's method called "truth force" by extensively reflecting upon Gandhi's early life and work. By using a mixture of clinical and historical hindsight, Erikson espouses that "Gandhi's existential experiments began in his youth" (Erikson, 1993, 11). Using the psychosocial study of Gandhi's life, he asserts that Gandhi's escalation to Mahatmaship could be understood when we analyze in retrospection that,

how the man, his method, and some of his first followers converged in Ahmedabad in 1918 in such a way that his philosophy of militant nonviolence became a political instrument ready to be used on a large scale and reaching far beyond the issue of industrial peace in the city of Ahmedabad (Erikson, 1993, 12).

Thus, Erikson determines in his work how early events in Gandhi's life coalesced together to form his idea of 'militant nonviolence.' Similarly, the present section highlights how Gandhi's understanding of religion, truth and nonviolence even in their rudimentary forms gradually progressed into becoming the foundation of his political principles later in his life.

SELF, RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

This section of the chapter focuses on producing a few instances from Gandhi's childhood that assisted him in developing some ideas about religion. Gandhi's early childhood was spent in Porbandar, a coastal town in the western Kathiawad peninsula. His family moved to Rajkot for his education. In Rajkot, his father got appointed as a leading adviser to the Rajasthanik court in 1879, when Gandhi was eight years old. Right from his childhood days, religious texts, stories and characters had a greater impact on Gandhi. From citing the dialogue between Vashishtha and Vishvamitra for making the significance of humility and truth clear, to considering Gita as his guide throughout his life, Gandhi derived many significant lessons from his understanding of religion. Talking about his knowledge of religion in his childhood, Gandhi writes, "From my sixth or seventh year up to my sixteenth I was at school, being taught all sorts of things except religion" (Gandhi, 1927, 29). These lines clearly indicate that Gandhi had no formal education in religious studies. Perhaps, this is what made his meaning of religion more practical. It needs to be noted here that Sudhir Kakar, an Indian psychoanalyst, novelist and author in the fields of cultural psychology and the psychology of religion, interprets Gandhi's engagement with religion as 'practical spirituality.' He defines practical spirituality as "a mode of being spiritually engaged with the world which may be uniquely suited to address the challenges of our times and the world still to come" (Kakar, 2009, 98). He further asserts that,

in a state of spiritual grace the practical spiritual man combines sublime fearlessness with robust humor. He is filled with a serenity that comes from an unconcern with the consequences once the decision to act has been taken and painful choices faced. Above all, though, he is infused with a wide-ranging empathy that even extends to his opponent. (Kakar, 2009, 98).

The element of empathy that Sudhir Kakar emphatically espouses leads him to identify the significance of what he terms as 'connective imagination.' According to him, the spiritual dimension of imagination is connective as demonstrated by the thinking of Tibetan-Buddhist and

Hindu Tantra. These two present an example of how spiritual thinking visualizes a union between the deities and the devotee's. Gandhi draws such a spiritual connectivity later in his life. In his early childhood, he began with understanding of the 'self.'

He explains that "the term 'religion' I [Gandhi] am using in its broadest sense, meaning thereby self-realization or knowledge of self" (Gandhi, 1927, 29). It shows that Gandhi's childhood proved to be a stepping stone towards the realization of the significance of 'self. The most important lesson that Gandhi borrowed from Gita and that is being repeated throughout this chapter is that of removing the barrier between 'mine' and 'thine'. Relating to Arjuna's pain and conundrum regarding the war with his own brethren, Gandhi explicates that even the sense of pain proves to be worthy is the acquisition of knowledge about the right from wrong and about truth. Discussing further, he compares the battlefield of Kurukshetra with the human heart, calling it a 'dharmakshetra' (the field of the righteous)' (Gandhi, 1960, chapter 2). He points out that in this field of heart many battles arise due to the distinction we make "between 'mine' and 'thine', between 'kinsmen' and 'strangers'" (Gandhi, 1960, chapter 2). Following the advice by Lord Krishna to Arjuna, Gandhi follows that attachment to a person or thing as 'mine' creates attraction (raga) and when the person is viewed as a stranger, repulsion (dvesha) grows. Thus, he recommends that the distinction should be forgotten, there should be no likes and dislikes, so that the battles due to such differences do not emerge.

Gandhi encountered religious thoughts, scriptures and its different forms from his surroundings and from his family. Be it his learning of the Ramanama, the Bhagavat, or the Ramayana, his sources have been people like his father, mother, nurse and cousin. Gandhi's toleration towards other religions had also begun in his childhood as he mentions:

Jain monks also would pay frequent visits to my father, and would even go out of their way to accept food from us-non-Jains. He had, besides, Musalman and Parsi friends, who would talk to him about their own faiths, and he would listen to them with respect, and often with interest (Gandhi, 1960, 31).

The above lines highlight that getting acquainted with different sects and religions had begun right at his home. His father's friends belonging to different religions made him more respectable towards faiths other than his own. It was right from his childhood that Gandhi witnessed a link between private and public. Gandhi's father would be "sitting in the Shrinathji temple day after day, peeling and paring the vegetables for his wife's kitchen, while he discussed politics"(Pyarelal, 1965, 192-3). "The house was therefore not a sealed domestic middle-class space but was closely

connected to politics of the Kathiawar peninsula. This reflects Gandhi's own fusion of private and public politics" ("Gandhi's World from Gandhi: The Historical Life," 2011, 22).

Later in his life, Gandhi did break the barrier between the private and public through his political resistance in the form of salt satyagraha. In fact, Gandhi's mother had a profound influence over him with respect to his acquaintance with religions. Gandhi acknowledged this influence: "The outstanding impression my mother has left on my memory is that of saintliness. She was deeply religious. She would not think of taking her meals without her daily prayers" (Gandhi, 1927, 4). The unwavering belief in God that Gandhi maintained throughout his life was a consequence of being witnessed to such commendable devotion by his mother. Discussing a chapter on devotion from Gita, Gandhi writes that "Knowledge and action in the absence of devotion are dry as dust and are likely to make us confirmed bond-slaves" (Gandhi, 2021, xii). Thus, from this sentence it can be deciphered that for freedom, Gandhi considered true devotion to be significant. Describing his mother, he further says that, his mother belonged to a sect that combined Hindu and Muslim beliefs and she welcomed Christians and Jains too. Her irresistible and consistent will power to fast even in odd situations proved to be an example of strength instead of suffering for Gandhi. "She would take the hardest vow and keep them without flinching. Illness was no excuse for relaxing them" (Gandhi, 2021, xii). Without doubt, it can be claimed that vows and pledges have been an important component of Gandhi's nonviolent struggles.

In his personal life too, vows have saved him from committing many grave mistakes. It can also be observed that in the process of molding the self, Gandhi was hugely inspired by his mother's unrelenting attitude towards keeping her vows as well as fasts. In the later years, he explained the meaning of fasting as "one of the means to the end of self-restraint, but it is not all, and if physical fasting is not accompanied by mental fasting, it is bound to end in hypocrisy and disaster" (Gandhi, 1927, 303). The explanation highlights the close connection between mental and physical restraint that Gandhi wanted to achieve while fasting. Gandhi's interpretation of fasting makes it more substantive and also much more potent for bringing about internal transformation, if not, external. Although, it will later be seen that Gandhi successfully used fasting in his Satyagraha movements leading to change in the outside world as well. Here again, it is worth noting how remarkably Gandhi chooses to employ fasting in his nonviolent struggles so as to set a link between the self and the other. His fasting was not to force the other but to bring a sense of change within through

repentance manifesting in the form of fasting. Such a process would ultimately change the heart of others and bring them into closer connection with the self of the one fasting. Gandhi cites a famous verse from Bhagavad-Gita in support of his understanding about fasting:

For a man who is fasting his senses
Outwardly, the sense-objects disappear,
Leaving the yearning behind; but when
He has seen the Highest,
Even the yearning disappears (Gandhi, 1927, 305).

These sentences that Gandhi cites from Gita throw light upon his intense understanding of fasting. In these lines Krishna explains to Arjuna that human beings are vulnerable to being attacked by sense-objects. To avoid such temptations for attaining sense-objects, fasting is adhered to. But, the relish for these objects cannot be driven out by fasting alone, until one seeks to look inwards and realize God Who stays in the heart and devotes himself to the God. Taking cues from these sentences, it can be said that, for Gandhi, fasting was not to gain anything, it was beyond fulfillment of any desire. Through fasting, Gandhi aimed to attain a deep connection with the inner self that could help him be closer to the Almighty or the Highest power. Various such verses from Gita formed a strong basis for Gandhi's ideas. Gandhi got familiar with the verses of Gita in his childhood as his father used to repeat some of the verses every day at the time of worship. He was attracted towards Gita due to his fear of ghosts and spirits in his childhood. It was to remove this fear that he was suggested to repeat Ramanama. Although, he admits that it was short-lived but he does agree that the seed was sown in his childhood as he believed that Ramanama and Bhagavat, both have become an important part of his life.

Gandhi admired Gita. In his own words, "The Gita has become for me the key to the scriptures of the world. It unravels for me the deepest mysteries to be found in them" (Gandhi, 1959, 30). According to him, the gist of Gita is that it teaches that life is for devotion to service and demanding sacrifice. It is not for enjoyment. He made an effort to live its message every moment of his life. He believed that Gita conveys the message of selflessness and detachment. Regarding detachment, Gandhi argues that, according to Gita, real service can be rendered only when one is ready to sacrifice which requires detachment. Considering it to be plausible, he says that if honest and genuine efforts are made, detachment will come, if not the very first day, then, in years to come. All that is to be emphasized is the effort for "the effort carries within itself the seeds of success"

(Gandhi, 2021, iii). Not only did Gandhi apply the teachings of Gita in his own life but also cited them in his arguments.

For Gandhi, Gita stood for real human nature. He considers that, within humans, too, there is an eternal battle between the baser impulses and the higher impulses just as in Gita that shows Duryodhan and his side to be representing the former while the latter is being symbolized by Arjuna and his party. For Gandhi, Krishna dwells in the heart, guiding the heart towards purity, failing which the dweller, that is, the God, ceases to speak. Krishna's teachings in Gita like 'be not moved by the fruits of works', the one who 'casts off all desires....comes unto peace', equanimity in the face of pleasure or pain, success or failure, proves to be the surest path to wisdom and spiritual attainment and other such valuable lessons formed the basis of Gandhian nonviolent principles. Sacred ideals like freedom from pride and pretentiousness, forgiveness, nonviolence, service, uprightness have been encapsulated under the definition of being completely selfless. These ideals formed the guiding principles for Gandhi.

These principles also helped Gandhi in propounding what qualities should a satyagrahi have? If observed closely it can be said that Gandhi's Satyagrahi was to be a *sattvika* that represents the highest *guna* out of the three *gunas* born of nature. Compared to the other two *gunas*, *rajas* that stand for passion leading to restlessness derived from attachment and craving and *tamas* for ignorance making a sloth rooted in ignorance and delusion, *sattva* is a *guna* that denotes goodness and happiness. A *sattvika* can be determined through finding out the differences in four components. These components are his food, austerity, sacrifice and almsgiving. With respect to food, a *sattvika* chooses those items that provide health, strength and energy. A *sattvika* offers sacrifice as a calling of duty with no expectations of reward. When it comes to the question of austerity of the mind, body and speech, a *sattvika* practices the three with an evenness of temper, devoid of any willingness for gaining any fruit out of this practice. Fulfillment of austerity of the body makes observing the saintly, purity, *brahmacharya* and non-violence possible, while, austerity of speech can be attained through incorporating in the speech, truthfulness, pleasantness and by ensuring that it is beneficial. Austerity of speech also demands study of scripture. Austerity of mind is achieved when one is cheerful, gentle, and silent, controls the self and believes in purity of motive. With respect to sacrifice and alms-giving, the Gita lays down that a *sattvika* gives a 'gift' to a deserving recipient disregarding any rewards in return.

Although Gandhi followed Gita's teachings, he did not blindly follow the already given interpretations. In this context, he remarks that, "I exercise my judgment about every scripture, including Gita. I cannot let a scriptural text supersede my reason"(Gandhi, 1959, 31). The significance to reason and experience that Gandhi bestows, can also be traced in his parents. While introducing his father, Gandhi states that,

He had no education, save that of experience. At best, he might be said to have read up to the fifth Gujarati standard...But his rich experience of practical affairs stood him in good stead in the solution of the most intricate questions and in managing hundreds of men (Gandhi, 1927, 4).

Similarly, talking about his mother, Gandhi writes, "My mother had strong common sense. She was well informed about all matters of State, and ladies of the court thought highly of her intelligence"(Gandhi, 1927, 5). These two introductions of Gandhi's father and mother respectively, explain that the trait of understanding things, be it in the spiritual, social or political realm require more than formal knowledge. Extending reason to the spiritual domain, Gandhi makes it clear that understanding religious texts demands one's own judgment, reason as well as experience. Hence, it can be said that though Gandhi had faith in religious scriptures, these scriptures were not beyond questioning for Gandhi. This part of the chapter, thus, underlines how the events in Gandhi's early childhood acquainted him with religion. In this section, an effort has also been made to explain how, later in his life, Gandhi interpreted different components of religion. The following section, explicates those events that showed that Gandhi understood the significance of truth right from his childhood.

TRUTH

In the previous section, it was explained how religion influenced Gandhi through his childhood events. In the present section, an attempt is made to demonstrate that truth was an indispensable part of Gandhi's childhood which later on helped his understanding of God when he claimed that Truth is God.

As aforementioned, Gandhi's belief in being truthful and honest was immense even when he was a child. One of the events in his school supports this claim. He writes,

I do not remember having ever told a lie, Mr. Giles, the Educational Inspector, had come on a visit of inspection. He had set us five words to write as a spelling exercise. One of the words was 'kettle'. I had misspelt it. The teacher tried to prompt me with the point of his boot, but I would not be prompted. It was beyond me to see that he wanted me to copy the spelling from my neighbour's slate, for I had thought that the teacher was there to supervise us against copying. The result was that all the boys, except myself, were found to have spelt every

word correctly. Only I had been stupid. The teacher tried later to bring this stupidity home to me, but without effect. I never could learn the art of 'copying' (Gandhi, 1927, 6).

The incident above seems to be insignificant if observed as a mere singular event but when it is read in connection with the larger impact it had on Gandhi, it holds much weight. Sacrificing for the sake of truth became one of the indispensable conditions for a satyagrahi. Choosing the right from wrong and standing for the truth even when none chooses to opt for it are some of the basic premises with which a satyagrahi resonates. Characters from Hindu religion like Shravana and Harishchandra made a profound impact on Gandhi. In this context, Gandhi says while introducing these characters in his autobiography, that, "Still both Harishchandra and Shravana are living realities for me, and I am sure I should be moved as before if I were to read those plays again today"(Gandhi, 1927, 7). Lessons pertaining to unconditional devotion to his parents and to truth stayed with Gandhi throughout his life.

NONVIOLENCE

As mentioned in the previous section, Gandhi's acquaintance with ahimsa took place through very personal and jolting instances. One such event was the day on which he wrote a letter of confession, for stealing, to his father. Asking for a fitting punishment, Gandhi pledged to never steal again. He narrates the reaction of his father as follows: "Those pearl drops of love cleaned my heart, and washed my sin away. Only he who has experienced such love can know what it is" (Gandhi, 1927, 26). The tears in the eyes of his father taught him the potential of love with respect to purging an individual of his wrongdoings. The force of love, that later, Gandhi realized was pure Ahimsa, sparked due to his pure repentance and his pledge to never repeat the same, had a greater consequence. The consequence manifested in the form of Satyagraha in South Africa, which was a unique struggle on a mass scale, keeping the power of Ahimsa and love as central and also focusing on how a resistance gets its authenticity through resolute pledges.

One more noteworthy instance that led Gandhi to understand the value of Ahimsa was when he started thinking about Brahmacharya as a part of his nonviolent journey. He realizes that the wife is not a slave of her husband but an equal companion and a helpmate. Thus, it can be said that Ahimsa personally transformed Gandhi before he entered the public realm as a leader. In the next section, this discussion on how Gandhi gradually incorporated religion, truth and nonviolence in his 'political' through his various life experiences in England, is taken further.

2.2. GANDHI IN ENGLAND: EXPERIMENTS AND THE IDEA OF POLITICAL

In England, Gandhi began experimenting in the direction of changing his lifestyle. These experiments are elucidated below with the aim of assessing how his idea of ‘political’ got further evolved. The previous section delineated how Gandhi’s formed his rudimentary understanding of religion, truth and nonviolence. This section carries on the discussion by focusing on Gandhi’s experiences in London. Gandhi’s stay in England prepared him for the struggle in South Africa, he was yet unaware of. Describing his experiments in England, he remarks that they were undertaken from the point of view of hygiene and economy. He began interpreting his experiments in religious terms in South Africa. Although he considered the experiments, he undertook in England as stepping stones. He made many changes in his lifestyle, ranging from living in a house that demanded economical rent, walking eight to ten miles to work and thus, saving fares, choosing a simple vegetarian diet and cooking breakfast himself. These experiments brought home many significant lessons for Gandhi. For instance, his changes in food habits made him realize that it is the mind that is to be focused and not the tongue, while choosing what to eat. Food became a fundamental component in Gandhi’s journey towards becoming a satyagrahi and therefore, it can be judged easily how beginning with this simple realization would have contributed in Gandhi’s life. His active involvement in the British vegetarian movement proved to be a factor of transformation at personal as well as political level. It was his main political activity until he left London.

The conference, meetings, committees that he attended in relation to this activity along with writing newspaper articles helped Gandhi learn the techniques of organization and propaganda which benefited him in the future. Through vegetarianism, Gandhi also got a cultural orientation apart from a political orientation. This happened because firstly, he was able to keep the oath he gave to his mother, secondly, as his fellow vegetarians advocated the dietary practices mentioned in Hinduism and thirdly, the radical vegetarians in the movement represented a disinclination towards industrialism and modern city. These three factors pushed Gandhi to rethink his imperialist loyalty and also about Indian civilization. In fact, Salt, which was to be a major component of Gandhi’s Satyagraha against the British in future, became so significant due to the thoughts of Kropotkin whose work linked vegetarianism to the critiques of colonial policies, conditions of factories, the legal system, prisons and cruelty to animals.

Similarly, his habit of walking proved to be a major factor in keeping him healthy and also in connecting his external self with the inner soul. Even his habit of calculating every penny he had, helped him to later teach lessons about simple living along with keeping in mind how economy plays a major role in determining the contentment of an individual as well as the society. In fact, it is worth noting that, even, an economy with words proved to be beneficial for Gandhi. Admitting that initially he considered his hesitation in speaking as a matter of annoyance, his later experience indicated that silence is a component of spiritual discipline, for those who are on a quest for truth. He explicates, further, that silence or being economical with words restrains an individual from exaggerating, suppressing or modifying the truth, as according to him, “A man of few words will rarely be thoughtless in his speech,” (Gandhi, 1927, 60) which means that, for Gandhi, truth is encapsulated in well-thought upon words. Reason, for Gandhi, is as precious as feelings or emotions.

With respect to religious churnings, Gandhi had explored a lot in England. He got acquainted with religious societies and experts of religions particularly Christianity. In England, Gandhi had a chance of converting to Christianity or simply foregoing the vows that he made to his mother that would keep him away from going astray from the principles of Hinduism, but he firmly adhered to being a Hindu. He believed that he had really less knowledge about his own religion and this shortcoming prohibits him from belonging to any other religious body. Although, this did not stop him from coming in contact with different religious texts. He claims to look at the teachings of Gita, the light of Asia and the Sermon on the Mount with an attempt to unify them. One of the major aspects of religion that made an indelible print on Gandhi was that of renunciation. Thus, he says, that

The verses, ‘But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man take away thy coat let him have thy cloak too,’ delighted me beyond measure and put me in mind of Shamal Bhatt’s ‘For a bowl of water, give a goodly meal’, etc. (Gandhi, 1927, 65).

Though, in his childhood, Gandhi did not respect this religion. Talking about Christianity Gandhi says “Surely, thought I, a religion that compelled one to eat beef, drink, liquor, and change one’s own clothes did not deserve the name” (Gandhi, 1927, 31). Conversion of people by the Christian missionaries made Gandhi dislike the religion more than anything else. But later when he came across the Sermon on the Mount, he began to change his position. He gained various insights from this sermon and developed them further. For Gandhi, Jesus was one of the greatest teachers

humanity ever had. Although he denied that Jesus was the most perfect man ever born, because he “believed in the *perfectibility* (not *perfection*) of human nature, Jesus came as near to perfection as possible. To say that he was perfect is to deny God’s superiority to man” (Gandhi, 1959, 6-7). He considered Jesus to be as divine as Krishna or Rama or Mahomed or Zoroaster.

Gandhi drew great inspiration from Christianity and gave explicit recognition to Jesus as an inspiration, he said “Though I cannot claim to be a Christian in the sectarian sense, the example of Jesus’s suffering is a factor in the composition of my undying faith in non-violence which rules all my actions, worldly and temporal” (Gandhi, 1959, 6). For Gandhi, Jesus Christ was a Satyagrahi as his immense suffering in the early days of Christianity shows. In his own words, Gandhi believes that,

Jesus Christ indeed has been acclaimed as the prince of passive resisters but I submit in that case passive resistance must mean Satyagraha and Satyagraha alone... The phrase passive resistance was not employed to denote the patient suffering of oppression by thousands of devout Christians in the early days of Christianity. I would therefore class them as Satyagrahis” (Gandhi, 2000, 97). He considered Christ to be a supreme artist as “ he saw and expressed truth (Gandhi, 1959, 5).

He understood the teachings of Christianity to be that of non-retaliation, or non-resistance to evil. He considered Jesus to be the creator of a new law: “not an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, but to be ready to receive two blows when only one was given, and to go two miles when you were asked to go one” (Gandhi, 1959, 13). These teachings of Christ are often misunderstood as being a mere submission to oppression. But actually these are illustrations of how to defeat and resist the opponent while walking on the path of human dignity and the spirit of love. Christ did not mean acceptance of blows without resistance. His instructions to turn the other cheek, give the other garment, or walk an extra mile are not to be taken literally, according to Wink, but are “examples to spark an infinite variety of creative responses” (Wink, 2017, 185). Turning the other cheek subtly indicates that the first try of the opponent failed in humiliating and overpowering the other person. Such a response morally disarms the opponent and this turns the tables. This strong challenge to injustice remains within the confines of nonviolence. Gandhi understood the transformative power returning love for hatred, good for evil and used this understanding for social change.

Though, in England, Gandhi accepts that he had a meager knowledge about his religion but he also considers that mere religious knowledge is futile. From these words it can be misinterpreted that Gandhi refuted the significance of knowledge of religion. This being not the case, Gandhi actually

transcends the border of mere knowledge and focuses on having faith in religion. He believes that this faith keeps getting stronger with experiences where one often applies the phrase ‘God saved me’. He further believes that supplications, worship, prayers, are not superstitions but are as real as eating, drinking, sitting or walking. It is his faith in God that makes him espouse that, “prayer is an unflinching means of cleaning the heart of passion. But it must be combined with utmost humility” (Gandhi, 1927, 69). This shows that for Gandhi, humility was an important virtue.

In his own words, Gandhi claims that the change he made in England did not bring him to the brink of breaking down, “On the contrary the change harmonized my inward and outward life. It was also more in keeping with the means of family. My life was certainly more truthful and my soul knew no bounds” (Gandhi, 1927, 53). The inseparability between the inner and the outer self gets highlighted in these sentences by Gandhi. Gandhi emphatically emphasized on the ‘self’ before establishing a bond with the ‘other.’ This movement from the ‘internal’ or the ‘within’ towards the ‘external’ or the ‘outer’ lays down the basis for sustainable and widespread changes in the personal as well as in the public realm. The sacredness of beginning from the ‘self’ reflects from the lines that Gandhi writes, explaining what he wishes to achieve. He writes,

What I want to achieve.... Is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain Moksha. I live and move and have my being in pursuit of this goal. All that I do by the way of speaking and writing, all my ventures in the political field, are directed to this same end (Gandhi, 1927, XII).

From the above sentences, it can be comprehended that, for Gandhi, self- realization is the path to achieve Moksha. His interpretation of Moksha does not confine to the after-life but pertains to the events or activities in this very world. It is due to this reason that, for him, even politics is a ladder to attain Moksha. It can be claimed that Gandhi was a practitioner of Karmayoga³ as he valued action and experience and that too, without an iota of expecting selfish gains. The dialectical relationship that Gandhi builds between the spiritual and the political makes his principles pragmatic and strong enough to sustain in the real world. The close connection of the spiritual with the political, makes Gandhi’s spiritual cannons as open to revision and criticism as his political principles. The scope for such a revision and correction remains open because Gandhi considers the truth to be central. His quest for truth acts as an impetus for his actions and beliefs in life. In this context, he mentions,

³ A term borrowed from Gita that means ‘the method of action’. For more details read ‘Discourses on Gita’ by Gandhi.

But for me, truth is the sovereign principle, which includes numerous other principles. This truth is not only truthfulness in word, but truthfulness in thought also, and not only the relative truth of our conception, but the Absolute Truth, the Eternal Principle that is God. ... But I worship God as Truth only (Gandhi, 1927, XIII).

The significance of truth can be judged from the above paragraph. Gandhi equates Absolute Truth with God. He believes that, quest to find God, puts him on a quest to search for truth. Gandhi accepts that “the conviction that morality is the basis of things, and that truth is the substance of all morality” (Gandhi, 1927, 29) had been scripted in his mind since his childhood.

Truth, for him, is not limited to just words but he extends it to thoughts as well. Relation between truthfulness of words and thoughts places nonviolence as a principle and practice in an important position in the scheme of Gandhi’s quest for truth. This is how one can observe that all other principles that Gandhi espouses are based upon two fundamental elements that are truth and nonviolence. Nonviolence is a crucial aspect for Gandhi, can be deciphered from how Gandhi understands the quest for truth to be carried out. He states that,

The instruments for the quest of truth are as simple as they are difficult. They may appear quite impossible to an arrogant person, and quite possible to an innocent child. The seeker after truth should be humbler than the dust. The world crushes the dust under its feet, but the seeker after truth should so humble himself that even the dust could crush him. Only then, and not till then, will he have a glimpse of truth (Gandhi, 1927, XIV).

The extent of humbleness demanded from a seeker of truth is perplexing at first, but the achievement of such depths of humility becomes possible when one gets to know how creatively Gandhi draws a link between truth, nonviolence and action. A satyagrahi, as will be discussed in the later parts of this chapter, attempts to be an embodiment of such a link between the three. At this juncture, it is sufficient to know that, for Gandhi, these three have an unbreakable tie. He borrowed the meaning of these three largely from the spiritual texts.

He made all possible efforts throughout his life to break the binary between inner and outer, mind and heart, body and soul, self and the other, because in his quest for truth, removing these boundaries was one primary task. Failing to do so would have meant maintaining the status quo in terms of walking on the already beaten path that leads to untruthfulness, violence, superficiality and immorality. Through his personal churnings that he made use of in building up his nonviolent way was a rupture in such a status quo. Such a spirit to destabilize the status quo could be observed in England where Gandhi tried understanding different facets of life, especially religion in-depth. In the next section, an attempt has been made to understand how Gandhi’s personal developments got more tangible through his leadership in his Satyagraha movement in South Africa.

2.3. GANDHI IN SOUTH AFRICA: REFINING THE ‘POLITICAL’ THROUGH SATYAGRAHA

This section produces the nuances of Gandhi’s journey in South Africa. It introduces his growth from an ordinary lawyer to a Satyagrahi and how each event helped him move towards shaping his understanding of politics.

3.2.1. EARLY ENCOUNTERS

This part of the chapter lays down Gandhi’s early experiences in South Africa. It begins from studying his role as a lawyer in South Africa and goes on to analyze the humiliation he faced at the Pietermaritzburg station. Gandhi came to South Africa to work on a case on behalf of Seth Dada Abdullah, a businessman in the same country. He was able to settle the case outside the court and claims that it was then that he realized the true practice of law. He learnt that the true function of a lawyer was to unite the parties involved. He further adds that the arbitration that he led made him see the positive side of human nature and enter into a human’s heart. The last sentence plays a primary role in Satyagraha as Gandhi always kept human and humanity at the core of his struggle. He believed in the capacity of humans to love, that is why, he defined Satyagraha to be ‘love-force’ i.e. a force born out of humans’ capability to love.

Gandhi’s political struggle through Satyagraha in South Africa was not a superficial one. The substance in his nonviolent resistance become clear when he writes the chapter explicating the difference between Satyagraha and Passive Resistance (a term which he used to denote his earlier phase of nonviolent struggle as till that time ‘Satyagraha’ as a term was not coined). His apprehensions of Satyagraha dissolving into Passive resistance or Duragraha shows that his was a resistance that was much more than a tool, as he puts it , ‘a weapon of the weak.’ The depth in his Satyagraha came as a consequence of his own shaping, right from his childhood and his experiences in London as already discussed. To these experiences, addition was made by his encounters in South Africa in the first few weeks of his arrival. These experiences of racial discrimination jolted Gandhi and proved to be a turning point in his life.

The first of such experiences was his encounter with the Magistrate in the Durban court who asked him to remove his turban, which he refused to follow and left the court. In response to such an insult, he adhered to the advice of Abdullah Seth and wrote to the press about the incident, defending his wearing of a turban in the court. With this he came into limelight as he says that,

“Thus the incident gave me an unexpected advertisement in South Africa within a few days of my arrival there. Some supported me, while others severely criticized my temerity. My turban stayed with me practically until the end of my stay in South Africa” (Gandhi, 1927, chapter 101). An incident later in Gandhi’s life made him realize that more than his turban, his struggle for the Indian community was important. It was in the Supreme Court that his turban was ordered to be removed and he paid heed to those orders. He explained that through this latter incident, he understood the beauty of compromise. He learned that reserving strength for the bigger, more worthy issues was much more prudent. Following the truth of the maxim, ‘When in Rome do as Romans do’, he believed that the spirit of compromise needs to be appreciated and it ultimately became an essential part of Satyagraha. Gandhi argues that, for a Satyagrahi, the spirit of revenge is insignificant. He is to follow self-restraint and suffer in difficult situations. He is to actively take steps so as to fight only for what is essential. He should prefer to be silent at the time of settlement as it would be in his favor when he is fighting against unjust laws.

Gandhi further narrates in his *Autobiography* that, being an Indian, he was addressed as a ‘coolie barrister’. He explains that this name was given to him because the indentured laborers in Natal from India were known as girmitya, a term that was derived from girmity, which was a corrupt version of the English word ‘agreement’, ‘coolies’ or ‘samis’. The other incident that Gandhi faced has been much discussed even now because of the intensity of hardships that it involved. At Pietermaritzburg, the Natal capital, he was pushed out of the train on the basis of a complaint by a co-passenger who could not tolerate a ‘colored’ man traveling in the first class even after having a ticket. Just like in the case of the court incident, Gandhi stood his ground and refused to leave the compartment voluntarily. In the waiting room, where he sat for the night, he had a lot of questions that made the foundations of his role as a leader in the future, firm. He writes,

I began to think of my duty. Should I fight for my rights or go back to India, or should I go on to Pretoria without minding the insults, and return to India after finishing the case?... The hardship to which I was subjected was superficial-only a symptom of the deep disease of color prejudice. I should try if possible, to root out the disease and suffer hardships in the process (Gandhi, 1927, 105).

The conundrum in Gandhi’s mind began with the debate between doing his duty with regard to fighting for his rights or just fulfilling his obligation of finishing the case and moving back to India. In a sense, an obligation is a duty too, but here is a case where the former represents an example of courage and resilience, while the latter depicts cowardice. Although Gandhi had nobody to be accountable for his decision, he chose to introspect, be accountable to himself and as his duty

decided to reach the root cause of the matter. His politics was based on similar lines. Rather than leaving the issues at the surface level, he understood the depth of the issue and struggled for resolving the root cause. It is because of this reason that this incident ignited his conscience to fight for what is right and the issue of racial discrimination got extended into a prolonged struggle for complete independence to attain meaningful Swaraj. Thus, it can be said that the realization of color prejudice that Gandhi encountered at Pietermaritzburg was a step towards his active political career.

It is to be observed here, that the incident at Pietermaritzburg station was not an end, another injustice, which Gandhi was a part of, happened during his trip. He had to board a stagecoach at Charlestown. He was forced to sit on the outside of the coach, was assaulted and humiliated by the driver. At this instance, Gandhi did not complain against the driver and “and so the chapter of the assault closed there” (Gandhi, 1927, 107). The decision not to take steps against the perpetrator of the assault may be taken as a sign of weakness, but, when Gandhi is understood entirely, it can be deciphered that he was a man who kept the crime separate from the one who executed it. He had already pinpointed the root cause of such happenings as color prejudice and wanted to redress it. Thus, instead of punishing the person who believed in such prejudice, he focused on treating the structural problem so that such a belief could be demolished. His politics in South Africa got a strong foundation in the form of such logic.

Gandhi’s first hand experiences acquainted him with reality and kindled his conscience towards redressing the wrong. In his Autobiography, he highlights what it is to be a coolie and how it affected him, and says a few sentences that goes for all his experiences. He mentions,

I thus made an intimate study of the hard conditions of the Indian settlers, not only by reading and hearing about it, but by personal experience. I saw that South Africa was no country for self-respecting Indians, and my mind became more and more occupied with the question as to how this state of things might be improved (Gandhi, 1927, chapter 122).

The next section discusses Satyagraha in South Africa that Gandhi led as a consequence of this very thought which pushed him to find a way to make a dent in the humiliating conditions of Indians in South Africa.

3.2.2. CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

In this section, a detailed analysis of Satyagraha in South Africa is attempted. Satyagraha in South Africa was an eight year long struggle. South Africa became the land where the discovery of

Satyagraha was made. The major demands that Satyagraha in South Africa aimed for were repealing of the three pound tax, legalizing the marriages celebrated according to the Hindu, Islam, etc. traditions, letting the educated Indians enter the boundaries of the country, altering the assurance regarding the Orange Free State and giving an assurance that the existing laws especially those affecting Indians will be executed in a way that keeps in mind the vested rights. These demands clearly highlight that Satyagraha was against unjust repression, humiliation and dehumanization of the Indian community.

These demands were finally accommodated in the Indians Relief Bill that had a section which dealt with validating Indian marriages in South Africa, if held legal in India. The Bill also contained a part that abolished the three pound tax for those indentured laborers who stayed in the country as a free man on completing their tenure. Another part assured that a domicile certificate issued to the Indians by the Natal Government, having the thumb impression of the holder of the permit will be recognized as conclusive evidence so that the right of the holder could enter the Union as soon as the identity of the holder was established. The Bill was debated in the Union Parliament. Apart from the matters mentioned in the bill, the other administrative matters were decided by a discussion between General Smuts and Gandhi. These issues included entry of the educated Indians' in the Cape Colony, allowing existing plural wives to join their husbands in South Africa and so on.

It was for the first time that a nonviolent means of resistance like Satyagraha was being applied, for resolving political issues, on a large scale. Gandhi, with the help of Satyagraha in South Africa, took the responsibility to make the Indian community in Natal and Transvaal, politically aware and educated so as to organize them for the upcoming difficulties. In his initial public speeches, he spoke on 'truthfulness in business', he emphasized on understanding the relationship between pure truth and business. He knew that the Indian community in South Africa comprised a considerable group of businessmen. Hence, he tried to awaken a sense of duty in this group towards being truthful and be an example for their fellow-countrymen. It was due to his motives of introducing cohesion among Indians that he took help from Indian leaders, Indian National Congress by creating widespread awareness in India about the cause of the Indian community in South Africa. In his initial letters to Dadabhai Naoroji, he expressed his true intentions and also asked for lending a helping hand. He writes, "I am yet inexperienced and young, and therefore,

quite liable to make mistakes. The responsibility undertaken is quite out of proportion to my ability... [but] I am the only available person who can handle the question” (Gandhi, 2000, Vol 1, 106). The letter highlights that even when Gandhi had stepped into an entirely new sphere, in which he had really less acumen, he still was strong-willed to continue and had no shame in asking for support.

In fact, in 1896 he returned to India to bring the discriminatory practices in South Africa before the country. This risked his life in South Africa, as, when he arrived in Durban in 1897, he was attacked by the hostile group of British residents. He decided not to go against the assailants just like in the case when he was assaulted by the ‘leader’ of the stagecoach in Charlestown. He even made efforts to clear the misunderstanding that sparked the direct attack against him. Following this, he communicated with the press, the British Committee of the Indian National Congress in London, and the government of Natal. Gandhi intensified his movement in 1899-1903. In this context, Joan V. Bondurant explains that Gandhi had a threefold program. Firstly, he represented his community to the authorities and made efforts to bring the grievances of the Indian community in the eyes of the general public. The second endeavor was towards urging Indians to focus on their own conditions, make amends in their own lives and thereby make their case for justice much stronger. In this context, Gandhi writes that,

I had found our people’s habits to be insanitary, as compared with those of the Englishmen around them, and drew their attention to it. I laid stress on the necessity of forgetting all distinctions such as Hindus, Musalmans, Parsis, Christians, Gujaratis, Madrasis, Punjabis, Sindhis, Kachchhis, Suaratis and so on (Gandhi, 1927, chapter 118).

Thirdly, he visited India in 1901-2 and personally attended the annual session of the India National Congress in order to move a resolution on the South African situation. He employed public meetings and letters to the press as means to fulfill this purpose. Press was a significant component of Gandhi’s movement. In 1903, he established the *Indian Opinion*, a weekly newspaper that played an important role in Gandhi’s own life as well as in the civil rights movement. Gandhi used the weekly journal, *Indian Opinion*, as a means to educate the local Indians in South Africa and also those present all over the world about the events happening in South Africa. This journal reflected the transparency of the movement. Gandhi writes,

Indian Opinion was an open book to whoever wanted to gauge the strength and the weakness of the community, be he a friend, an enemy or a neutral.... The workers had realized at the very outset that secrecy had no place in a movement, where one could do no wrong, where there was no scope for duplicity or cunning, and where strength constituted the single guarantee of victory (Gandhi, 1950, 27).

These words clearly reflect that Satyagraha demands moral righteousness on the part of the Satyagrahis. The reason behind such a condition is that morality infuses fearlessness in the Satyagrahis which in turn, makes them brave enough to accept vulnerability equally, before friends or foes. Such a vulnerability is not a mark of weakness but of strength that establishes a firm faith in the movement. The element of owning one's reality by every Satyagrahi in front of friend and opponent, also breaks the binary between the self and the other. In this context, Gandhi explains that,

A Satyagrahi bids good-bye to fear. He is therefore never afraid of trusting the opponent. Even if the opponent plays him false twenty times, the Satyagrahi is ready to trust him for the twenty-first time, for an implicit trust in human nature is the very essence of his creed (Gandhi, 1950, 30).

The immense faith in a Satyagrahi to be ethical, moral became stronger due to his enhanced religious knowledge that he gathered in South Africa. This is discussed under the following heading.

3.2.3. RELIGIOUS CHURNINGS

With respect to his inclination towards study of different religions, Gandhi states that, "The study stimulated my self-introspection and fostered in me the habit of putting into practice whatever appealed to me in my studies" (Gandhi, 1927, 149). In this section, the emphasis will be on showing that Satyagraha is a principle that has moral, spiritual and ethical values, that Gandhi so far grasped from his childhood and other past experiences, at its core. Gandhi's religious quest in South Africa reached a new level as from Christianity he moved to theosophy and back to Hindu religious texts. During his stay in South Africa, he memorized the Bhagavad Gita and considered it as an infallible guide of conduct (Gandhi, 1927, chapter 22). In fact, taking inspiration from Gita, Gandhi underscores the spiritual significance of Satyagraha by considering it as a *dharma-yuddha*. He defines *dharma-yuddha* as, "in which there are no secrets to be guarded, no scope for cunning and no place for untruth, comes unsought, and a man of religion is ever ready for it" (Gandhi, 1950, Preface). He further believes that the Satyagraha being a *dharma-yuddha* could only be waged in the name of God and God would help when one felt oneself humbler than the very dust under one's feet. The definition reflects the centrality of truth, transparency, faith in religion and humility. He argues that the beauty of Satyagraha is that, there is no need to search for it, as it comes up to oneself. This argument can be interpreted as Satyagraha being a spontaneous event that needs no pre-planning. But, when observed, Satyagraha struggle is spontaneous in the sense

that it begins and ends with the 'self.' A Satyagrahi cannot give away the qualities that Satyagraha demands, until intentionally repressed. It makes the core of the Satyagrahi so strong that in the sudden event of offering a Satyagraha there is no thinking twice with respect to how to prepare for the struggle.

The other reason why Satyagraha is spontaneous can be that it believes in the righteousness of the cause. If the Satyagrahi believes that the cause is worthy, then, the struggle could be waged right then. Strength in the self and in the cause enables sufficient power to the Satyagraha to begin. Moreover, because no selfish gains are to be reaped from the movement, it remains completely devoid of secrecy and deceit. Most importantly, Satyagraha depends on the power to suffer. Regarding the indispensability of suffering or *tapas*, Gandhi suggests that, "Real suffering bravely borne melts even a heart of stone" (As quoted in Erikson, 1993, 183). The sentence encapsulates the potency of suffering in Satyagraha. By self-suffering, the Satyagrahi becomes a source of change, not only for the internal self but also for the external world.

Tolstoy also helped Gandhi in deciphering the nuances of religion. Leo Tolstoy, a former czarist military officer, advised soldiers to reject military services and advocated civil disobedience. Tolstoy criticized the Church for not supporting the Christian 'law of non-resistance to evil by violence'. He believed that this law was guided by Jesus' statement in the 'Sermon on the Mount' (Matthew, ch. 5, v. 39-42): 'I say unto you, that you resist not evil, but whatsoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also....' (As quoted in Hardiman, 2017, 26) By using Jesus' 'resist not evil' as, 'non-resistance to evil by violence', Tolstoy refuted to be defeated by violence. He, thus, suggested, "Do not resist evil, but also do not yourselves participate in evil: in collection of taxes, and in violent deeds of law courts and (what is more important) the soldiers. Then, no one in the world will enslave you" (Tolstoy, 1963, 1). He insisted on resistance to the state authorities through nonviolence. Both supported a kind of religion that was rid of lust for power belonging to the state, religious sect, ruling class, racial majority. They believed in a religion that opposes the tendency towards self-expansion and forms the roots of most of civilization and culture. Theirs was a religion that values simplicity, self-limitation, peace, reason, and suffering.

Similarly, Gandhi and Tolstoy considered that all religions teach these same values. Tolstoy called it "Christianity as a New Concept of Life." This new concept of life, according to him, is found not only within Christianity but also in Islam and Buddhism and other religions of the world.

Gandhi was overwhelmed by Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is within You*. This writing of Tolstoy gradually made him read other works of the same author. In 1909 he read Tolstoy's *Letter to a Hindu*, which impacted Gandhi to great extent. In this letter, Tolstoy introduced the 'law of love' that can conquer evil. He strongly condemned the use of violence and asserted that "the truth that is to be realized is love, which is an attribute of the soul that has an irresistible power over the body, and over the brute or body force generated by the stirring up of evil passions in us." (Tolstoy, 1963, 2) He considered the law of love and the belief in resisting violence by violence to be diametrically opposites.

He highlights that

though common sense indicates that if some men claim to decide who is to be subjected to violence of all kinds for the benefit of others, these men to whom violence is applied may, in turn, arrive at a similar conclusion with regard to those who have employed violence to them (Tolstoy, 1963, 5).

Thus, he clearly points out that violence leads to counter-violence. This argument of Tolstoy impacted Gandhi to a great extent. Tolstoy further suggested that the one very important condition of love is to endure the injuries, insults, and violence of all kinds without resisting evil by evil. Gandhi formulated his principles of Satyagraha on these lines.

In fact, he and his friend Kallenbach had set up a 'Tolstoy Farm', near Johannesburg. In this place, Gandhi along with the families of Satyagrahis experimented with simple life-they practiced vegetarianism, fasting, reformed dress, nature cure, physical labor and so on. One of the most indispensable facts that Tolstoy conveyed and which made an ever-lasting impression on Gandhi was about India's subjection to the British.

He pointed out that British rule exists in India because Indians have allowed them to rule; otherwise it is impossible, according to him, to enslave two million people. Tolstoy opined that it is Indians who have enslaved themselves and they can be free only when they discover the law of love. Indian subjects have mistaken it to take force to be the supreme means of resisting against the violence by the British. He stated that "If the people of India are enslaved by violence, it is only because they themselves live and have lived by violence and do not recognize the eternal law of love inherent in humanity" (Tolstoy, 1963, 8). Therefore, it can be observed that the arguments made by Tolstoy acted as a mirror reflecting the harsh reality of colonialism and the role of Indians perpetuating it.

Although Tolstoy did not discuss in any detail how to execute the form of non-resistance he espouses, he had firm faith in the power of resistance without violence for struggling against oppression and evil. Gandhi wrote “Action is my domain” (Cited in Galtung, 1992, 42). He always said that his life is his message to the world. He always believed in doing rather than thinking. This is where he is different from earlier writings on nonviolence. It was not that the idea of nonviolence came only with Gandhi. This idea was present years before Gandhi pursued it, but remained enclosed within the scriptures or within the small community of priests and religious leaders. He practiced this idea and disseminated it amongst the masses through his deeds. His practical application of nonviolence manifested in the form of Satyagraha. He claimed that “if the story of the universe had commenced with wars, not a man would have been found alive today” (Gandhi, 1938, 67). For him, nonviolence is the root of the existence of the universe. Gandhi advocated Passive Resistance or Satyagraha for resolving conflicts. According to him, “[p]assive Resistance is a method of securing rights by personal suffering; it is the reverse of resistance by arms.” (Gandhi, 1938, 69) In his letter to Tolstoy in 1909, Gandhi stated that he along with his fellow Satyagrahis were attempting to practice ‘the doctrine of nonviolent-resistance to evil’ in South Africa (Gandhi, 2000, Vol.9, 444). What does this doctrine mean for Gandhi in the form of Satyagraha is explicated in the next section.

3.2.4. MEANING OF SATYAGRAHA

In this part of the chapter, an effort is made to understand what Satyagraha meant for Gandhi. He brought the element of strength and a new kind of force to the sphere of nonviolent resistance by introducing Satyagraha. The genesis of Satyagraha as a principle could be traced even before it was identified with the same name. As Gandhi mentions, “The principle called Satyagraha came into being before that name was invented. Indeed when it was born I myself could not say what it was” (Gandhi, 1927, 292). An atmosphere of ambiguity that envelops these lines put forth the possibility that this principle was entirely a novel idea and practice which made it difficult to weave Satyagraha in the ordinary fabric of practices for resistance so far available.

Gandhi’s cautious approach in letting Satyagraha to be not mixed with ‘passive resistance’ confirms his conviction in the principle of Satyagraha being exclusive. Differentiating Satyagraha from passive resistance, Gandhi makes it clear that his passive resistance was about the ‘soul force’ which was a weapon of the strong and fearless. According to him, Satyagraha (Satya-Truth;

Agraha-Firmness) is a “force which is born of Truth and Love or non-violence” (Gandhi, 1950, 106). On the other hand, passive resistance that was interpreted by the English people was a weapon of the weak.

Gandhi underscores the element of weakness and helplessness inherent in passive resistance. Following this, he explains that the choice of adopting passive resistance is made not because there is an aversion to the violent means, but because passive resisters feel deprived of the power to handle the force of arms given a strong opponent on the opposite side. It is this hopelessness with oneself in succeeding with violent means and physical force that drives them to adhere to passive resistance. Due to this reason, passive resistance even contains the chances of eruptions of violence, whenever such an opportunity arrives.

Contrasting passive resistance with Satyagraha, Gandhi emphatically argues that,

brute force had absolutely no place in the Indian movement in any circumstances....no matter how badly they suffered, the Satyagrahis never used physical force and that too although there were occasions when they were in a position to use it effectively (Gandhi, 1950, 109).

These few lines encapsulate the strength and a firm belief of Satyagrahi in the principle of ahimsa. An unflinching faith in Satyagraha or truth-force lends the Satyagrahi not only an unwavering conviction in the cause for which he or she is fighting but also infuses the courage and energy to bear suffering on the self to the extent that “pain to a Satyagrahi is the same as pleasure”(Gandhi, 1950, 304). The ability of a Satyagrahi to bear intense pain germinates from the moral strength that defined Satyagraha. It is due to this strength that getting imprisoned was a matter of pride for the satyagrahis. The first satyagrahi prisoner, Pandit Rama Sundara, offered an opportunity to learn a lot of lessons to the satyagrahis. A resident of Germiston, originally an Indian, Pandit Rama Sundara, became famous all over South Africa after he got incarcerated. His imprisonment raised the confidence of the rest of the satyagrahis. But, gradually it was found out that Rama Sundara was an indentured laborer who did not complete his term. Dishonesty on his part was not disclosed by Gandhi so as to insult him but to gain a lesson that it is the responsibility of the leader to select such fighters that have a clean and honest record. The real learning from this incident was that it emphasized on the value of forgiveness.

Gandhi did not look down upon Rama Sundara with contempt, because he understood that imperfection is nothing unique to Rama only, every human is defined by it. Therefore, he refused to dehumanize him just for his misdeeds and insisted on treating him charitably. In addition to this,

his imprisonment first proved to have been in the favor of the satyagrahis and even after he fled away, his actions made the other weaklings remove themselves on their own accord. Thus, even a dishonest act by a man in Satyagraha had positive repercussions on the movement. This happens because Satyagraha gives time to think over any action that takes place. It allows us to calibrate the situation, deliberate over the action and chart out what needs to be done in the future. If such room would not have been available in the movement, then, the only consequence that Rama Sundara would have had faced was disrepute, disgrace, expulsion from the hands of those disappointed and annoyed with him. Such an act would have filled the movement with negative energies, hampering the progress of the movement itself.

Gandhi did not limit the belief of love force being natural to humans to the Satyagrahis only, but also, extended it to the opponents as well. He endeavored (as a Satayagrahi) to make the opponent as a friend and not an enemy. Gandhi, thus, aimed at breaking the divide between ‘us’ and ‘them’, He upheld that the heart of the opponent can be converted by a Satyagrahi through the means of love force. The conversion of the opponent is to be achieved by relevant, sane arguments, morally upright nonviolent actions and self-suffering by a Satyagrahi. Gandhi included persuasion, civil disobedience and fasting in Satyagraha.

It was not that Gandhi did not take into account the dimension of winning or losing in a Satyagraha. He was concerned about the cost-benefit calculations as well, but not always from the prism of utilitarianism. He looked at Satyagraha as a principle that, though, is also concerned about victory in terms of tangible gains. But the true essence of Satyagraha lies in that it goes beyond such a cold calculation of the consequences. Therefore, Gandhi aptly says that, “The very nature of Satyagraha is such that the fruit of the movement is contained in the movement itself” (Gandhi, 1950, 172). He further explains that as Satyagraha proceeds, it is the Satyagrahi who tends to become stronger and is on the gaining side as compared to the opponent. The calculations in Satyagraha do not move as in the case of a violent movement. The example where Gandhi identifies the hypocrisy of Lord Elgin, representative of the British Government proves this argument. Gandhi underlines that how Lord Elgin pretended to be a friend of the Indian community by not allowing the ordinance turn into a law, on the one hand while on the other hand, he withdrew from taking any responsibility for the Sir Richard’s actions after the title of Responsible Government will be granted to Transvaal on January 1, 1907.

Lord Elgin's secret support to the Transvaal Government made it easier for Sir Richard to pass those very laws that Lord Elgin had decided not to by the power of veto. The obvious consequence of this should have been that the spirits of the Indian community would be crushed. Instead, the betrayal raised the enthusiasm of the community. The faith in Satyagraha and self-confidence helped the satyagrahis to overcome the difficult situation. They were aware that their struggle was independent of any assistance from the government due to which all they had to do is to rely on their own selves and have faith in God. The Act took effect from July 1, 1907. The Indian community was called upon to apply for registration under the Act before July 31, 1907. He states that,

The adversary is not a Satyagrahi, Satyagraha against Satyagraha is impossible, and is not bound by any limit of maximum or minimum....Therefore as a Satyagraha struggle is prolonged, that is to say by the adversary, it is the adversary who stands to lose from his own standpoint, and it is the Satyagrahi who stands to gain (Gandhi, 1950, 175).

These sentences direct towards the benefits that are implicitly present in Satyagraha. According to Gandhi, Satyagraha does not perish with time but expands unlike other struggles that get reduced as it moves further. He states that,

A Satyagraha struggle progresses onward, many another element helps to swell its current, and there is a constant growth in the results to which it leads...For in Satyagraha the minimum is also the maximum, and as it is the irreducible minimum, there is no question of retreat, and the only movement possible is an advance (Gandhi, 1950, 194).

It is progressive in nature and the intensity of actions taken by a Satyagrahi gradually escalates as the struggle gets tougher. Apart from fighting for the issue and positively impacting the parties involved, Satyagraha envelops the possibility of constructive work for the betterment of the society at large. For the overall development of the masses, Gandhi relied on educating the concerned people. His Satyagraha kept service as an important component. The centrality of the idea of service can be measured from Gandhi's own activities in South Africa. It was due to his dedication to the spirit of service that he resolved to take up the vow of Brahmacharya. He says in this context that,

.... During the difficult marches that had then to be performed, the idea flashed upon me that if I wanted to devote myself to the service of the community in this manner, I must relinquish the desire for children and wealth and the life of a vanaprastha-of one retired from household cares." (Gandhi, 1927,191)According to him, Brahmacharya helped him be closer to the knowledge that allowed "protection of the body, the mind and the soul (Gandhi, 1927, 193).

Even at a great personal risk, he nursed the plague stricken patients in Johannesburg. In the Boer war, he supported the British by organizing a medical corps in which he served. Although, his

service greatly served the British. But, he also ignited a new hope among the Indian community. It was felt that the grievances of the community would be redressed finally as the attitude of the British was favorable. Gandhi's own narration supports this feeling, he states that,

At the moment the white man's attitude seemed to be distinctly changed. The relations formed with the whites during the war were of the sweetest. We had come in contact with thousands of tommies. They were friendly with us and thankful for being there to serve them (Gandhi, 1927, 200).

Therefore, it can be said that for Gandhi, the 'search for truth' was at the core of Satyagraha and this search demanded more than a mere struggle. It called for building a constructive society, for a better future, apart from just winning the struggle. Winning or losing at any cost was not its fundamental condition. This section presents how, gradually, religion, truth and nonviolence were incorporated in his first political struggle in the form of Satyagraha.

4. MAKING SENSE OF GANDHI'S 'EMBEDDED POLITICAL'

Sections above attempts to explicate those steps that helped Gandhi in making his own understanding of politics. These sections present how significant self, ahimsa and truth are for Gandhi in the conceptualization of politics. For Gandhi, the spiritual and the political realms were closely connected, as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. He explains seeing the political sphere from a religious lens in the following words:

I could not be leading a religious life unless I identified myself with the whole of mankind and that I could not do unless I took part in politics. The whole gamut of man's activities today constitutes an indivisible whole... I do not know of any religion apart from activity. It provides a moral basis to all other activities without which life would be a maze of sound and fury signifying nothing (Orwell, 1954, 180).

From the above lines, the inextricable link between religion and politics in Gandhi's framework of understanding what is political, becomes clear. According to him, the active realm of politics is founded upon the moral bedrock that is laid by the religious sphere. Religion, not in the sectarian sense, unifies mankind, as it shows all the path to swaraj while politics, not based upon the selfish interests, paves way for acting towards building such a swaraj. He writes, "If India adopted the doctrine of love as an active part of her religion and introduced it in her politics, Swaraj would descend upon India from heaven"(Gandhi, 1959, 14). Three things can be observed from this single sentence. One is that Gandhi's religion was all-encompassing. It did not limit itself to just one category. That is why he would call for establishing a religion of India and the second point is that, for Gandhi, politics could not be separated from religion. Another important point is his articulation of Swaraj or freedom. This modern value of freedom is understood in-depth by

Gandhi. Gandhi's project of freedom had nonviolence and truth as its base. These two values i.e. nonviolence and truth were in turn the lenses through which Gandhi developed his religious philosophy. This connection can be noticed in the following sentences that Gandhi reminded the Gandhi Seva Sangh, he says, "I am quite sure that no one would have cared for my politics, if I was not pledged to truth and non-violence. Truth and non-violence are synonymous with God and whatever we do is nothing apart from them" (As quoted in Jawed, 2016, 178). Thus, religion, nonviolence, truth and freedom were going together in Gandhi's framework. Therefore, it forms an 'indivisible whole', according to Gandhi.

Gandhi had understood this indivisible link between the divine, nature and humans as a result of which he insisted upon a holistic framework of development. Akeel Bilgrami's analysis is significant to be observed at this juncture. He asks in one of his articles that "How and when did we transform the concept of nature into the concept of natural resources?" ("Gandhi's Radicalism: An Interpretation," 2016, 218) He notices that,

From anima mundi, there were built-in constraints to what one could take from nature, and such taking as was done was often accompanied by rituals of respect shown to nature and the divine presence within it, before cycles of planting and hunting. Now, without any such metaphysical constraint, they argued, things were openly being set up to take from nature with impunity, and they presciently saw that this would make the hitherto fitful practice of forced enclosures, a systematic and legally backed practice, depriving the poor of the collective cultivation of the commons and generating the future that pointed to what we today call "agribusiness", thereby destroying the local forms of egalitarianism that radical sects had envisioned ("Gandhi's Radicalism: An Interpretation," 2016, 221).

In his analysis, Bilgrami shows that Gandhi's conception of nature was closely associated with the divine, with atman that resided not only in nature but in all its inhabitants. Therefore, this conception of divinity connected every living being with nature. Gandhi's understanding of a sacred bond with nature coincided with the interpretation of the Early Dissents of Europe of the seventeenth century according to whom a conception of an inert and brute nature had been spread by the orthodox figures in the Royal Society.

The Royal Society had an alliance with the commercial and mercantile interests and with Anglican orthodoxy to master nature. They followed the deliberately constructed ideology reflected in the remarks of one of prominent members of the Royal Society, William Petty. William Petty said in one of his works of 1682 that, "What may be the meaning of the glorified bodies, in case of the place of the blessed shall be, without the convex of the orb of the fixed stars, is that the whole system of the World was made for the use of our earth's men" ("Gandhi's Radicalism: An

Interpretation,” 2016, 218). Thus, Bilgrami unfolds the evisceration of divinity from nature by the ploy manufactured by the early modern thinkers of the Royal Society which destroyed the ethical value of nature and treated it as a mere commodity. Gandhi, rightly, predicted the same fate of nature in his times as with colonization, the modern duality between nature and human had already crept in. This has started transforming nature into natural resources that Akeel Bilgrami is talking about.

Looking at Gandhi's politics from the lens of *purusharth*, Anthony Parel's 'Pax Gandhiana: *The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi*', direct attention to a critical question, which is as follows: "whether politics and economics can deal with the real issues of daily life, and whether the material basis of life can be maintained without undermining life's ethical basis and spiritual aspirations." It presents the possibility of answering this quest by focusing on a political philosophy based not on disjointed political ideas but on an organic whole of ideas. Anthony Parel's endeavor is towards presenting a holistic picture of Gandhi's political philosophy. He asserts that Gandhi emphasized on building up Pax Gandhiana. "Pax Gandhiana stands for a peaceful and nonviolent political order, both domestically and internationally." Parel explicates that such a peaceful order cannot be placed in reality with political means alone. It calls for the confluence of the four canonical ends of life: ethics (dharma), economic pleasure and democratic politics (artha), forms of pleasure (kama), and the pursuit of spiritual transcendence (moksha). By reviving purusharthas, Gandhi emphasizes on the need for a plurality of life-goals. According to Gandhi, Purushartha is what makes humans different from animals. It is the intelligent purpose associated with human life that distinguishes our struggle from the struggle of animals. This purpose seeks much more than bodily material well-being; it seeks moral and spiritual well-being as well. Pursuing purushartha helps in making such a transcendence from our mere bodily conditions towards achieving the moral and spiritual.

Gandhi, as an innovator and as a political philosopher, updated the old theory of *purushartha* and reconciled it with modern conditions. In the process of updating the old Indian political canon, Gandhi deleted the emphasis on monarchy and caste system, he crushed the hierarchical 'law of fishes' in favor of the idea of swaraj or self-rule. On the other hand, he added four ideas that he

borrowed from the West. These ideas were that of civic nationalism⁴, civic nonviolence⁵ the limited constitutional state, fundamental human rights, and modern political economy. The product of this project was a new political canon that led to the emergence of swaraj, Satyagraha, sarvodaya, swadeshi, ahimsa, nationalism, constitutionalism, selfless public service, and the like. Even the eleven civic virtues⁶ recited as prayers have largely been taken from Gandhi's understanding of religion from various sources. But it needs to be highlighted that amongst these eleven there are certain virtues like swadeshi, discarding of untouchability that are in response to the then current situations. This insight reflects that Gandhi constructed his conception of social individuals as internalizing these civic virtues so that they can be closer to both religion as well as the practical reality that called for grasping the modern values in order to deal with the ills of the tradition.

Talking about Gandhi's politics in modern age, Bhikhu Parekh explicates, that, for Gandhi, the modern age was the age of politics par excellence. For a transformative effect, Gandhi thought that political life needs to be spiritualized. According to Gandhi,

Whenever the religious spirit is on the decline, it is revived through such an effort in tune with the times. In this age, our degradation reveals itself through our political condition... Everyone had realized that popular awakening could be brought about only through political activity. If such activity was spiritualized, it could show the path of moksha (Parekh, 1989, 100).

Therefore, Gandhi asserted that the path to moksha, in the modern age, was only through political action. For him, 'true politics' was primarily concerned with man's moral and spiritual development. Following this argument, according to him, 'true politics' did not materialize in reality only through attainment of independence, it consisted in revitalizing Indian society, culture and character by working in the villages, fighting against local injustices, helping people acquire

⁴ Civic nationalism considers individuals to be the bearer of inalienable rights and as subjects capable of swaraj or self-rule, self-determination, and self-development.

⁵ Civic nonviolence allows for establishment of civic friendship as it makes room for the virtue of equal respect for all religions to flourish.

⁶ ahimsa satya asteya brahmacharya asamgraha sarirasrama asvada sarvatra bhaya-varjana sarvadharmasamanatva svadesi spasabhavna.

(nonviolence, truth, non-stealing, chastity, non-possession, physical labour, control of the palate, fearlessness, equality of all religions, swadeshi, discarding of untouchability.)

courage and self-respect, building up their organized strength and in general devoting oneself to the programme of constructive work.

CONCLUSION

This chapter focuses on unfolding the emergence of Gandhi's idea of 'political' by analysing three phases of his life: his childhood, stay in England and his political resistance in the form of Satyagraha in South Africa. The chapter lays down how with each passing stage of his life, he develops his understanding of the three fundamental elements of his life: self, truth and ahimsa. These three elements became the foundational principles of his idea of 'political'. The idea of 'political' deciphered after studying his three phases of life comes out to be largely influenced by his life events, his gradual understanding of core components of his life and his initial experiments. Therefore, it would not be wrong to argue that Gandhi's idea of 'political' is experiential. He embedded his conception of 'political' in his experiences which helped him to make self, ahimsa and truth to be the basic core principles. Gandhi saw an inextricable link among the three principles and applied it to form an interconnection among social, economic, political as well as spiritual spheres of life. Thus, the chapter asserts that Gandhi's 'embedded political' is holistic as well. How such an emergentist, experiential and holistic idea of 'political' crystallized and evolved in the Indian context with Gandhi's leadership in the local and national context is analysed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2: ‘EMBEDDED POLITICAL’: EVOLUTION FROM LOCAL STRUGGLES TO NATIONAL MOVEMENT

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter takes the discussion on understanding Gandhi’s ‘political’ further by analyzing some of the movements that Gandhi led. The chapter argues that as Gandhi matured in his on-ground nonviolent resistance, his faith in having a holistic understanding of ‘political’ grew. Thus, as shown in the previous chapter, Gandhi learned to establish a link between political and spiritual with the help of his experiences in the social and economic realm, he practiced the same interconnectedness in his political struggles as well. Gandhi did not become an established leader as soon as he entered India. He was just like other nonviolent leaders who were working for the country initially, it was his unique political philosophy which had its base in his learnings during his early life as explained in the previous chapter which made him stand out.

It is important to note here, that unlike popular misconceptions, Gandhi had not entered the field of resistance as a mere idealist. It is true that he came up with a vision of raising a challenge against British rule and that too on nonviolent lines. Yet, his focus was also on understanding the needs, the objectives and the context of the movements that he led. Bob Overy aptly mentions in his thesis chapter that , “ Practical choices faced him [Gandhi] as an organizer about what issues to take up, which groups to involve, what methods to pursue and to what lengths he should go in order to achieve the results he was seeking” (Overy, 2019). These lines precisely present that Gandhi was a political organizer of different movements that he led at local and national level. It would not be wrong to assert here that those local struggles which Gandhi led initially in India helped to gather a critical mass for his national movements. It was during his long journey of movement organization that he sketched the idea of nonviolent politics. The sections below lay down his journey in India as a political organizer of movements and as a leader who propounded nonviolent politics in two broad parts. The first part discusses Gandhi’s role in local resistances that helped him construct his political principles for nonviolent resistance to a certain extent. The second part of the chapter focuses upon understanding how Gandhi applied and innovated his idea of politics at the national level.

2. LOCAL RESISTANCES: UNRAVELING THE POTENTIAL OF SATYAGRAHA

In South Africa, Gandhi had deciphered the basis of Satyagraha and had introduced a lot of changes in his own life. Simple living, a life of Brahmacharya, experiments with his diet and methods of treatment, made him a leader that was relatable with the grassroots in India. There he had a small Indian community to fight for, but in India, his image as a nationalist leader formed gradually. The initial steps came in the form of his local struggles in 1917-18. Judith M. Brown, describes Gandhi's entry to the Indian political life in the following words, he says,

When he [Gandhi] returned to India with his little ashram community, he seemed to have had no idea that he would become involved in national politics. However, through the practice of nonviolence in local, small-scale conflicts in Bihar and in Gujarat, he not only became known in political life but began to sense that this might be an arena where he could and should suggest the practice of Satyagraha (Brown, 2011, 56).

The above lines clearly reflect the significance of Gandhi's initial struggles in Bihar and Gujarat as gateways to national politics. When these two nonviolent struggles are looked into separately many important aspects of Satyagraha get unfolded. The following section highlights such aspects of Satyagraha when Gandhi was in Champaran.

2.1. CHAMPARAN SATYAGRAHA: BEGINNING OF A 'PEOPLE-CENTRIC' POLITICS

Champaran Satyagraha brought Gandhi face-to-face with peasants. Regarding his meeting with them, Gandhi writes, "It is no exaggeration, but the literal truth, to say that in this meeting with the peasants I was face to face with God, Ahimsa and Truth" (Gandhi, 1927, 382). This single sentence depicts the significance Gandhi placed upon the peasants. Champaran Satyagraha was against oppression of peasants due to a law that forced them to grow indigo over at least three out of every twenty parts of land. This oppressive system was called the tinkathia system. The struggle that Gandhi raised against the law in Champaran was considered to be a bold experiment with truth and nonviolence. This experiment included coming face to face with the repressive British regime and also engaging with the ryots of the area. Gandhi had already led a Satyagraha in South Africa and in India, he focused on dwelling on the principles of Satyagraha in order to achieve goals. One of these principles was that Gandhi endeavored, as a Satyagrahi, to make the opponent as a friend and not an enemy. Gandhi, thus, aimed at breaking the divide between 'us' and 'them', as can be observed in his anxiousness that Rajendra Prasad describes in 'Satyagraha in Champaran'. Rajendra Prasad explains that

What he [Gandhi] was anxious about was the trouble of the tenants should disappear and friendship established between the two parties, and their relations should be such that each should wish well of the other (Prasad, 1928, 178).

These sentences put forth the concern of Gandhi as a Satyagrahi not only for the suppressed and marginalized but also for the exploiter. He did not aim to resolve the conflict in Champaran by giving a volte-face to the situation as in that case the planters would have been suppressed. What he was seeking was to find a solution that would ensure the well-being of both the parties involved. This would make them stand at the same pedestal so that none would be below or above anyone.

Even with respect to the government officials like the Collector, Magistrate and the Police Superintendent, Gandhi had brokered friendly relations with them as he claimed that these officials “saw that I did not want to offend them personally, but that I wanted to offer civil resistance to their orders” (Gandhi, 1927, 381). He used civil resistance so as to go against the repressive order of the government to leave Champaran. His faith in this method and his cause was so firm that in the event of the demand for postponing the case, he stood determined to plead guilty before the court for disobeying the order to leave Champaran. His disobedience was an important lesson in the course of nonviolent struggle. He disobeyed the orders because he was a leader who considered his duty towards the down-trodden and his commitment to the voice of conscience to be above and beyond the penalty he was to bear for his disobedience. It was due to his persistence that Gandhi’s civil disobedience was answered promptly and that too, in his favor. The Magistrate asked the Lieutenant Governor to withdraw the case and the Collector allowed him to conduct the inquiry.

Apart from fighting for the issue and positively impacting the parties involved, Satyagraha envelops the possibility of constructive work for the betterment of the society at large. For the overall development of the masses, Gandhi relied on educating the concerned people. Rajendra Prasad explains Gandhi’s faith in education in Champaran Satyagraha by mentioning that,

It was the opinion of Mahatma Gandhi that one of the main reasons of the sufferings of the tenants of Champaran was their ignorance.... Mahatmaji had accordingly decided that arrangement for spread of education was as necessary among them as the redress of their grievances (Prasad, 1928, 194-195).

It should be noted here that for Gandhi, education was not mere knowledge of letters. Education, according to Gandhi, should ensure character-building in moral and ethical terms. Therefore, it can be said that for Gandhi, the ‘search for truth’ was at the core of Satyagraha and this search demanded more than a mere struggle. It called for building a constructive society, for a better future, apart from just winning the struggle. Winning or losing at any cost was not its fundamental

condition. For Gandhi, “Constructive programme may otherwise and more fittingly be called construction of Poorna Swaraj or complete Independence by truthful and non-violent means” (Gandhi, 1941, Introductory). Therefore, it can be said the foundation of freedom in Gandhi’s framework is laid through constructive work. In fact, Civil Disobedience which Gandhi undertook in this Satyagraha was a part of constructive efforts. According to him, “Civil Disobedience was a storehouse of power” (Gandhi, 1941, 7). He believed that non-confirmation of repressive laws by people who are ready to face the consequences of their non-compliance could bring the entire legislative as well as the executive system to a standstill.

In Champaran Satyagraha, Gandhi also displayed how a struggle is to be understood as a path towards serving the larger political goals. He considered it better to keep this resistance away from getting a political shade. Hence, he tried not to involve or work under the name of Congress. Stating the reason behind not giving the struggle a political undertone, Gandhi said that, “I had seen that, even where the end might be political, but where the cause was nonpolitical, one damaged it by giving it a political aspect and helped it by keeping it within its nonpolitical limit” (Gandhi, 1927, 385). These sentences highlight that Gandhi had decided to keep the Satyagraha, nonpolitical, although he identified that its consequences were largely political.

The question that may be asked is that did Gandhi really differentiate between the political and social? I think from the aforementioned sections it must be clear that that was not the case. For him, social and political were intertwined. In this context, Anthony Parel claims that Gandhi was both a political philosopher drawing from Indian traditions as well as an innovator focusing on modern aspects of civilization. As a political philosopher, Gandhi treats spiritual liberation to be the highest human good and as an innovator, he updates the theory of *purusharthas* by placing the four canonical ends of life in an integrative, interactive framework that would ultimately lead to the achievement of spiritual liberation. It can be said that Gandhi did not envisage the sphere of politics (the sphere of artha) in isolation from dharma, kama and moksha. The implication of understanding Gandhi’s political philosophy from the conceptual framework of the theory of *purusharthas* is to understand that “Gandhi’s politics is more than just the pursuit of power and self-interest”(Parel, 2016, 18). For Gandhi, politics (that is, artha) is the means of achieving full humanity.

Then why is he demarcating the political from the nonpolitical, in this case? If we read further, then, Gandhi in his Autobiography, explains that, “The Champaran struggle was a proof of the fact that disinterested service of the people in any sphere ultimately helps the country politically” (Gandhi, 1927, 385). It is through this single sentence that we see the idea of political as well as social being closely linked in Gandhi’s philosophy. He elucidates that the service of the people in the sphere of social, economic or spiritual is going to be helping politically. Gandhi endeavored to inform and convince people of this ‘simple-truth’ that the political representatives do not have power which is independent of the people. It is people in whom the power resides and not the Parliaments. In fact, he questioned the belief that Parliaments are the true power-holders and asserted that,

A superficial study of British history has made us think that all power percolates to the people from parliaments. The truth is that power resided in the people and it is entrusted for the time being to those whom they may choose as their representatives (Gandhi, 1941, 7).

Due to this reason, we observe that in Gandhi’s struggles and in the contemporary Gandhian Social Movements, the approach is always ‘people-centric’ or ‘human as well as humanity-centric’ instead of ‘power-centric’, which is often the hallmark of conventional political systems. Moreover, it would not be wrong to argue that the ‘people-centric’ approach advocated by Gandhi was so comprehensive and substantive that it encapsulated not only power, but also self-respect, dignity and consciousness of connecting the self to the universal. He developed such an approach further in his Ahmedabad mill strike explained in the following section.

2.2. AHMEDABAD MILL STRIKE: EXPERIENCING FASTING AS A MORAL & POLITICAL TOOL

In the previous section, it could be noticed that the Champaran Satyagraha had many valuable lessons to teach. It ended with success in terms of abolishing the *tinkathia* system and ultimately, finishing the planters’ raj. During the course of the movement, Gandhi got a call for help in Ahmedabad where the workers had been struggling to get an increment in their wages. After getting acquainted with the situation, Gandhi advised the laborers to go on a strike and follow the conditions mentioned below, so as to observe a completely nonviolent and a successful strike:

1. Never to resort to violence,
2. Never to molest blacklegs,
3. Never to depend upon alms, and

4. To remain firm, no matter how long the strike continued, and to earn bread, during the strike, by any other honest labor.

Accepting these conditions, the workers continued the strike for twenty-one days. Though the strikers showed enthusiasm in the initial days, it had started waning later. Looking at such a situation, Gandhi decided to go on a fast. He said, “unless the strikers rally,’ I declared to the meeting, ‘and continue the strike till a settlement is reached, or till they leave the mills altogether, I will not touch any food” (Gandhi, 1927, 400). Here it can be understood that the fast was due to the failing commitment to the pledge that the laborers had made. It was a plea to continue the pledge with enthusiasm. But, it also had another impact, of which Gandhi was well-aware. Gandhi knew the mill owners and his suffering would thus, have affected their decisions. He still continued with his fast, as for him, the duty of a Satyagrahi is to stand for his fellow strikers when there is a lapse towards the commitment to the pledge made was superior to any other reason.

However, his fast did create certain pressure and guilt among the mill-owners. It was the wife of the chief of the mill-owners’, Sarladevi, along with Anasuyabehn and a few other friends who could not bear seeing Gandhi suffer. The mill-owners had to ultimately accede to the demands of the workers, so as to make Gandhi break his fast after three days and stop the twenty one day strike. The strike, thus, demonstrated Gandhi’s faith in fasting as a Satyagrahi. In the next section, the discussion on how Satyagraha in India at the local level developed is carried on, by focusing on Kheda Satyagraha.

2.3. KHEDA SATYAGRAHA: COALESCENCE OF CIVILITY & FEARLESSNESS

Along with the Ahmedabad Mill Strike, Gandhi also led Kheda Satyagraha. This Satyagraha was for the suspension of land revenue assessment for the year as the farmers were already facing a condition of approaching famine due to a widespread failure of crops. The farmers claimed that following the Land Revenue Rules, the crop that was under four annas should qualify for suspension of revenue assessment for the year but the Government did not yield to the demands. This led to the beginning of Kheda Satyagraha.

This Satyagraha displayed how unity helps in taking the struggle forward. There were cultivators who could pay the land assessment but they were asked to withhold the payment. The reason behind this was that their payment would have created pressure over those farmers who were not

in a position to pay so far. Such a situation would have made them borrow money, incurring debts, and further worsening their condition. Therefore, it was demanded that those who could pay the land assessment should not do so, for the sake of the poor farmers.

Kheda Satyagraha also puts forth the significance of educating people about the principles of Satyagraha. Gandhi knew that this Satyagraha included the Patidars, who were in better positions than most of the poor farmers. In order to convey the message that a Satyagraha was not entirely dependent on money, Gandhi decided to go from village to village to explain the principles of Satyagraha. In this exercise, he realized that farmers had to be made fearless of the authorities. In this endeavor, he resorted to combining civility with fearlessness. For him adherence to uncivil path was a reason for dissolving the essence of Satyagraha as he said that, “if they resorted to incivility it would spoil the Satyagraha, like a drop of arsenic in milk” (Gandhi, 1927, 405-6). Civility, according to Gandhi, had a deeper meaning than just being an outward and occasional show of gentleness of speech. It meant an innate gentleness and a virtue that pushes the individual to do good even to the opponent.

Practicing civility and fearlessness together was a challenge that every Satyagrahi had to commit to. In the event of repression by the Government in different forms, the Kheda Satyagrahi had to prove that they can practice both. It was on this occasion that an innovative way of carrying out the struggle was practiced in Kheda. This included the removal of onion crop from the field which was wrongly attached. Under the leadership of Sjt. Mohanlal Pandya, the disobedience was carried out and the consequences of it were to be readily accepted. Following this, imprisonment was accepted and instead of reducing, it escalated the enthusiasm of people. Having observed similar consequences of voluntarily accepting imprisonment during Satyagraha in South Africa, Gandhi knew that, “When the fear of jail disappears, repression puts heart into people” (Gandhi, 1927, 407). Although, Kheda Satyagraha had a great impact with respect to motivating the farmers to fight for their rights but the fervor dissipated gradually and the Satyagraha came to an unexpected end.

From the above local Satyagraha that Gandhi led, it is clear that he had laid a strong foundation for the upcoming national level struggles through these resistances. He had made people aware of their power, right to have a respectful and dignified life and disobey the unjust laws.

3. 'EMBEDDED POLITICAL' AND NATIONAL MOVEMENT

From the previous section, it could be observed that Gandhi was able to weave his understanding of politics further by adhering to the path of Satyagraha in the local context. In the present broad section, it is argued that Gandhi's idea of 'political' got refined as he led struggles at the national level. The challenges, complexities and difficult decision-making which Gandhi had to undertake made his faith in his understanding of politics firm.

3.1. A SEARCH FOR UNITY & NON-VIOLENCE: KHILAFAT & NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENT (1919-22)

The Khilafat struggle marked a new turn in the nationalist movement of the country. The Lucknow Pact and Satyagraha against Rowlatt Act had already laid the foundation for raising a combined political agitation by the Hindus and the Muslims. Government repression of both Hindus and Muslims added to the unity. Khilafat agitation, amidst such an environment, presented the rising consciousness amongst the Muslims about the nationalist movement. The causes for the agitation was the faltering of the British Premier Lloyd George from his promise of keeping Thrace with Turkey and the undermining of power of the Sultan of Turkey. The Khilafat Committee consisted of leaders like Ali Brothers, Maulana Azad, Hakim Ajmal Khan and Hasrat Mohani. For Gandhi, the Khilafat agitation was a golden opportunity of uniting Hindus and Mohammedans which would not arise in the next hundred years. He, soon, became one of the leaders of the Khilafat movement.

This movement led to the Non-Cooperation Movement on 31 August, 1920. The reasons behind non-cooperation were not limited to the causes of Khilafat agitation only. Repressive and stubborn attitude of British government with respect to the Rowlatt Act, which they refused to annul, with respect to setting the wrongs in Punjab right and also with regards to paying heed to the nationalist demand for self-government formed the basis of declaring Non-Cooperation with the government by the Khilafat Committee. It included boycotts of schools, colleges and law courts, which was approved by an all-party conference at Allahabad in June, 1920. It was later on that the movement expanded in order to further include resignation from government service, mass civil disobedience, refusal to pay taxes, giving up of foreign clothes, surrendering of officially-conferred titles and honors and practicing of hand-spinning and hand weaving for producing khadi. The Nagpur session in December 1920 proved to be a significant juncture for the movement as it was in this session that the decision to peacefully defy the government and its laws was taken. Gandhi, in this

session, cautioned the British people that if they do not adhere to the path of justice, then, it would be every Indians' duty to destroy the empire. Such a strong statement reflected the fervor of the movement against injustice.

The Non-Cooperation Movement focused not only on external changes but also triggered an internal churning within the structure of the Indian National Congress. Substantive amendments were undertaken in the Nagpur session with respect to the constitution of the Congress. Reorganization of Provincial Congress Committees on the basis of linguistic areas and introduction of a Working Committee consisting of 15 members, including the president and the secretaries to lead the Congress, both these changes enabled the party to work as a continuous political organization and also offered it with a structure so as to implement its resolutions. Apart from such organizational changes, Congress implemented the decision of reducing its fee to 4 annas per year which gave it a character of being a party of the masses. Now, Congress could reach the grassroots and make the latter a part of the organization. Appreciating this change, Bipan Chandra claims that, "Political freedom might come years later but the people had begun to shake off their slavish mentality" (Chandra, 2001, 288). So far it can be observed how effective measures could be taken in a peaceful, nonviolent movement that have a positive impact on a larger population. Such constructive developments are in the range of plausibility in such movements because it makes room for debate and discussion for parties coming from different backgrounds. Rather than clinging on to one particular strand of thinking, these movements focus on making the thinking and decision-making process more democratic and meaningful. Diversity of causes and changes, especially, pertaining to changing the character of Congress and making it a party of the masses through just one nonviolent movement is worth noticing.

The years 1921 and 1922 added greatly to these scheme of changes with the construction of institutions like the Jamia Millia Islamia (National Muslim University) of Aligarh, the Bihar Vidyapith, the Kashi Vidyapith and the Gujarat Vidyapith. This was the time when distinguished personalities like Dr.Zakir Hussain, Acharya Narendra Dev and Lala Lajpat Rai taught in these national institutes. Many lawyers gave up their legal practices, women offered their jewelry to raise funds for the movement and people boycotted foreign clothes. In fact, huge bonfires were organized to burn these foreign clothes and Khadi was endorsed as a symbol of freedom. Weaving Khadi, which was one of the constructive activities Gandhi emphasized, symbolized how his

movements and also his politics balanced resistance with constructive work. According to Bob Overy,

Constructive work was designed to discipline the people prior to civil disobedience. It was to provide tasks which could be taken up by the poorest peasants and give them a place in the national movement. It was designed to provide a link between the national political elite and the peasantry and to take active nationalists out of legislatures to the 'rural' politics of India, tackling poverty and injustice in the villages. It was used, too, not only as a preparation for civil disobedience but also as a delaying tactic: until the targets were reached and the 'capacity' of the nation demonstrated, civil disobedience could not be launched (Overy, 2019).

The above sentences highlight the significance of constructive work in Gandhi's frame of politics. Through constructive work, he, not only, aimed at preparing people for larger political struggles but also focused on removing the social evils that infested Indian society. Constructive work was a very significant component of his nonviolent politics. The first point in his draft for Congress constitution underlines the indispensability of this component. In Gandhi's idea of a liberated India, political freedom needed to be complemented with constructive work that encapsulated social and spiritual freedom. His idea of politics was a comprehensive, bottom-up approach. He wanted that individuals, communities and villages should learn to be self-sufficient and independent by making themselves empowered socially, economically and also politically. It was because of this reason that he did not really believe in the institution of parliament. He placed more weightage on people with respect to participating in political decision-making and also taking up political struggles nonviolently in case they find it against them. Constructive work, thus, was extremely important as also demonstrated by the movements discussed in this section.

Repression of government began with the arrest of Ali Brothers on the charges of 'sedition' as they passed a resolution declaring that Muslims would not serve in the British-Indian army. Instead of getting discouraged by the step taken by the government, Gandhi decided to take up the resolution for withdrawing participation in the British-Indian army on a larger scale. This resolution, thus, was repeated at as many meetings as possible along with a similar resolution issued by the All-India Congress Committee declaring that even a single Indian should not serve a government which undermined the value of India socially, economically and politically.

The government answered back by declaring activities of Khilafat Committee and of the Indian National Congress as illegal and arresting all significant leaders except Gandhi, by the end of 1921. The annual session of Congress in December 1921 in Ahmedabad, displayed the unwavering faith of people in the movement by passing a resolution affirming that the Congress would continue

with the non-violent non-cooperation with full vigor till the time the wrongs of the Punjab and Khilafat are set right and Swaraj established. The movement was given further strength by motivating people to pledge to remain non-violent in word and action, to make efforts in promoting unity among Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Parsis, Christians and Jews, to practice swadeshi, also to redress evils within the Hindu community relating to untouchability and to organize for individual or mass civil disobedience. The movement was able to strike the roots of the country and became widespread. On 1 February 1922, Gandhi announced that a mass civil disobedience movement would begin if the political prisoners were not released within seven days and the press was not freed from the clutches of the government.

The movement got de-escalated with the happenings of 5th of February, 1922 when, at Chauri Chaura, a Congress procession was fired upon by the police. The incident enraged people. A group of angry people burnt and attacked the police station causing the death of 22 policemen. Other such violent responses from the side of common masses had begun to crop up, observing that Gandhi realized that the nationalist workers had not properly embraced the practice of non-violence. Moreover, he could understand that if the movement takes a violent turn, then, the British Government could easily suppress the movement. Therefore, at the Bardoli session, during the meeting of the Congress Working Committee on 12 February, 1922, it was decided that all activities that could break the laws would be stopped and a resolution was passed to that effect.

Both the Khilafat and the Non-Cooperation Movement present an opportunity to understand that for Gandhi, politics is about forging strong ties between people belonging to different communities rather than breaking them. His idea of politics connoted a positive meaning to politics, which, as will be shown in the next chapters, is rare. On one hand, his was a politics of constructing substantive ties, institutions and leaders that could pave way for meaningful justice in the future and on the other hand, it aimed at uprooting those structures that have been the real causes of injustice. It also needs to be noted here that Gandhi envisaged a politics that is also strategic and flexible along with being embedded in ethics and nonviolence. His decision to withdraw the movement as he found that the public is not yet ready for such a nonviolent struggle reflects such a balance between reality and ethics clearly. This withdrawal gradually led to the Civil Disobedience movement as discussed in the next section.

3.2. A CALL FOR SUBSTANTIVE DEMOCRACY: CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE (1930-31)

In the previous section, how Gandhi's idea of politics was being framed through Khilafat and Non-cooperation movement along with his decision to withdraw the movement was explained. In this section, an attempt is being made to understand how Gandhi's 'political' was being played out and being influenced in turn during the Civil Disobedience Movement.

The post-withdrawal Non-Cooperation period proved to be in favor of the British government. The British were able to gain an ascendancy over the Indian land after February 1922 as the nationalist forces were demoralized and moved to the corners. The unity that was carefully built during the Khilafat Movement between Hindus and Muslims gradually started to weaken. The fast in 1924 undertaken by Gandhi against rising communalism had a very limited impact. Taking advantage of such events, the British Government decided to further suppress the nationalists by deciding to appoint a commission for examining the performance of the, then existing responsible government. This commission was scheduled to be set up after ten years of the Government of India Act, 1919 but it was appointed two years before i.e. in the year 1927 on the 8th of November. It was headed by Sir John Simon with seven members representing different components of the British.

Early appointment of an all-British commission was done with the aim of further breaking the spirit of Indians, but as Irfan Habib argues, this step was a miscalculated one. He states that, "This was because its authors ignored the basic reality that despite nationalism's recent discomfitures, the two fundamental factors had not changed, namely, India's continuing impoverishment under British rule, and the Indian people's urge for freedom" (Habib, 1997, 3). It is clear from these lines that the country had not lost its zeal to fight against exploitation and for independence. This political consciousness resulted in creating waves of strong protests from different corners. A national boycott was declared and the depth of frustration with the British Government's decision can be calibrated from the lines by Mohammad Ali Jinnah said at the Muslim League's Calcutta session, on January 1, 1928. Expressing his disgruntlement with the appointment of the Commission, he said, "We are denied equal partnership. We will resist the new doctrine to the best of our power. Jallianwallah Bagh was a physical butchery, the Simon Commission is a butchery of our souls" (Habib, 1997, 5). The extent of insult that the country felt is visible from these sentences spoken by Jinnah. After the Non-Cooperation Movement, 1920-22, it was the first time that a nation-wide agitation was organized.

An all-India hartal was called on 3rd February, 1929. It was on this day that the Commission landed at Bombay. Demonstrations with black flags and the slogan “Simon Go Back” were raised as a sign of protest, along with this, observations of local hartals were witnessed everywhere the Commission went. This protest was met with brutal police repression that led to the inflicting of grave injuries on Lala Lajpat Rai in Lahore procession on 30 October. The country had to pay the price of the agitation by the loss of this brave leader who died on 17 November. The agitation grew bigger and involved politicians, trade-unionists, communists as well as peasants.

One such agitation in the form of Bardoli Satyagraha in a district of Gujarat was an example of how Gandhi’s path was being followed by the peasants of the country. This Satyagraha was led by Vallabhbhai Patel. It began from 28 February onwards against the payment of enhanced revenue. It was a refusal by the peasants to the repression by the Government. The significance of this struggle was that it included the better-off “pattidars” (peasant-proprietors) and not peasant-tenants. Bardoli Satyagraha was a symbol of faith in the Gandhi’s methods. It can be argued so because even when there were violent revolutionaries struggling against the dominant forces, these peasants chose the path of nonviolent resistance so as to question the same authorities.

Another important event that happened during this period was the Calcutta Session of Congress. It was in the Calcutta Session of Congress that the confusion between Dominion Status for total independence was resolved by Gandhi. He, on 31 December, 1928 moved a resolution stating that if the British government accepts all parties’ reports by the end of 1929, then, in that case, the offer to agree to Dominion Status stands. In the event of failure to do so by the British Government, the country would be demanding total independence and the path of Non-Cooperation would be adhered to. The year-long time frame given to the British government was used to repress the different forces threatening British rule. Apart from brutal repression, in this gap, the British tried to placate those sections that were left dissatisfied with the Simon Commission as it was recognized by the British that this commission had done more harm than good for the rule to gain legitimacy of people. Due to this reason, Irwin, on 31 October, 1929, declared that a Round Table Conference of representatives from both sides would take place and also a hope of granting Dominion Status not now, but, sometime in the future. Although these assurances were able to win over the Congress and liberals, the positive impact was short lived. The Labor government supported the final authority of the Simon Commission.

The year 1929 not only saw growing strength of parties in the political corridors but also witnessed a rising political will among common people of the country under the leadership of Gandhi. Boycott of foreign cloth, promotion of khadi, constructive programme, anti-untouchability struggles, increased mobilization of women and strengthening of Hindu-Muslim understanding, all formed the constituents of change in the larger struggle for national independence. That it would be a struggle for complete independence was only decided in the historic Lahore session of the Congress on 29 December, 1929. It was on this day that a call for purna swaraj or azadi was made. In order to begin the struggle for purna swaraj, resignations from the councils and boycott of elections, campaigns for enrolling members and volunteers to Congress along with organizing public meetings were undertaken. The country on 26 January 1930 observed Independence Day by unfurling the national tricolor at numerous meetings. Gandhi drafted a pledge for this day which declared that submission to the unjust rule of the British would be a crime against man and God. This simple pledge speaks volumes about how the right to be free and the right to have a just rule is equal to serving humanity and God. Spiritual, human and political worlds were not different for Gandhi, as his pledge demonstrates.

On 12 March, 1930, he began with the famous Dandi March from Sabarmati Ashram at Ahmedabad to Dandi on the Gujarat coast. Idea of violating the salt law came from the eleven demands from the government, Gandhi expressed in *Young India's* last issue for January 1930. These demands included prohibition, reduction of land revenue, of military expenditure and of official salaries, abolition of salt tax and imposition of a protective tariff on foreign cloth. Focusing on one of the demands regarding state's monopoly over production and sale of land, Gandhi remarked that "this is a 'nefarious monopoly', since next only to air and water, salt was 'perhaps the greatest necessity of life'" (Guha, 2018, 330). Determined to raise a civil disobedience movement based on Salt Satyagraha, Gandhi said, "The illegality is in a Government that steals the people's salt and makes them pay heavily for the stolen article. The people, when they become conscious of their power, will have every right to take possession of what belongs to them" (Guha, 2018, 330). These lines clearly determine the kind of politics that Gandhi wanted to be realised in reality. He stood with substantive democracy which was based on people's power. The idea of power in people has been motivating social movements even in contemporary times. Gandhi was a leader who emphasised on a bottom-up approach in political and social decision-making. For

him politics was to enable people to understand their potential to lead themselves, to recognise their rights and also to hold accountable those leaders that undermine people's power.

Vallabhai Patel shared Gandhi's sentiments which he expressed in his speeches to the villagers of Gujarat. He told people in village that "a *dharmayudh*, a battle of righteousness, of good against evil, unprecedented in the history of the world will commence within a few days, and its beginning will be made in Gujarat" (Guha, 2018, 333). Further, criticizing the laws concerning salt and land he commented in a sarcastic tone that "only the air remained to be taxed by the government" (Guha, 2018, 333). Vallabhai was arrested on March 7 and sentenced to three months of rigorous imprisonment.

At exactly 6.30 in the morning on 12 March, Gandhi commenced his March with his companions, from Sabarmati Ashram. He was earlier hoping that the government would arrest him so as to deter him from marching to Dandi. This did not happen and he began successfully. Stopping at various villages, he finally reached Dandi on 5 April. Instead of executing the task of violating the salt law on the very same day, he declared that he would begin with the act of civil disobedience the next day at 6.30 am. Explaining the reason behind his decision, he said that, "6th April has been to us, since its culmination in [the] Jallianwala [Bagh] massacre, a day for penance and purification" (Guha, 2018, 334). It must be remembered that on 6th April, 1919, Gandhi came to the forefront on the national platform through Rowlatt Satyagraha.

Salt Satyagraha brought to surface many aspects of politics during that time. It showed that the government committed a mistake in underestimating the leadership of Gandhi. The words that the Bombay governor told the viceroy, clearly highlight Gandhi's significance in the country. He said that,

There is no doubt that Gandhi has a great emotional hold as evidenced by the numerical support of his demonstrations and the popular enthusiasm, largely among the younger generation, and increasingly, amongst women and girls, which has been more than expected. He added that Gandhi has scored a certain degree of success in attaining his objective-viz. to teach the masses...that the law can be defied if sufficient concerted action is brought (Guha, 2018, 351).

The above sentences are proof that even those in British rule, considering politics as their monopoly through which they would oppress Indian population, had accepted that Gandhi was trying to shift the meaning of politics from being ruler-centric to ruled-centric. The British government had also recognized that Gandhi's belief in concerted action was manifesting in reality

through the Salt satyagraha. The kind of power that Gandhi evoked was that of the collective which was different from the strategy of the British that introduced 'divide and rule' in India.

Gandhi did not include women directly in the Satyagraha but advised them to make their mark by choosing an "exclusive field for themselves" (Guha, 2018, 348). Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and Perin Captain went against Gandhi's suggestion and led a Satyagraha in Gujarat, in Dholera salt bed. After congratulating the both for their courage and calm disposition, he added that

They would have done better to remain outside the venue of the men's fight. He reminded the women that 'in all humility', he had 'suggested to them an exclusive field [prohibition] in which they are at liberty and are expected to show their best qualities (Guha, 2018, 349).

Gandhi being a nonviolent leader, believing in the potential of people to create a future guaranteeing freedom for all, seems to be at fault here. Binary between the spheres for men and women by Gandhi looks discriminatory and favoring gender-biasness. It is very important to understand at this point that Gandhi is to be read as a man of his context and also as a man beyond his context. There are moments when he shows himself to be a perfect leader but there also are instances where he seems to be at fault.

For the contemporary readers who wish to learn from this personality, it is very important to keep the two parallel aspects of Gandhi. In this way the readers can make a better use of Gandhi's ideas, values and principles to redress Gandhi's mistakes. Adopting such an approach demands humanization of the leader and not idealization. If we see Gandhi from the lens of him being a political strategist then the very same situation can be looked at as a division of labor, where the leader is asking for choosing those spheres where each section can better utilize their capacities with as minimum external obstacles as possible. Thus, ensuring efficient use of energies and efforts of the above two sections. In no way, does this discount the gender based discrimination by Gandhi. This is just to understand that if a constructive future has to be built then that can happen only when Gandhi's path is followed with the intention of undoing the wrong that Gandhi did and making use of the essence of his actions that lie in his politics embedded in ahimsa, truth and satyagraha.

With respect to participation of Muslims, Gandhi seemed to have faltered in the eyes of the Ali Brothers, who were his comrades during the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movement. Mohammad Ali who was Shaukat Ali's brother, declared in his speech in Bombay that, "The non-cooperation movement which was inaugurated by Gandhi ten years ago was a genuine movement

to get swaraj but...the present civil disobedience movement [was] aimed at establishing Hindu Raj in India” (Guha, 2018, 347-8). In one of his letters to Shaukat Ali, Gandhi tried to explain that his actions may be independent of the support of Muslims, but this did not amount to deserting anyone. He further replied that, “My conscience is clear. I have deserted neither you nor the Mussalmans. Where is the desertion in fighting against the salt laws and other inequities and fighting for independence” (Guha, 2018, 347). These sentences present how Gandhi’s politics was that of conscience. He focused on how his political decisions and actions impinged on his conscience. These sentences also depict that he was a strategic decision-maker. For him, salt tax was one such issue that would cover the entire Indian society irrespective of caste, class, religion and region. Thus, the Civil Disobedience Movement made Gandhi such a leader who was considered to be important for India’s swaraj. One of the leadership qualities that makes a large section of the population depend and trust the leader is the trait of offering a platform for democratic participation. It was not a new thing to observe that during the Independence struggle certain sections were marginalized by the dominant parts of the society. Such fault lines which create divisions still exist. Nevertheless, in the present case one thing that Gandhi was conveying through his answer is that he aimed at politics having the objective of the larger good of all and not only of any one particular section of society. The larger goal of freedom or the immediate goal of achieving rights to make salt, focuses on guaranteeing the good of the larger good.

Newspaper coverages presented different perspectives on Gandhi’s march to Dandi. The British-owned newspapers considered the march as trivial. In this context, the *Statesman* of Calcutta claimed the march to be a “childishly futile business” (Guha, 2018, 341). The *Times of India* of Bombay, correspondents from the *Daily Telegraph* and the American news magazine *Time*, all under-estimated the significance of Gandhi and his Satyagraha. While the views of the nationalist press were entirely different. Ram Chandra Guha mentions that “the *Pratap* of Kanpur, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of Calcutta and the *Bombay Chronicle* all saw the march in epic and mythic terms” (Guha, 2018, 342).

Irrespective of such reports, breach of salt law in Dandi led to similar breaches by Indians in different places. In Bengal, under the leadership of Satis Chandra Dasgupta, volunteers walked from Sodepur Ashram till Mahisbathan to make salt. Similarly, K. F. Nariman, in Bombay, led the march to Haji Ali Point so as to prepare salt in the nearby park. In Tamil Nadu, C. Rajagopalachari

and in Kanpur, Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi led the anti-salt law campaign. After the success of Dandi March, Gandhi, on May 4, announced in a letter to the viceroy that he would be leading a similar kind of March to raid the Dharasana Salt Works. On the morning of the 5th of May he was arrested. The basis of his arrest, ironically, was not illegal possession of salt. He was arrested under an ordinance of the Bombay government which allowed the authorities to arrest anyone that they deemed to be a 'menace to public order.' Gandhi's arrest highlight two parallel facts. First, the fact that Gandhi was not arrested on the basis of illegal possession of salt shows that the government had gauged the strength of Gandhi's Salt satyagraha proving the mettle of people's power and nonviolent resistance and secondly, his arrest on the charge of 'menace to public order' underlines how resistances aiming at expanding the boundaries of democracy are attempted to be dissolved by the government with the means of manipulations in the laws and rules, largely considered to be the monopoly of the powerful sections. Salt Satyagraha can be said to have presented a path for challenging such monopolies which shrink the fabric of a substantive democracy. This period demonstrated that Gandhi's politics was embedded in real socio-political issues but the resolution of these issues had come only after a link was envisaged between the different realms so as to build a substantive future politics. The Civil Disobedience Movement also highlighted that the people were ready for a strong Independent struggle that is discussed in the following part of this chapter.

3.3. FAITH IN NON-COERCIVE & JUST POLITICS: THE FINAL STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE (1942-47)

From the previous section, it could be deciphered that Gandhi had established himself as leader and had been continuing with his idea of politics until then. This section aims at understanding what role did the Independence struggle play in furthering Gandhi's politics. It tries to do this by analyzing the Quit India Resolution and the National Independence Movement.

The resolution, popularly known as the 'Quit India' resolution was passed by Congress on 8th August 1942. It is interesting that the phrase 'Quit India' was not a part of the actual resolution passed. Following this event, Gandhi was arrested on 9th August, at around 5 a.m. With his arrest many misinterpretations about the movement started getting endorsed by the British Government. Gandhi was being held responsible for the violence that happened after his and the Congressmen's arrest. In response to this, Gandhi took a stand that violence in any form was not a part of the

resolution. The violence, according to Gandhi, was invited by the British Government's actions by wrongly arresting him and the Congressmen. He writes that,

In so far as there was any violence after 8th of August last on the part of any Congressman, it was wholly unauthorized as is quite clear from the resolution itself. The Government in their wisdom left me no time whatsoever for issuing instructions. The All-India Congress Committee finished after the midnight on the 8th August. Well before sunrise on the 9th, I was carried away by the Police Commissioner without being told what crime I had committed. And so were the members of the Working Committee and the principle Congressmen who happened to be in Bombay. Is it too much when I say that the Government invited violence and did not want the movement to proceed on peaceful line? (Gandhi, 2000, Vol.83,320)

The above sentences highlight that Gandhi intended to make people move on nonviolent lines but his sudden arrest left him no time to give further directions to his followers. In such a situation the onlookers reacted to the government's actions. Although Gandhi refused to take responsibility for the upheaval that followed the arrests, he made it a point to express his views on the issue in one of his writings later. He elucidated that the issue of sabotage or destruction of government property involves violence which further perpetuates violence. He emphasizes that evil does not reside in the property that is being destroyed, for these are inanimate objects. The evil, as he suggests, is in men who need to be handled by sacrificing oneself rather than harming them. Following this, he states that, "To sterilize it needs not destruction but self-immolation of the purest type, which would demonstrate that the authorities might break but would not be able to bend a will that has resigned itself to God" (Gandhi, 2000, Vol.84, 48). Thus, for him it is important to understand the origin of evil or wrongdoing, instead of resorting to misplace destruction.

He also directs the attention towards how that wrongdoing is to be redressed by nonviolent means of self-sacrifice, like a true satyagrahi who has devoted himself or herself to God in his quest for truth, rather than harming the wrongdoer violently. He further argues that using violence in the form of sabotage against British power is futile as the British would do everything to win. Sabotage, therefore, would backfire as it would provoke the British government to employ more violent means. Gandhi mentions that the 'Quit India' movement is a nonviolent rebellion that does not aim at seizure of power but has been launched with the objective of "transformation of relationship ending in a peaceful transfer of power... It will never use coercion. Even those who hold contrary views will receive full protection under it" (Gandhi, 2000, Vol.84, 49). In this respect, Gandhi discusses how 'Quit India' does not imply a foreigner's destruction but his willing conversion to the life of India. 'Quit India' is not just a slogan but a voice of the soul. It is not a signal of hatred towards foreigners but a source of conversion for both Indians as well as the

British. According to Gandhi, it is fear that enslaves one and makes him or her hate British people. What is required is conversion in a way that stops Indians from considering themselves as inferiors before the British. "He (a foreigner) is a man, even as we (Indians) are.... His arsenals and his weapons, typified in their extreme in the atom bomb, should have no terror for us," (Gandhi, 2000, Vol.90, 153) according to Gandhi. Thus, Quit India is not a program of hatred but a harbinger of unity and freedom.

One of the most misunderstood aspects of Gandhi's instructions for attaining freedom was his call for "Do or Die." It was wrongly understood that Gandhi had implicitly eschewed his principle of nonviolence in order to achieve freedom for the country. The violent undertone that the call for "Do or Die" seemed to have captured was taken advantage of in few cases. In his speech at A.I.C.C., Gandhi discusses the matter and says that:

A satyagrahi lays down his life, but never gives up. That is the meaning of the "Do or die" slogan. That slogan does not mean 'Kill or be killed'. That would be wilful distortion and travesty of its true meaning. The true meaning is that we must do our duty and die in the course of performing it if necessary. To die without killing is the badge of a satyagrahi (Gandhi, 2000, Vol. 91,251).

With the above sentences, Gandhi clears all the doubts regarding the slogan 'Do or die'. For him, it is a slogan to be followed in the spirit of a satyagrahi. It would make way for a nonviolent path to achieve independence. He explains that if people would have realized the significance of ahimsa in their struggle then swaraj would have been achieved by now. But, as nobody is perfect, so is ahimsa, due to which there remains a lot to be done. Although, he expresses full faith in the fact that whatever progress and strength people have gained so far in the struggle is by the virtue of faith in nonviolence.

The Quit India Resolution was being used as a tool to defame Congress that was working in accordance with Gandhi's instructions. In his letter to Lord Samuel, Gandhi tried to clear the doubts that the August resolution or the Quit India resolution was a way to escape from supporting the British in the war that was going on and an opportunity for the Congress to come in power at such a difficult moment. He explicated that Congress has resolved on behalf of people rather than for its own self-interest. Gandhi reiterated the democratic spirit and nonviolent basis of Congress in one of his letters to Lord Samuel in 1945. He argued against Lord Samuel's connotation of Congress as a party having a totalitarian spirit. Reminding the declaration that the British Government has often put forth that it would depart from the country if any other body in India is

ready and fit to take the charge. Following this declaration, Congress has not been at fault if it tries to qualify to be fit for taking the charge. In addition, Gandhi makes it clear that, this charge will be taken by Congress, not for itself, but for the people of India as “Congress has no other sanction except that of persuasion and self-suffering, any other being precluded by its creed. On the other hand, is not violence, euphemistically called physical force, the basis and backbone of the totalitarian spirit?” (Gandhi, 2000, Vol 87,74) Therefore, Gandhi was absolutely sure that so far nonviolence stays at the core of the ‘Quit India’ resolution, there will be no negative consequences of immediate withdrawal of British power. In fact, he was of the opinion that it would help India attain swaraj and support Britain willingly in the war against Japanese invasion.

He, also, objected to Lord Samuel’s comparison of India with Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa or the United States as he considered these countries to be either virtually independent or wholly independent countries. He argued that India, on the other hand, was still unfree. He further explains that even if the Allied powers were to lose, the other countries mentioned would not witness a forfeit of their independence. But, defenseless India, in a situation where the Allied powers after losing would decide to leave the country under military necessity, would still remain in the clutches of some dominant country. Thus, there would just be a change of masters. From his book, Hind Swaraj, it can be deciphered that Gandhi argued for a Swaraj that would restore the dignity and self-dependence of every single individual. He emphasized self-reform and self-governance so as to treat the larger social, environmental and political problems pertaining to untouchability, education, domination of alien rule, unjustified exploitation of natural resources and so on. He thus asserts that India will be free, only if, we become free by adhering to the basic lesson of Swaraj which is to rule ourselves. This is the reason that he had no fear of the British as such. He believed that if we are just with ourselves and if we do not let our individuality be engulfed by modern means like machinery, we can even befriend Englishmen, who can support us in moving towards our goals. He, therefore, refuted that his Swaraj merely dealt with removing the British from seats of power in the country. He even warned against the idea of replacing the ‘white sahibs’ with the ‘brown sahibs’. Hence, it can be said that the self-belief that Gandhi hints towards, forms the basis of individual as well as collective Swaraj.

In order to save themselves and to actually support the Allied powers, which Samuel considered to be the cause of mankind, the people of India need to have freedom immediately instead of promises of independence in the future. Gandhi, thus, writes in his letter to Lord Samuel that,

Neither the Congress nor any other organization can possibly kindle mass enthusiasm for the Allied cause without the possession of independence, to use your own expression either de jure or de facto. Mere promises of future independence cannot work that miracle. The cry of “Quit India” has arisen from a realization of the fact that if India is to shoulder the burden of representing, or fighting for the “cause of mankind”, she must have the glow of freedom now. Has a freezing man ever been warmed by the promise of the warmth of sunshine coming at some future date? (Gandhi, 2000, 305)

The above lines clearly reflect that the call for complete and immediate independence is for guaranteeing a democratic environment to the people so that they could choose to support the British in war as free people with pure intentions. In one of his writings, Gandhi further elaborates the reason for immediate withdrawal of the British government’s rule. He asserts that the rule should end immediately and not after the war as he noticed growing estrangement between the Indians and the British. Racial superiority that is being practiced in the country and on the basis of which the country is being ruled is a drastic disease that requires a drastic remedy, according to Gandhi. He pointed out that the remedy is complete and immediate withdrawal of the British from India. In one of his interviews, Gandhi again raised the issue by saying that the “Quit India” resolution was not a hasty cry conceived in anger but a well-deliberated demand of granting India the freedom to be governed by Indians elected by Indians which includes the entire population, and not a coterie, irrespective of differences in race, creed or color. In order to make his point clear, he tells the press that,

The Allies will have their victory, but the exploited races will not feel the glow of it. They will know that the seeds of another and deadlier war will be sown by that very victory. I ask myself the question: ‘Must rivers of blood flow for such an empty victory?’ (Gandhi, 2000, Vol.84, 253)

These sentences present the firm and clear intentions of Gandhi of getting a dignified independence and maintaining sustainable peace in India through the Independence struggle.

The withdrawal of the British government would place the Allied cause on a completely moral basis. Moreover, in Gandhi’s view,

The presence of the British in India is an invitation to Japan to invade India. Their withdrawal removes that bait. Assume, however, that it does not; free India will be better able to cope with the invasion. Unadulterated non-co-operation will then have a full sway (Gandhi, 2000, Vol.83, 148).

Indispensability of freedom, of independence in the entire Quit India resolutions gets visible from these lines. Gandhi staunchly argued for removing slavish mentality that British rule has

introduced and made not only the physical body but also the psychological aspect of every human to submit to slavery. He went onto instruct the people of India that,

Every one of you should from this very moment consider yourself a free man or woman and even act as if you are free and no longer under the heel of this imperialism. This is no make-believe. You have to cultivate the spirit of freedom before it comes physically. The chains of a slave are broken the moment he considers himself a free man (Gandhi, 2000, Vol.83, 318).

From the above lines, it can be deciphered that, for Gandhi, the resolution meant more than the physical removal of British rule. It was an impetus for the common people of the country to start weaving a fabric of freedom not only in actions but also with respect to thinking about it. Although Gandhi had eliminated the possibility of raising a mass civil disobedience, he allowed for individual civil disobedience in case one sees an unjust obstruction in their path to independence. He considered constructive programmes to be a means of attaining swaraj and mentions civil disobedience at the end of the eighteen items. According to him, individual civil disobedience is an inherent right to which every individual is entitled just as the right of self-defense. This means that no special permission is required for its practice. Gandhi considers it as a non-violent equivalent to the use of fistcuffs or arms meant for defending oneself.

He also took up the case of charkha and stated that it should not be interpreted as a mere economic activity. According to him, activities that find a place in the 18 items of constructive work are means to achieve national independence. Some may seem to be just economically beneficial like khadi work while others may look as if they are impacting socially only, but, on a closer look these all have effect on the social, economic as well as political simultaneously, either directly or indirectly. For instance, he explicates that 'service of lepers' cannot be considered as a political work in the accepted sense. Yet, this activity that allows rendering of non-violent service brings the country closer to the aim of political independence even though in itself it may not have any overt political significance. According to Gandhi, such selfless service carries with it, its own rewards. If everyone dedicated to such sincere selfless service among the lepers, in serving the lower castes who live next door, then, swaraj could be achieved easily. The reason behind this is the self-dependence that these services offer would result in that "the Cabinet Mission would find itself without any job. Briton would quit India or decide to stay on as her servants" (Gandhi, 2000, Vol.90, 325). Therefore, for Gandhi, finding solutions to the problems that India was facing had to be done by the Indians themselves so that the foreign rulers were left with no tasks. He got stern in choosing the Indian Government for resolving the issues of the country, especially food

shortage, as events proceeded. In his letter to Lord Pethick- Lawrence, it was made clear that acceptance of 'Quit India' was unconditional of the Constituent Assembly's performance in bringing out a constitution. He further asserted that a National Government would be much better than an Interim Government so as to resolve the matter of food crisis in the country. He, thus, argues that,

The food crisis demands immediate formation of a strong, capable and homogenous National Government. Without it, deep and universal corruption cannot end, without it the psychological effect will not be produced in spite of the landing on Indian shores of expected grain from outside. Every day's delay in forming such a Government is agony added to the agony of famished millions of India (Gandhi, 2000, Vol.91, 5-6).

Hence, for him, it was not significant who forms the National Government, Congress or Muslim League, but the need was of such men or women from India who are incorruptible and efficient. Instead of his emphasis on role of National Government in ameliorating the conditions of people, he continued to reiterate that people have to become self-dependent so as get out of slavery. In one of his speeches to the workers in Srirampur (Gandhi, 2000, Vol 93, 147-8). He laid down the dismal condition of villages that had shortage of clean drinking water, bad conditions of road, choked canals leading to multiple diseases like dysentery, cholera and smallpox. Villages, according to Gandhi, were full of men of bad character. He, thus, asked for action immediately on these issues without depending on the support of the Government. For him, more than outward changes, substantive change of mind and body was important. He proposed that collective efforts should be made in the direction of forging enlightened public opinion so that harmonious relations displace poverty and ignorance.

For Gandhi, communal unity was one of the important components of attaining swaraj. He was of the view that "if millions of Hindus regarded non- Hindus as their blood-brothers and sisters and treated them as such without the slightest tinge of a political motive, it must result in the complete political unity of India" (Gandhi, 2000, Vol. 90, 180). It can be understood from these lines that Gandhi wanted people to remove discrimination against each other on the basis of religion rather than depending on any external authority. In order to not let British authority interfere in the efforts for Hindu-Muslim unity, Gandhi suggests Satyagraha and says that,

My advice is Satyagraha first and Satyagraha last. There is no other better road to freedom. Whoever wants to drink the ozone of freedom must steel himself against seeking military or police aid. He or they must ever rely upon their own strong arms or, what is infinitely better, their strong mind and will which are independent of arms, their own or other (Gandhi, 2000, Vol. 92, 144).

It can be said that for Gandhi it was necessary to change the minds of people through Satyagraha rather than force people into uniting by seeking aid from outside authorities. His method was simple as with the help of Satyagraha, he wanted people to join together nonviolently in the independent struggle. He took the challenge of persuading the two communities especially in Noakhali and Bihar, to unite instead of resorting to violence towards each-other. He accepted that he was himself in the dark and could not be the best guide with respect to providing a direction in case of resolution of the Hindu-Muslim hatred in Noakhali. Still, he considered that for him his attempts in striking unity were the most significant experiments of his life. *The Hindu* covered his speech at a prayer meeting as

He was soon going to make the greatest experiments of his life. That would be perhaps his last experiment. He was not a holder of any Degree- B.A. or M.A. But if he succeeded in the examination he was taking in Noakhali, he would think he had received his highest Degree of life-his M.A. (Gandhi, 2000, Vol. 93, 197).

These sentences reflect the significance of Gandhi's visit to Noakhali which was a Muslim majority region and he wanted to go there to prove that "he was a real friend of the Muslims" (Gandhi, 2000, Vol.93, 197). He was trying to create trust in the vulnerable communities in Noakhali and Bihar by being amongst them. His display of courage was not to build a following for himself but to build bridges amongst people. It was a test of his ahimsa as he was going to reside amidst violence manifesting in all forms and in all corners of these regions. According to him, if hatred, through ahimsa, is rooted out from the minds and hearts of people, a permanent camaraderie could be established between Hindus and Muslims.

In fact, the speech that he delivered at the prayer meeting, in which he mentioned the aforementioned challenges, was provoked by witnessing that people offered to serve the Muslims of Noakhali only in his presence. He wanted to put across that service for the sake of it will be short of making any deep-rooted changes. The demand of the circumstances was a change of hearts of the two community members. In Noakhali, he stayed amongst Muslims who were seen to be perpetrators of violence against Hindus in that area. Similarly, he wanted that, in Bihar, the mentality of Hindus should be changed. This shows that he was not shying away from any kind of difficulty, rather than just pacifying the victim community in both these regions, he aimed at acting to change the thinking process of the perpetrators. The surest way of removing bitterness between the two communities, Gandhi suggested, was self-sacrifice and self-suffering. Departing from this path will lead to a mere change in the form of evil. He was convinced that even if British power

leaves India, still real swaraj will be a dream till the time communal harmony restores in the country. He refused to accept the logic that vandalism of Temples should be answered by destroying Mosques and vice-versa. According to him, such a strategy of returning blow for blow would accentuate slavery and lead to division among people. By citing the example of Badshah Khan, a Pathan, he argued for adhering to the path of nonviolence. In one of his prayer meetings, he says that,

....Badshah Khan has full faith in nonviolence. I asked him how an expert swordsman like him came to believe in nonviolence. He said that they had come to realize nonviolence as the only road to their national-freedom. If the Pathans do not give up the policy of a blow for a blow and do not adopt nonviolence, he said they would perish in their internecine feuds (Gandhi, 2000, Vol. 94, 103).

The above sentences clearly depict that Gandhi took up the task of bridging the gap between Hindus and Muslims in a substantive manner, the proof of which was Badshah Khan's conversion into a believer of nonviolence. Not only in Noakhali, but, in Bihar too, Gandhi aimed at spreading the message of nonviolence. He had taken the decision of going to Bihar so as to change the mentality of Hindus in that region. His was not the goal of just assuaging the Muslims of Bihar and coming back rather he was determined to build bridges between the two communities so that the harmony between them does not permit re-occurrence of any kind of violence in future. He wanted that both the communities should be accountable and responsible to each other to the extent that they resolve issues on their own rather than solely depending on the government. In this context, he states while addressing the Hindus who had destroyed the houses of Muslims in Bihar and had been involved for violence in the region, that,

... We have not been able to do anything by way of reparations during all these months. The devastated villages continue to wear a deserted look.You might argue that the Government should rebuild or repair the damaged houses. But I ask you, 'Did you seek permission from the Government, when you resorted to murder, loot and arson?' You have to atone for the sins, not the Government, because, after all, the Government is your own and not imported from England (Gandhi, 2000, Vol. 94, 154).

The above lines highlight that Gandhi's politics included moral values like atonement so as to undo the consequences of violence. His scheme of political mediation was based on reconciliation on the basis of communities, amongst communities instead of third-party involvement or retribution. It eschewed any kind of coercion. In fact, with respect to the question of partition also, Gandhi stood with a decision that would be in favor of both the communities. He did not treat the matter as a purely political tactic. He had expressed his views on partition on different occasions. The *Harijan* and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* reported his views on partition in the following words:

Gandhiji expressed the opinion that personally he had always been anti-partition. But it was not uncommon even for brothers to fight and separate from one another...[but] he was much against forced partition as against forced unity (Gandhi, 2000, Vol. 94, 58).

The reported views of Gandhi on partition reflect his unwillingness towards it but he does not reject the possibility of partition altogether as he humanizes the concept by relating it with the quarrels between two brothers who, for the sake of peace, have to separate. But he also does not permit forced or compulsory separation or unity. It can be said that, if read between the lines, Gandhi hoped for a solution that would not lead to partition between Hindus and Muslims. Although he considered that the first step towards restoring calm between the two communities would be independence of the country from British rule, still, he had doubts if people would listen to him. He also expressed that he had no issues with the League taking over political power instead of Congress after the British left. In one of his speeches at the Prayer Meetings, he threw more light on this view, while talking about the issue of Punjab, he said,

Even if the Muslim League had been ruling there, it would have meant our rule, because if the Muslim League members come to power there it would be on the strength of the votes of people; and then it would be our rule. A rule established by the votes of the people would be the rule of the people. It is up to us to see whether such a rule brings happiness or unhappiness (Gandhi, 2000, Vol. 94, 288).

It is understood from Gandhi's speech that what was important was not the party that rules but that how people choose and vote. The real political power, according to Gandhi, resides in people and not in any political party alone. Although, he was not blind to the circumstances where a gamble of power between the political parties was going on and he was sad about how the state of affairs were unfolding. His disappointment with the entire situation gets reflected through the following sentences,

..... I am aware of the fact that there is a large section in favor of the vivisection of India. Who cares for the nation today? Everyone wants to realize his ambition and grab power by creating dissensions. This is the situation obtaining today..... It hurts me to talk about the partition of the country. What will be the plight of a body if it is dismembered? Similarly, dismemberment of a prosperous country like India will utterly ruin the people (Gandhi, 2000, Vol.94, 261).

The pain of partition that Gandhi felt could be calibrated from his analogy of the divided nation with that of a dismembered body. Gandhi was aware that division of the country seems inevitable as the nation has stopped paying heed to his words. He recognized that behind the decision of dividing the country lies not the true interest of the nation but the selfish motive of attaining power. He substantiated his vision on Independent India in the following words,

India is now on the threshold of independence. But this is not the independence I want. To my mind it will be no independence if India is partitioned and the minorities do not enjoy security, protection and equal treatment.

Because the independence of my dreams is altogether different. The country is not yet completely independent. If what is happening today is an earnest of things to come after independence, it bodes no good for the future. We have a proverb saying that the cradle bespeaks the child's future. I, therefore, feel ill at ease. But I am content to leave the future in God's good hands (Gandhi, 2000, Vol. 94, 286).

From the above sentences, it can be observed that Gandhi desired a substantive independence which would ensure harmony between different religions, would protect the minorities' rights and help in creating an environment of equal treatment for all. He considered the independence that India was getting as incomplete and had placed the future in God's hands. The India of his imagination was not a divided one. Throughout his life, he took his politics beyond the divisive forces, embedded the political principles in spirituality and took political actions in a way that could set examples for the future India to establish politics on values of morality, spirituality, nonviolence, justice, equality and peace. He knew that the country would not be chalked out according to his visions. Therefore, he did not reject the decision of partition altogether. He was acquainted with the entire scenario that was more driven towards political power and control at the cost of people's power. It has also been suggested that Gandhi may have supported partition for the sake of the right to self-determination for the Muslims of the country. In this context, Arvind Sharma mentions that,

Soon after the Lahore session of the Muslim League in 1940, while rejecting the two-nation theory, Gandhi wrote in *Harijan* that he knew 'no non-violent method of compelling the obedience of eight crore Muslims to the will of the rest of India.... The Muslims must have the same right to self-determination that the rest of India has. We are at present a joint family, any member can claim a division (As quoted by Sharma, 2016, 20).

The cited lines highlight that for Gandhi, political rights like the right to self-determination were extremely important and if partition ensured this right to Muslims then, he was ready to accept it. He feared the pervasiveness of violence and suppression of rights of the people more than separation of land. He, in fact, expressed what true Pakistan should be like. According to him, "True Pakistan is a place where there is proper justice, where there is no rule of force and where everything is done and achieved by effecting a change of heart in the opponents" (Gandhi, 2000, Vol. 94, 288). From these lines it can be argued that Gandhi envisaged a country that is formed on the basis of non-coercion, non-violence and justice. These principles define the formation of his politics and all the political entities.

4. A VOYAGE TOWARDS SWARAJ: GANDHI IN POST-INDEPENDENT INDIA

In this section, a brief analysis of what happened to Gandhi's idea of politics in post-independent India is attempted. Gandhi espoused Swaraj, which meant much more than political independence.

While his concept of Swaraj included political independence, it was a more expansive vision. This vision incorporated a comprehensive and substantive meaning of independence. It was independence from one's own baser nature, from the evils breeding in society, from the greed and the resultant exploitation that was pervasive in the economic realm and also from the corruption being practiced in the name of religion. In other words, it was about keeping morality as the core of every sphere, be it social, political, economic or spiritual. But not every section in India shared this idea of Swaraj. Soon, after the removal of British rule, Gandhi's ideas were given a backseat and India witnessed a bloodbath in the form of Hindu-Muslim riots as the aftermath of partition. August 15, 1947 was not a day of celebration for Gandhi. It was a day when he fasted and prayed. He was utterly disappointed with violence that his own countrymen were spreading. Gandhi was left alone with only a few true followers. In this context, Louis Fischer remarks that,

Millions adored Mahatma, multitudes tried to kiss his feet or the dust of his footsteps. They paid him homage and rejected his teachings. They held his person holy and desecrated his personality. They glorified the shell and trampled the essence. They believed in him but not in his principles (Fischer, 1950, 473).

The India of his dreams did not crystalize in reality. "I would prefer to die rather than live in an India where such brutalities are practiced" (Mellor, 1951, 64), Gandhi declared on October 1, 1947. Even on being disheartened, Gandhi made efforts to uproot the suspicion and hatred from the hearts of the Hindus and Muslims by fasting so as to strike the conscience of people in the riot affected regions. With respect to the politics of the country being led by the Indian National Congress, Gandhi emphasized on building a service-based nonviolent society. For this purpose, he desired that Indian National Congress should become an Association for the Service of the People (Lok Seva Sangh). But his demand was not fulfilled and Congress remained a political party. Gandhi was against the role of Congress as a political party as it would get embroiled in the nasty competition of capturing power. As he could not stop Congress from retaining its position as a political party, he insisted his constructive workers to "banish the idea of the capture of power and you will be able to guide power and keep it on the right path... There is no other way of removing the corruption that threatens to strangle our independence at its very birth" (Mellor, 1951, 490). Disillusioned with the kind of politics that India had adopted, Gandhi, thus, stood for selfless service and for keeping a check on the conventional political working of the country. However, it does not mean that he wanted people to maintain a distance with politics as such. He envisioned a bottom-up approach rather than an up-down scheme of things. The holders of real political power were to be the common people. It is due to this reason that he argues,

The present power of the zamindars [landlords], the capitalists and the rajas [rulers] can hold sway only so long as the common people do not realize their own strength. If the people non-co-operate with the evil of zamindari [landlordism] or capitalism, it must die of inanition (Gandhi, 1949, 256).

The strength of the common people to dissent against the unjust systems has always been significant for Gandhi. His nonviolent struggles right from South Africa had relied on his strength. He believed that true Swaraj could come only when the marginalized and the downtrodden know how to wield the power of nonviolent dissent. In this context, he says in 1945 that,

I have no doubt that if we have democratic Swaraj [independence, self-rule], as it must be if the freedom is won through non-violence, the Kisans must hold power in all its phases, including political power, their grievances would be redressed through legislative channels....If the legislature proves itself to be incapable of safeguarding the Kisans' interests they will of course have the sovereign remedy of civil disobedience and non-co-operation (Bose, 1947, 80).

From these sentences, it can be deciphered that one of the most significant values that Gandhi tried to inculcate and strengthen was not just dissent but nonviolent dissent, for, as he asserts that, "Violence can only be effectively met by non-violence. This is an old, established truth." (Bose, 1947, 254). Gandhi had already demonstrated the power of nonviolent resistance in the pre-independence times. He had faith in the Indian people that after freedom is won through nonviolent means, people will absorb nonviolent values and treat nonviolence as a principle, as a way of life. But, as already highlighted, this was not the case. The post partition riots had dissolved Gandhi's plans of establishing a truly, nonviolent and harmonious India. Looking at the failure of people to take nonviolence as a creed, as a philosophy, Gandhi, introspectively and critically, mentions just ten days before independence that,

....our non-violence was of the weak. But the weak of heart could not claim to represent any non-violence at all. The proper term was passive resistance. Passive resistance was a preparation for the active resistance of arms. Had it been the non-violence of the strong, the practice of a generation would have made the recent orgies of destruction of life and property impossible (Gandhi, 1949, 272).

Although Gandhi recognized the loophole in the resistance, he also made it clear that the faulty execution of nonviolent struggle does not stain the inherent worth that nonviolence holds. His unwavering faith in the nonviolence as a creed gets displayed from his belief that when nonviolent in all its purity can be applied only by the strong. For him, nonviolence of the weak is actually a precondition to violence. The kind of nonviolence that Gandhi advocated was based on sustainability, integrity, honesty and absolute bravery and courage. Gandhi was also concerned about the violent lines on which post-independent India was being constructed. He was against the rising military budget of the country as he was of the view that military and democracy cannot go hand in hand. For India, to become a true democracy, he recommended shunning the military spirit

in favor of walking on the path of love. He even prophesied that if India keeps adhering the same violent path then the country may even turn into a military dictatorship.

Gandhi had already predicted that, “Mankind is at the crossroads”, he said. “It has to make its choice between the law of the jungle and the law of humanity” (Gandhi, 1949, 56). He warned against the dismal condition that India would be in future if the path of violence is followed. He said,

There is no escape from the impending doom save through a bold and unconditional acceptance of the nonviolent method with all its glorious implications. Democracy and violence can ill go together. The States that are today nominally democratic have either to become frankly totalitarian or, if they are to become truly democratic, they must become courageously non-violent (Gandhi, 1948, 159).

The question now arises that after so long has Gandhi’s predictions come true? Is India a false democracy? If yes, then, is there something being done about to redress it? How has the Gandhian legacy been valued and practiced in contemporary times? The next chapter attempts to answer some of these questions.

CONCLUSION

This chapter is a journey of Gandhi’s understanding of the idea of politics on ground. As the events clearly show that it was not a linear process of formulating the idea of politics. Gandhi sketched his conception of politics through the ebb and flow of experiences he countered in the entire course of activism in local and national context. It was a complex web of ideas, experiences, dialogues, events and struggles that assisted Gandhi to shape his idea of politics. His was a very comprehensive idea of politics also because it was experiential. He believed in ‘doing’ along with ‘thinking’. According to him, “politics is the art of doing on the largest scale what is right, and, as an affair of principle, it touches eternal interests and religious sentiments” (Iyer, 2000, 44). Numerous experiments that he did during his struggles proved to be a bridge between the present, which is past for us today and the future for Gandhi that is the present for our time. It is the responsibility of the contemporary generations to take Gandhi’s journey forward in the future. The realisation that the past, present and future are interlinked and one transcends into the other is very important in order to continue this journey. Muhammad Iqbal’s quote makes this relationship lucid, he says that,

Pure time, then, is not a string of separate, reversible instants; it is an organic whole in which the past is not left behind, but is moving along with, and operating in, the present. And the future is given to it not as lying

before, yet to be traversed; it is given only in the sense that it is present in its nature as an open possibility (Kothari, Joy, 2017, 155).

If we understand the significance of interrelatedness of past, present and future, we would be able to decipher that our present has ruptured the link with our past taking us off-track from the future which Gandhi's political framework had envisaged. Gandhi laid the foundation of his politics that encapsulated the political, economic, social and spiritual interest of the last person. In this context Gandhi said that,

I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man [woman] whom you may have seen, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him [her]. Will he [she] gain anything by it? Will it restore him [her] to a control over his [her] own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj [freedom] for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and yourself melt away (Pyarelal, 1958, 65).

This is one of the last notes left by Gandhi in 1948. In this note, he explicates that the real essence of his idea of politics was that its fabric covers the last recognized human. For him the objective of politics was to empower the last recognised human. He articulated political power in terms that create horizontal equality among people and demolish vertical hierarchies. Along with this, he gave significance to collective power. It can be argued here that Hannah Arendt's notion of power coincides with Gandhi's interpretation of power when she says that power is "the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. When we say of somebody that he is "in power" we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name" (Arendt, 1970, 143). Further, he emphasized that the aim of politics was to make every human realize their higher self. According to Gandhi, politics, like religion, had to do with "the happiness of the toiling masses, a means to the realization of the highest realization in life" (Pyarelal, 1956, 422). How far has this conception been lived up to by the Gandhians in the contemporary times? The next few chapters are an attempt to probe this question as they focus on understanding the idea of politics by a Gandhian social movement called Ekta Parishad.

CHAPTER 3: SELF-PERCEPTION OF EKTA PARISHAD: BETWEEN 'SOCIAL' AND 'POLITICAL'

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on putting forth a self-perception of Ekta Parishad with the aim to analyze how it constructs and connects its 'social' and 'political'. This chapter borrows resources from Ekta Parishad's online and offline materials. In addition, it also has relied on the broader observations, common beliefs and ideas noticed during the field work. In order to study the kind of politics that this Gandhian movement had presented, the chapter introduces Ekta Parishad as a Gandhian movement in the first section. This section elucidates the role of Ekta Parishad in shaping nonviolent resistance in the present century with a vision of empowering and mobilizing people on nonviolent lines by strengthening voices of tribals. The next section focuses on the various tools that this movement employs to raise itself from an organization into a movement. This part of the chapter elaborately discusses, with the help of tables, diagrams and examples, multiple tools or strategies that help it stand and move with a stable and strong foundation. The following section focuses on nonviolent resistances like Janadesh, Jan Satyagraha, Jan Samvad yatra and Jai Jagta yatra that Ekta Parishad led in order to bring its principles into practice. The last section discusses how Ekta Parishad builds a way for a worldwide nonviolent resistance and is symbolizing a continuous march in the direction of nonviolent resistance.

2. EKTA PARISHAD: SHAPING NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE IN 21ST CENTURY

This section is largely based on Ekta Parishad's description of itself as a movement mentioned on its website (<https://www.ektaparishadindia.org/> (new website)). Ekta Parishad began as loose grouping of NGO training institutes for creating a large base of community development work. Right from its initial days it emphasised on making people independent and empowered for being able to raise their voice against the injustices towards them. It asserted people's right over livelihood resources. It helped in the making of a large social formation around the issue of rightful control over land, water and forest resources.

It was in 1991 that Ekta Parishad finally evolved as a federation for mobilizing people by nonviolent resistance. It began with foot-march, as one of the tools to resist first in 1999-2000,

from western to eastern Madhya Pradesh (prior to the partition of Chhattisgarh). Once gaining momentum, Ekta Parishad organised about a dozen marches like 'Bhu Adhikar Satyagraha Padyatra, 1999', 'rebuild Bihar March, 2001', 'Chambal Peace March, 2002', 'Madhya Pradesh Bhu Adhikar (Land Rights) Sanvad March, 2002', 'Chattisgarh Sambad Yatra, 2003', 'Chhattisgarh Bachao March, 2005' and it attained a breakthrough with the historic Janadesh. These marches reflect the vision of Ekta Parishad that is laid down in the next subsection.

2.1. THE VISION

From the above section it can be observed that Ekta Parishad concentrates on empowering and mobilizing people for raising nonviolent resistance. Ekta Parishad stands for its literal translation 'unity forum' as it visualizes a unified world on the lines of nonviolent resistance. It is a federation that emphatically emphasises on nonviolence as a means of resistance or application of Gandhian principles of nonviolence as it believes that it would ensure respect for fundamental rights of the marginalized and vulnerable sections. By taking nonviolent resistance as the main pillar it also envisions a land reform policy and a development model that is inclusive, democratic so that the rights of every citizen are protected including the poorest communities. Ekta Parishad has raised the struggle for ensuring that every community and every individual in the world gets the opportunity of living with dignity. In order to reach the goal of a dignified life for all, it is important that each individual benefit from equal and guaranteed access to land, forest and water.

Ekta Parishad carries out its struggle for introducing and strengthening three concrete models: community-based governance (gram swaraj), local self-reliance (gram swawlamban) and responsible government (jawabdeh sarkar). After having read such a self-perception by Ekta Parishad, doubts may arise with respect to its role and position in the struggle to which it is committed. It may be thought of as an NGO or a welfare association, but the major factor that separates it from such organisations is that it is not merely delivering its services but it aims to change the status quo by empowering the deprived communities through nonviolent resistance. In the next chapter, how the founder of this movement perceives NGOization of social movements as a problematic issue will be explained further

In this section, it could be deciphered that Ekta Parishad's journey began with raising voice against political injustices. It tried understanding the potential of those sections that are at the lowest rungs of the social hierarchy and trained them to be a part of substantive political change. One of the most

marginalised sections in the socio-political history of the country are the tribals. The next part of the chapter discusses how Ekta Parishad explains its goal to empower this particular section.

3. EMPOWERING TRIBALS: NONVIOLENCE AND THE VOICES OF TRIBALS

In the earlier section it has been made clear that Ekta Parishad aims to empower deprived communities that form the core of their nonviolent resistance. It can be deciphered from Ekta Parishad's own explanation that this movement seeks to enable its members with tools of nonviolence so that they can raise their own voices and lead their struggles through Satyagraha and Ahimsa. This section primarily is divided into three subsections that explicates how and through which strategies and tools Ekta Parishad perceives its building process into a social organisation, a movement for raising resistance and also how it sustains its resistance.

These three subsections are largely made out of the research paper produced by peace activist and scholar, Jill Carr Harris (For further information, please refer to <https://www.jaijagatinternational.org/marchers/jill-carr-harris/>) on Ekta Parishad. They delineate her interpretation of Ekta Parishad's building process into a social organization by using certain strategies and tools. (It is to be noted here that Jill C.Harris is a significant member of the movement and also has been studying the movement as a part of her research.) In this part of the chapter, the tools and strategies have been attempted to be explained through flowcharts for a better presentation and understanding. Tools basically refer to the employment of some tactic/method to reach a particular end result.

Ekta Parishad asserts that it highlights the significance of the tribal people of society in conserving natural resources, it aims to break the stereotypes surrounding the tribal communities. One of the most common stereotypes is that tribal communities are: 'backwards', 'primitive' and 'need to be pulled into the mainstream.' Ekta Parishad tries to break this stereotype by giving them skills, tools and training in upholding nonviolent forms of resistance with the objective of protecting their unique identity.

It demolishes the myth that these sections are against development by arguing that the tribals or the marginalised, play an indispensable role in bringing about truly democratic, inclusive development based on Gandhian principles of self-reliance. It can be argued at this juncture that in the process, it unmasks the ugly face of today's crony capitalism, materialistic society, rabid

industrialisation all encapsulated in faulty and unjust industrial policy, tourism policy, energy policy, mining and forest policy and land policy. Tribals have been a neglected chunk of Indian society ever since the times of the colonial period. Their exploitation was supposed to have disappeared with the independence and the constitutional safeguards. But, this has not been the case. They are still being suppressed and marginalised.

In fact, from the observations made by scrutinizing various group discussions organised by Ekta Parishad's own members, a common insight that I came across was that the broken promises and the continued inclination of the government towards the market have worsened the condition of the tribal section. Criminalisation of the tribal communities, perpetual harassment, forced evictions, and atrocities have added to the misery of the tribals. Such continued repression has not succeeded in making them dormant, as the tribal people have always tried to confront injustice against them and questioned the unjust disposition of the state with strong resistance. Today, the struggle to get their rights over their natural resources has intensified because of the frequent false promises of the government. The next two chapters lay down some of the testimonies and interviews of the constant struggle that tribal women have been bravely leading, reflecting the present observations.

It needs to be noted that during the freedom struggle every section of Indian society hoped for an independent India that would guarantee them not only autonomy of self-expression with dignity but also equality and unity. The tribal and the peasant community participated in the struggle with the very same hope. It is true that they got political freedom as they became the citizens of free India but the social and economic freedom was still to be achieved. As B.R. Ambedkar pointed out that if the contradiction between political equality and social and economic equality are not set right, then it would not be long that even our political democracy would be in peril. The failure to assure socio-economic development to the people along with political development has made the prediction of B.R. Ambedkar true. From the field observations it could be deciphered that the movement largely dwells upon the values that Gandhi, Vinoba, Jayprakash and also Ambedkar have left behind.

Following the legacy of such great thinkers, the movement believes that the Indian Government initially made a commitment towards democratic socialism and welfarism but gradually shifted its direction to serve capitalism. The widely circulated view that was discerned from the across the

interviews of its members was that it does not mean that moving towards capitalism was a wrong step but sacrificing the democratic values, trampling over the rights of some sections in order to cater to some other sections, and delivering injustice instead of justice in the name of 'National Interest' is something that needs to be given serious attention.

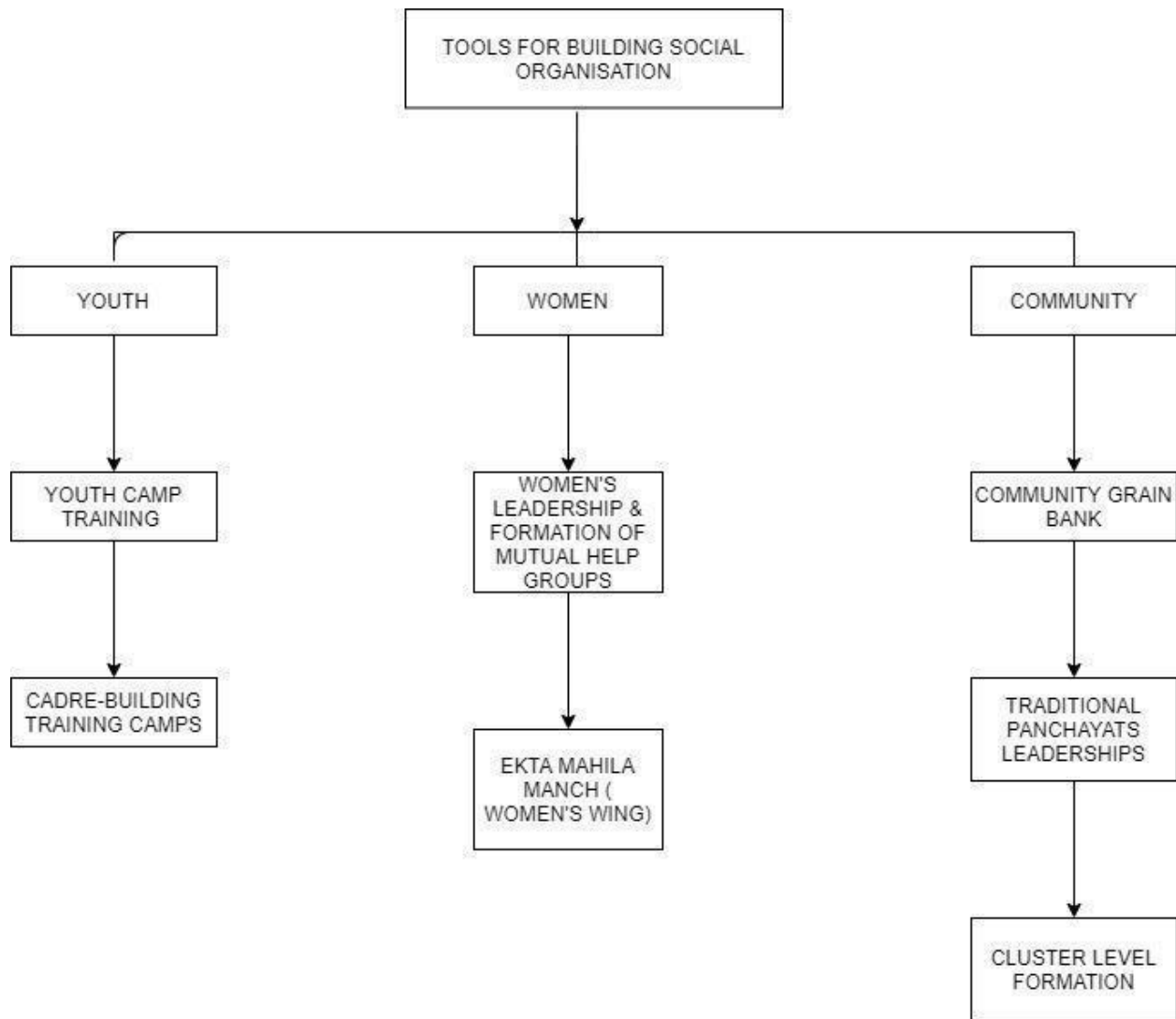
The members of the movement largely argue that the other thing that has to be taken into account is that under the tag of 'National Interest' and 'development' the government is justifying its acts of repression and tyranny over the marginalised and poor sections of the society. It is not to deny that every country desires to walk on the path of progress and development. But, the point is that every country has its own story; its own context and accordingly, a blueprint of development should be formulated. India is a country with diverse sections and diverse ways of life. Even the constitution makers of the country kept this diversity in mind due to which they introduced a 'mixed economy' and a constitution that would balance the interests of all. Today, this concern for all seems to have been diverted to a few. The state is trying to replicate the western model of capitalism in every way possible. The blind faith in this kind of a move has made the state overlook its own people, their context, interests and stories.

From these observations one can argue that the voices of those sections that deny adhering to the unquestioning obedience principle circulated by the state are stifled by calling them to be 'anti-development' and 'anti-nation'. Many voices remain passive due to such a lack of substantive freedom of speech and expression. Certain questions that may be raised at this point are: what could be the way ahead? Should the suppressed continue to suffer under the yoke of unjust state? Should the status quo remain unquestioned?

Ekta Parishad believes that considering the rights of the tribal communities becomes important also because even though the judiciary has extended a helping hand through its judgements and active interventions, there are certain nuances that have been missed. For instance, it is mostly the case with the tribal communities that the land is inherited by them from their ancestors, the inheritance goes on from generation to generation without any records. The absence of records and papers make them illegal holders of the land in one go and that made them to evict the land. Therefore, the order of the Supreme Court though in good faith has created more problems for the tribal people as they have been held responsible for illegal encroachments and subjected to

eviction. This has escalated the violent protests against the state structures instead of slowing them down.

Similarly, the complete ban of the felling of trees has proved to be a reason for further discomfort for the local population. It has adversely affected the local forest owners, laborers and locally owned small forest based industries that used to earn their living by selling forest based products. The next chapter presents a few of the case studies that give a firsthand account of how such issues are being articulated by the members themselves. The preceding chapter also puts forth a deliberation with the members of the movement on how at present, it can be observed that both the militants and the State are at loggerhead, it is the people belonging to different marginalised sections that have to bear the brunt. How to break this deadlock? is the main question being discussed further in the next chapter.



1. Tools for building Social Organisation (Flow Chart by Priya Sharma)

3.1. THE ORGANIZATIONAL PARAPHERNALIA OF A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

In order to make a firm foundation on which the movement may stand and grow, building a social organization becomes significant. As the flow chart above presents, Ekta Parishad, not only reaches the most vulnerable sections of the population, trains them but it also ensures the strengthening of the entire community. As already stated, Ekta Parishad believes in the substantive role of the youth in introducing any kind of change. It is widely claimed by the members of the

movement that P.V.Rajagopal has saved many youth from taking the path of violence after getting disillusioned with the unjust system that surrounds them from all sides. Thus, participation of youth in Ekta Parishad is the first step towards building a strong social organization. Youth training camps form the first introduction for the poor youth of different villages that this movement covers. At this level, young and energetic people are given training collectively. They are made to understand the significance of their untapped potential that is to be directed towards Gandhian or nonviolent political action. Instead of just making them follow the instructions that the conventional set-up has always forced them to do, the movement helps them focus on their leadership qualities so that they become capable of initiating changes in their own contexts and encourage others to take action-oriented measures. The poor youth, at this juncture, is made to realize their role in converting the top-down approach into a bottom-up democratic framework by sensitizing them about political issues related to land rights, rights of the tribals guaranteed by the state and also unveiling how the landlords, the government, forest department is exploiting them.

After putting forth the real picture of injustice done to them, these youth are given the training to use such tools that can help them raise a mass struggle on Gandhian lines, so as to protect people's rights. The attempt of this movement of connecting the youth at the level of self, of the external surrounding and with the rest of the downtrodden sections of the society makes it lay a strong base for raising a meaningful political struggle. These young minds are introduced to such tools that help them in articulating the importance of non-violence as a form of political action for targeting the roots of social as well as political issues. The youth, as earlier mentioned, is made to connect with one self as well and this is done by inculcating in them certain skills ranging from developing a moral attitude and self-disciplined dispositions to making use of such skills that help them take up leadership in way that inspires others to develop capabilities for contributing towards a positive, nonviolent political change. The leadership qualities that these youth are made to acquire make them more committed towards voluntary service as well as towards taking direct voluntary actions. Therefore, it can be said that this movement tries to sow the seeds of such leaders for the people in true sense.

An example of how significant the youth camps are, is the Bihar youth camp that Ekta Parishad organized (Harris, 2005, 8). The movement understood a lack of faith in the state to be the primary reason for rising violence in Bihar. So as to treat this situation, youth training camps were

introduced under the banner of 'Rebuilding Bihar' campaign. The main objective of this campaign was to help the youth know the history and culture of the state so that they start respecting the region they belong to. Looking at the caste-war situation in the region, the youth were made a part of such constructive works that included community schemes, restoration of traditional water systems, restoration of water tanks and bringing water to the local farmers free of cost. Such an exercise ensured building channels for dialogue between the youth and the rest of the adult population across caste barriers. Solidarity through such constructive tasks manifested in the form of conflict resolution and peace-building mechanism for treating the issue of caste-differences.

After these fresh young minds of the villages are trained enough to get acquainted with their significant role in building channels for social and political change. They are introduced to the next level of training meant for cadre-building. At this step, the new group of youth, along with those young men and women who have an on-going relationship with Ekta Parishad are given much more sophisticated capacity building training. Skills that can help them lead constructive work campaigns, understand the need for a different development approach and can make them activists who can use the tools related to struggle-dialogue (as explained below). The focus here is thus, on enabling them as activists to raise questions against the structures of oppressions and also, taking suitable actions that help in establishing networks for dialogue and in case of need, in raising a mass nonviolent struggle.

Along with the youth, the movement focuses on building the strength of women in the village areas. It considers this section of population to be indispensable to the building process of a social organization. As patriarchal domination is prevalent in village areas and as opportunities for empowering women seems bleak in these regions, Ekta Parishad makes an attempt of ameliorating the situation. It helps in making rural women realize their simultaneous linkages with nature, community and the larger social and political realm. Self-sufficiency as an important factor is made to empower these women. They are made to participate in various Mutual Help Groups so that they start identifying themselves with other women and devote their energies in uplifting, not only themselves, but other women as well. These women are encouraged to educate themselves about the real oppression that they face in their daily lives in the form of social, cultural and political imperatives they are made to follow in different domains, ranging from households to markets to community gatherings. They are made to be courageous enough to raise difficult

questions related to their dismal plight. Issues like encroachment on forest land, forest produce, liquor shops, almost absent education facilities, child marriage, gender- based discrimination, reduced employment opportunities and so on are brought to the forefront, discussed and debated by these women. The Ekta Mahila Manch that began in mid-2001 to include women in the decision-making processes and at the leadership positions at the senior level of the organization, contributes to the strengthening of women in a substantive way. One of the major steps taken from the stage of the women's forum is that of the demand of giving equal status to women as farmers. The movement recognized that the identity of a farmer is mostly equated with that of the male section of the population. The consequences of such a limited definition are seen in the government policies that are made to benefit the farmers. As these policies and laws are created from the lens of catering to the male population, the women who are the actual cultivators as they are left behind to work after the males of the family migrate to the cities, are overlooked. Therefore, Ekta Parishad and especially, the Ekta Mahila Manch firmly stands for the rights of the women as farmers.

The way to give effect to this demand is to ensure that these women farmers are guaranteed joint land rights along with men so that they have equal land ownership. Thus, this movement seeks to introduce a radical shift in the property laws of the country that have so far been inclined in the favor of male ownership rights only. Through such steps, the movement tries to re- establish the equation between men and women in almost every form, be it husband and wife, sons and daughters, farmers and householders and so on. It would not be wrong here to claim that this movement is making an attempt to dissolve the boundary between the personal and the political. It understands that the domination in the private realm cannot be adequately addressed if the policies, laws and institutions of the country are not sensitive towards such oppression. In fact, the movement targets the faults in the conventional political realm by educating about the virtues like substantive equality, justice, freedom and empowering them in their personal lives. So, a two-way approach is adopted by the movement in order to produce a holistic solution to the structural dominations present in the private as well the public sphere.

Extending the horizon for both youth as well as women, the movement focuses on introducing and reviving such institutions that can meaningfully connect both these sections with the community. The three institutions that represent development at the community level are community grain banks, traditional panchayats and clusters formations. The community grain banks shake the

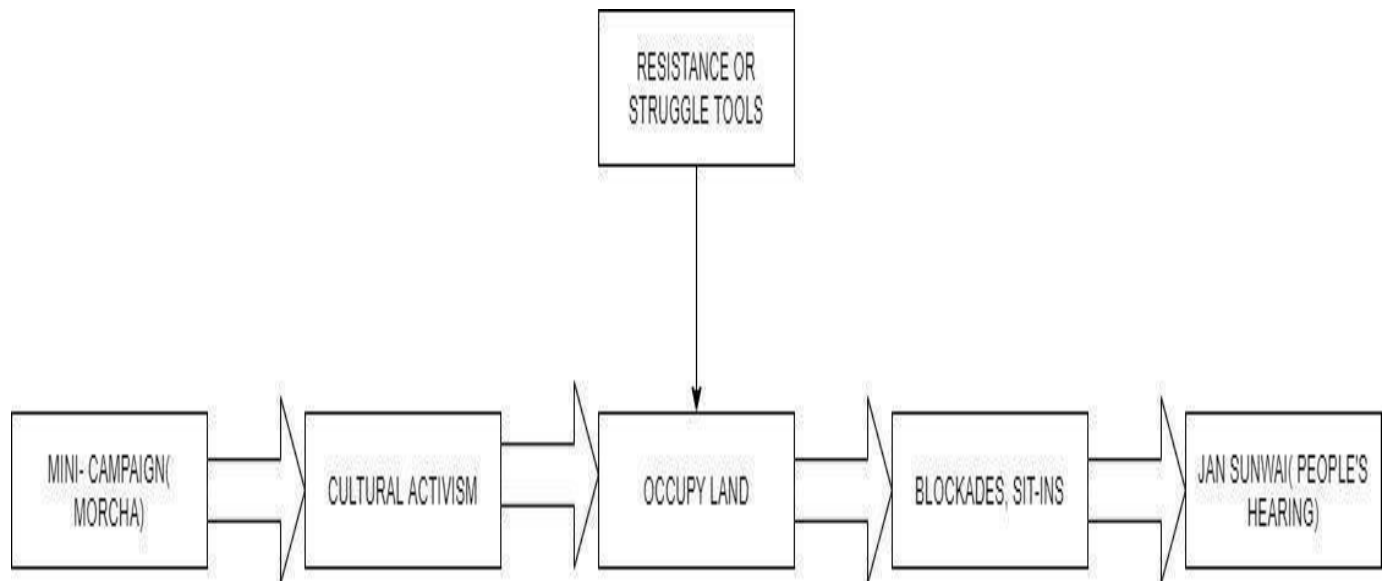
common myth that money is the end and directs the attention towards a very pertinent point that it is the resources that are of value rather than money itself. The innovative method of building-up community resources, especially grains, includes the participation of all sections of society without any discrimination. These resources are a contribution of the villagers and are used for their own welfare whenever the need arises. Instead of depending on the state's resources that have been made a tool to exploit the poor people further, the grain bank offers a more secure, dignified option. This kind of bank also helps in empowering people by making them active contributors to their well-being rather than being passive takers of the government announced welfare doles. As a building block of social organization, the community grain bank has helped in saving enough resources for raising mass campaigns, repaying loans that were made to be means of exploiting the poor agricultural laborers by the moneylenders. The villagers are given grain from the bank at 20 per cent interest instead of at least 50 per cent interest rates charged by moneylenders. Thus, by eliminating moneylenders from the chain of loan distribution, the movement has saved many farmers, laborers from becoming indebted and bonded labor.

The case of landless dalit women in Sahlawan-Pipariya, a village in Katni district provides a real picture of the advantages of such a bank (Harris, 2005, 10). These women whose livelihood are entirely dependent on natural resources, got the motivation by Ekta Parishad to cultivate a portion of forest land that had been devoid of any vegetation due to illegal felling of trees. These women collectively planted beans on a 10-acre tract. The product of such collective effort went to the grain bank so that the members of the women's community could use it. It shows the empowerment that women get from contributing to the larger community's welfare, the will-power of these women in re- cultivating land that has been cleared of trees, the significance of solidarity in struggling against the odds and also re-thinking about the meaning of development.

In the endeavor of re-defining local development, the movement has revived the traditional panchayat leadership which are different from the local village governments. The local traditional decision making bodies that have been a part of the village communities for centuries and have a legitimacy in the eyes of the tribal population. These local bodies are deeply ingrained in local community values and cultures and command a considerable influence over the local population. Ekta Parishad understands the moral force that the leadership of these village panchayats exert. The movement has modified the leadership by including women as leaders in these panchayats.

The third tool to ensure community development is cluster level formation. By combining villages in the form of clusters the movement not only guarantees a strong, cohesive base to the social organization but also fights back the divide and rule tactic of the powerholders that seek to suppress the voice of the downtrodden by taking advantage of their reduced numerical strength.

Thus, it can be concluded that Ekta Parishad sees itself as a social organisation that includes youth, women and the community as a whole. In the process of making itself a social organisation, it employs such tools that bring greater cohesion in the movement and also empowers each category that it incorporates. The next subsection expounds how these three categories are trained to raise a nonviolent struggle as per Ekta Parishad.



2. Resistance or Struggle Tools (Flow Chart by Priya Sharma)

3.2.RESISTANCE & STRUGGLE TOOLS OF A MOVEMENT - The first set of tools, as focused upon in the previous subsection, are to build a social organization basically aim at empowering the vulnerable section of the society, in understanding the day-to-day oppression and providing them enough training to start becoming an active agent of change in their immediate contexts. The second step is to make them understand that their issues are part of the larger scheme of exploitation that calls for resistance or struggle. The tools used for resistance are on the lines of Gandhian struggle. ‘Satyagraha’ forms the basis of these tools. Thus, the struggle focuses on holding on to nonviolent principles as well as strategies. Adhering to the principle of nonviolence espoused by Gandhi, the participants are made to understand the significance of their moral

righteousness and use it to empower themselves against the oppressors who are on a morally wrong footing. They are motivated to understand that just because they are economically poor and socially as well as culturally marginalized that does not mean that they do not hold the power to break the chains of oppression and injustice. In addition, the resistance is to persuade the government to make such policies as well as laws that are pro-poor. This step is also important to highlight that Gandhi believed in active struggle rather than passively approaching the issues. His path was difficult in a way that it required the oppressed to act against oppression and easy in a way that it called for harnessing the soul or moral force from within instead of depending on others or external tools to carry out their struggle. Thus, it can be said that this sphere is of active participation and mobilization.

In order to carry out a struggle all or a few of the mentioned tools in the above chart are required as it largely depends on the context and the objectives to be achieved. The first tool which is that of developing a mini-campaign (morcha) deals with those struggles that demand a spontaneous response. These campaigns are smaller in size and influence a limited number of people. There can be multiple mini-campaigns operational at different localities on different issues in a region. These aim at educating the people about the issues for which the campaign is undertaken, garnering their support in the form of physical presence, arrangement of few logistic requirements, financial contribution (if needed, generally a really minimum amount is needed), to discuss about the actions that could be taken to face the challenges and also to ensure social mobilization.

The case of poor landless families who shifted to a wasteland in the Guna Village of Damoh district in the state of Madhya Pradesh (Harris, 2005, 11) explicates the impact of such mini-campaigns. These families made the land cultivable through their hard work, suitable enough to grow at least one crop. The males of these families tried to provide for themselves by migrating towards the cities during the dry season. Finding that the men of the family were absent, the rich landlords tried to grab their land. Even when the revenue department officials were well aware of the land being occupied by the poor landless families, they participated in selling the land off to other land dealers. After two years, men with tractors came to evict these families from the land. As the males of these families had gone out to the cities to work as wage laborers, the women decided to set up a mini-campaign. One of the tactics that they came up with, with the help of the mini-campaigns, was to use the feces of their children as a threat to spoil the faces of the encroachers. The threat

worked and the eighteen families still remain the cultivators of the same land irrespective of the names mentioned on the land ownership papers.

The next tool that the movement uses is that of cultural activism. Ekta Kala Lok Manch(One Artists' Group Front) is a platform through which Ekta Parishad uses cultural activism to disseminate information about important issues like land grabbing, exploitative policies, negative impact of industrialization and so on. From this stage, people are mobilized into taking actions, they are infused with enthusiasm with the help of plays, songs and slogans like '*Zameen apne aap ki, nahi kisi Sarkar ki*' (The land belong to us, not to any government) and '*Kala kanoon todenge , jungle, zameen jotenge*' (We shall break the black laws, shall plough the land and forests).

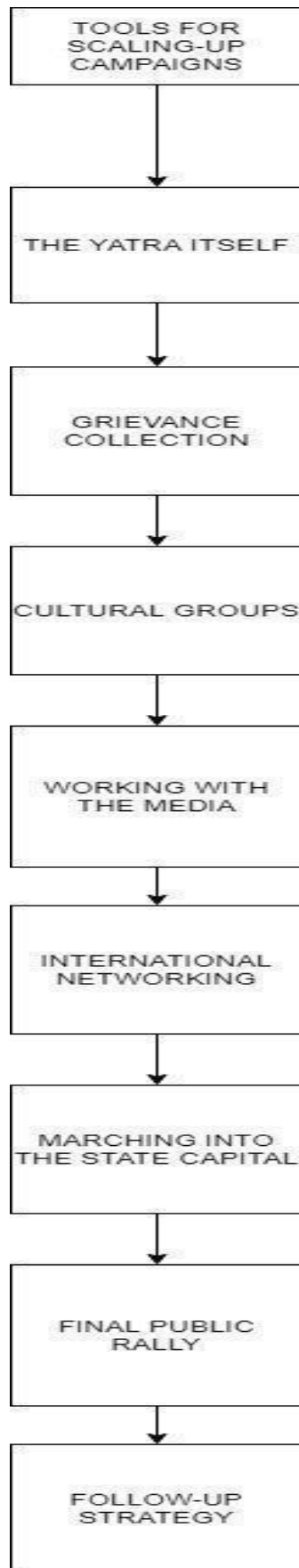
Taking cues from the last two slogans, the significance of land and the emphasis on establishing the right to land can be easily calibrated. The tool pertaining to forcibly (re)occupying land reinforces this right. This tool is used to ensure reoccupation of land which means that the tribals stay on their land even if they do not have the titles to the land. In order to assert the right to land, Ekta Parishad has taken support of rituals like *bhumi puja* (traditional land ceremony). It can be deciphered that this movement adheres to everything that is available in the context. They attempt to resist by harnessing resources offered from the ground. The politics that they want to create is not a top-down approach rather than a bottom-up approach rooted in the local needs, culture, people and communities. They have struggled against the tag of transgressors given to the innocent tribals. One of the major demands of this movement has been recognition of the right of every individual on earth to a piece of land enough for sustenance of her/ him and her/his family. They want to establish that every man and woman has a natural right to a piece of land. Therefore, the reoccupation of land by tribals, who are closely related to nature, is not illegitimate in their eyes. The kind of political state and the policies that they envisage consider this concern to be very central.

The other tool that is used in managing their mini-campaigns and mass struggles is civil disobedience. Being a Gandhian social movement, Ekta Parishad relies on various sub-tools like blockades (of roads or railway lines), gherao (surrounding politicians) till they agree to their demands, sit-ins (dharnas) against oppression. Although it needs to be added here that this movement is cautious enough with respect to applying these methods in a fair and honest manner. They do not seek to harm the opponent in any wrong way due to which they always make it a point

to inform their civil disobedient acts to the concerned authorities. This shows their commitment to Gandhi's principle of separating the act of oppression from the oppressor.

With the aim of shaking the structures of oppression, this movement organizes Jan Sunwai (or people's hearing). It is like a people's court that listens to the grievances of local individuals, families who are disillusioned as well as tired with the process of formal political institutions. Ekta Parishad understands that due to pervasive corruption, red-tapism and hierarchies these innocent people fail miserably in expressing their grievances before the concerned authorities. These authorities often turn a blind - eye to their problems as a result, they find nowhere to go. Ekta Parishad not only listens to their issues but also persuades the government to take appropriate actions. It harnesses the power of the collective and boosts the confidence of such individuals and families by letting them know that they are not alone in their struggles.

From the above explanation, it can be deciphered that Ekta Parishad is a movement that follows nonviolence in its active and persuasive form. By training its members who form a social organisation, it tries to put forth a resistance that apart from highlighting and amplifying the unjust issue aims to take a stand for resolving it as well. The next subsection, presents how the movement uses such tools that help in escalating nonviolent struggle on a larger scale against structural issues.



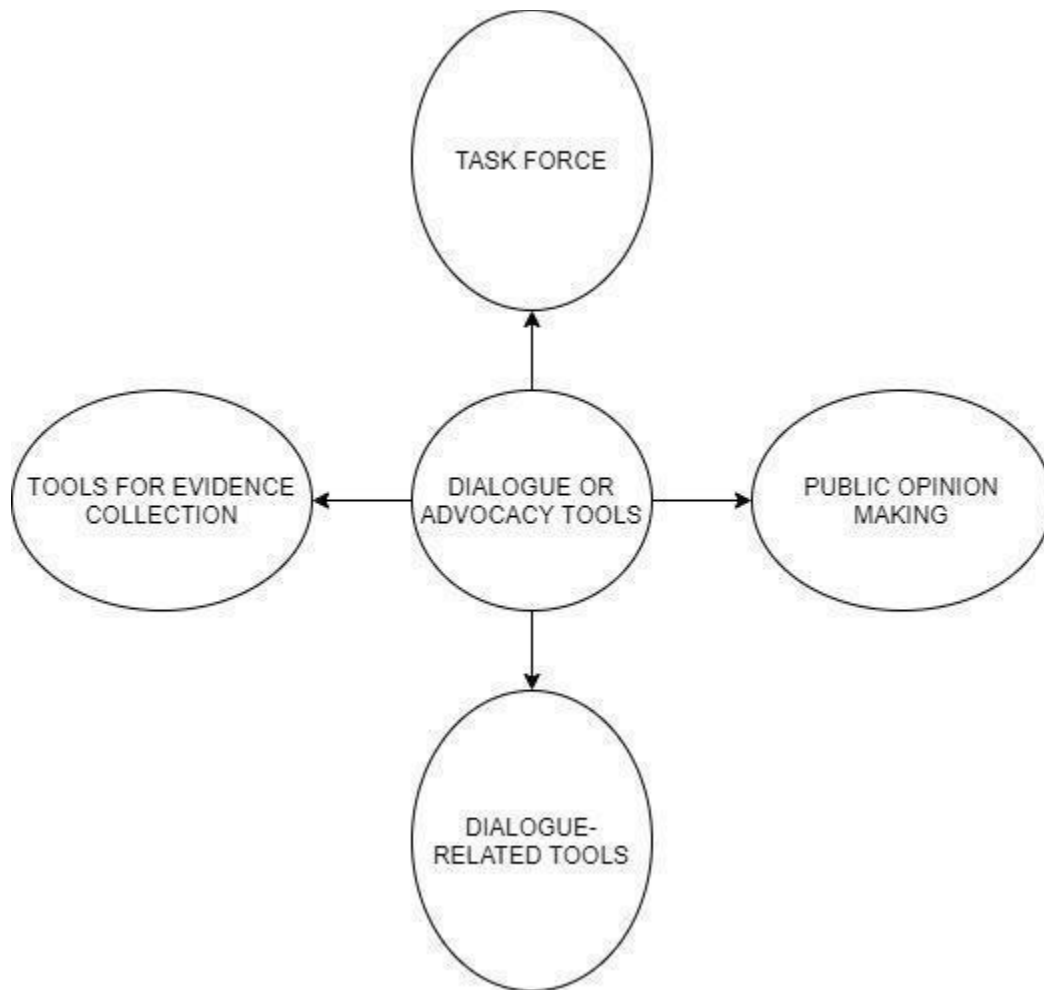
3. Tools for Scaling-up Campaign (Flow Chart by Priya Sharma)

3.3. SUSTAINED CAMPAIGN: STUDYING TOOLS FOR SCALING-UP

The previous subsection presented how Ekta Parishad understands itself as a nonviolent movement carrying out struggle at the local level. This subsection extends the discussion further and shows how this movement expands its range of nonviolent resistance by using certain tools and strategies. In order to bring about a radical transformation, a sustained struggle is very important. Ekta Parishad continues believing in strengthening the struggle through state –level, national- level and even international-level campaigns. Instead of taking impulsive measures, this movement plans these campaigns for months and sometimes even for years. The tools for scaling-up the campaign are significant in planning a mass-based, long-term and sustainable struggle. The major tool used in this context is foot-march itself. Ekta Parishad has relied on foot-marches which are planned and pre-decided so as to make it a serious attempt in achieving the objectives decided. The march comprises a cultural group that attracts people and manages to deliver the message of the march through plays, songs and slogans. These cultural activities help in striking closer contacts.

By using these tools many villages are covered with the aim of connecting the people and so as to ensure efficient collection of grievances. Grievance collection mechanism forms another tool in scaling up the campaign. The grievances are collected in writing and in full-details. First, the grievances are discussed and the channels and institutions that need to be targeted are decided, then, a dedicated team is allotted the task of writing them down. The names of all those that had their grievances registered so that they can be provided the follow-up. It is important that the march is not an isolated activity. In order to disseminate to the people not in the immediate coverage, national and local media along with international networks are used as tools. Due to these two tools, widespread connections are made and opinions from all parts of the world are gathered. As a consequence a lot of pressure gets created on the opposition. In order to persuade the government to respond, in case it has not paid to the rising pressure, the march enters the state capital. This move helps in gathering critical support from various non-state actors, shaking the government and sometimes judicial institutions from their slumber. After the government has been brought into action, a final public rally takes place. This rally is basically to have dialogue and negotiate with the government and other concerned actors. A follow-up strategy is also planned so that if the decisions taken during the public rally are not implemented fully, then, a fresh campaign, using all or some of these tools could be pondered over.

Two things that get visible through these tools are first, the belief in the right to struggle. This right is extremely important in order to expand the boundaries of a democracy and the second is related to the commitment to the Gandhian path of resistance. Just like Gandhi, the founder of this movement, P.V.Rajagopal maintains strict nonviolent discipline, believes in the value of Ahimsa, foot-march, dialogue and negotiation. It also puts forth the kind of relationship that this movement seeks to establish with the state. It must be clear that this movement sees the state at par with people and it emphasizes on holding the state accountable. Thus, it endeavors to break the implicit hierarchies built between common man and political institutions.



4. Dialogue or Advocacy Tools (Flow Chart by Priya Sharma)

Advocacy tools- These tools are extremely important so as to build up public support along with mobilization of people. Ekta Parishad advocates for effective implementation of land rights as a part of livelihood rights, constitutionally guaranteed by the Indian state. In case these are not

assured, the movement considers that, as an alternative, civil disobedience should be acceptable. A few tools support the process of advocacy are as follows:

- Public opinion-making tools
- Task Force
- Tools for evidence collection
- Dialogue-related tools

The tools required for public opinion making range from media, press release, press briefings, conferences, networking with journalists at local as well as national level, preparing films, documentaries and so on. A record of all the press clippings is kept so as to keep checking if these means are effectively influencing people by disseminating vital information at a wider scale.

Task Force- In order to address the issue of land distribution and regularization, Ekta Parishad has been a force in pushing the state governments of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Bihar and Orissa to form a committee called Task Force in each of these states at the district, sub-district and state levels. The Task Forces have been constructive means with respect to achieving the objectives of the movement and in offering the government a mechanism for action.

Tools for evidence-collection –As most of the tribal communities lack documents to prove their ancestral rights over land, Ekta Parishad directs its efforts towards collecting the information as well as grievances of these communities through legal approaches.

Dialogue-related Tools- Dialogue has been a very significant part of the movement and its significance is explained in the tables given below.

The above tools clearly highlight the conviction of the movement in encompassing all sections of society through advocacy so that along with maintenance of transparency, the goal of education about pertinent issues is realized.

The tools, in this subsection, related to scaling up of campaigns clearly highlight the intensity of the nonviolent struggle that Ekta Parishad aims at. It can also be argued here that Ekta Parishad focuses on making a long term, large scale and a meaningful change through the tools it employs for raising its struggles at different levels. It can also be highlighted from this section that Ekta Parishad begins its journey from being a social organisation first and then slowly moves on to

becoming a movement for raising a nonviolent struggle against political injustices. Thus, it can be asserted that the movement focuses on combining the ‘social’ and the ‘political’. The next section discusses Ekta Parishad’s different nonviolent struggles that make use of the aforementioned tools at various levels and in numerous ways so as to bring the combination of the ‘social’ and the ‘political’ in practice.

4. NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE IN ACTION: SAMNVAD, SATYAGRAHA AND YATRA

As already mentioned, Ekta Parishad is committed to a nonviolent form of resistance. Its contribution to the development of nonviolence as a means of resistance can be calibrated from analysis given below of different significant nonviolent resistances it organised in which it uses the aforementioned tools of resistance embedded in both, the ‘social’ and the ‘political.’

4.1. JANADESH

It would not be wrong to argue that nonviolent resistance does not simply assume that it is being waged to resolve the conflict but it is largely carried out with the aim of plunging in the middle of the conflict situation with full force and power. Jan Satyagraha is an example of such a nonviolent resistance. The journey to Jan Satyagraha began with Janadesh in 2007. It was a march from Gwalior to Delhi (340 km) in which 25000 villagers participated. It commenced on 2nd October and culminated on 27th October, 2007. This effort led to substantive results that include enforcement of Forest Rights Act 2006 on 30th September 2013, distribution of 1.4 million land titles, constitution of Land Reforms Committee and also establishment of a National Council for Land Reforms. It was to ensure assessment of the status of land reforms, suggest recommendations to resolve conflicts over land and for providing broad guidelines and policy recommendations of the Committee.

Ekta Parishad believes that Janadesh i.e. ‘people’s order’ acted as a stepping stone towards the long journey that was to be taken under the Jan Satyagraha. Its success in delivering significant outcomes infused a breath of energy, encouragement and courage. One needs to note that in a nonviolent resistance, taking small steps and learning from them so as to devise a more organised, planned and efficient strategy in the near future is central. In a nonviolent resistance, a step-wise approach works the best because of the numerous sub-tools that need to be used and adjusted at

every single step. Due to these reasons, decision-making, leadership, farsightedness and innovative thinking gains much relevance.

The Janadesh as a precursor to the Jan Satyagraha encapsulated all these elements. Janadesh reflected the power of common people and in order to continue harnessing this power it was central to instill faith in the people and to show that their fight and hard work has not gone waste or has simply faded away. Although the government agreed to introduce major changes due to Janadesh, the commitment to the implementation of these changes remains on paper only. Instead of bringing the necessary legislations in the land policy on ground, the government diverted its energies on suppressing the movement by questioning its legitimacy.

Ekta Parishad claims that the participants and leaders of Janadesh did not succumb to the suppression of the government, instead came forth with greater strength in the form of Jan Satyagraha. The 350km long March from Gwalior to Agra called Jan Satyagraha began on the UN International Non Violence Day and also the day of Gandhi Jayanti, 2nd October 2012. Through Jan Satyagraha the poor and the marginalised raised the most fundamental and pertinent questions. This march impinged on the significance of agriculture, of food production, farmer's suicide and welfare measures, government's preference for industrialists over farmers, land reforms and reduction of poverty. It also uncovered the basic flaw in the governance structure that in the name of 'national development' is catering to the interests of the elite minority and ignoring the majority. It can be seen that these issues touch the foundations, relate to the basics of the concepts of development, national interest and governance. One of its major objectives was to persuade the government to reconstruct the land reform policies.

At the outset, it is indispensable to take note of the fact that amidst the rampant atrocities that peasants belonging to marginalised, poor backgrounds suffered under the British rule, the freedom struggle came as a light of hope for these peasants. They participated in both the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1921 and Non-cooperation Movement of 1931 in the hope that political freedom would guarantee their emancipation from the repression of the taluqdars and zamindars.

During the post-independence period, in favor of tribal farmers and other peasant classes, radical land reforms were supported by a section of Congress that described them as the 'Congress Socialists Group'. Accordingly an Agrarian Reform Committee, commonly known as the

Kumarappa Committee was set up. This committee proposed a fairly radical ceiling on land. With this recommendation being incorporated in the five-year plan, the matter of land reform has remained an item in the five year plans.

As rightly noted by D.Bandyopadhyay, it was in the Seventh Five -Year Plan that the indispensability of land reform in the whole process of rural development and poverty alleviation programs was recognised. It stated that:

Land reform have been recognised to constitute a vital element both in terms of anti-poverty strategy and modernisation and increased productivity in agriculture. Redistribution of land could provide a permanent asset base for a large number of rural landless poor for taking up land-based and other supplementary activities. Similarly, consolidation of holding, tenancy regulation and updating of land records would widen the access of small and marginal landholders to improved technology and inputs and thereby directly leading to increase in agricultural production (Bandyopadhyay, 2008, 38).

In the present days of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation, land reforms have been given a backseat by the government. The half-hearted implementation is a sign of the state trying to undermine the significance of land reforms. It was the Sixth Five-Year Plan (1980-85) i.e. even before liberalization that observation was made regarding faulty implementation:

If progress of land reforms has been less than satisfactory, it has not been due to a flaw in policy but to indifferent implementation. Often the necessary determination has been lacking to effectively undertake action, particularly, in the matter of implementation of ceiling laws, consolidation of holdings and in not vigorously pursuing concealed tenancies and having them vested with tenancy/occupancy rights as enjoined under the law (Bandyopadhyay, 2008, 38).

Such an observation depicts only half reality. It is like a shifting of responsibilities. D. Bandyopadyay's comments reflect the reality of the faulty governance, he questions that

Is not the bureaucracy an integral part of the system of governance which formulated the policy? If the bureaucracy failed, the policymakers were no less responsible. This failure lies in the seeds of further rural unrest which we are witnessing today (Bandyopadhyay, 2008, 38).

Today, the land reforms that were supposed to be an instrument of socio-economic development are used to promote capitalist development, neglecting the value that they possess in improving the conditions of poor, marginalized peasants and tribals. They have become irrelevant. With this, the pro poor measures and rights of the tribal people have been pushed to the corner.

According to P.V.Rajagopal, after independence two sets of people went in two directions. One set of people went to Delhi to govern the country. Another set of people went to the rural areas of the country to make the democracy vibrant by increasing people's participation, people's democracy and so on. Vinoba Bhave was the leader of the second set of people. He soon realised

that in regions like Telangana violent armed struggle was emerging on the question of land. He realised that the problem is landlessness and poverty. He conveyed that the solution to this is not killing(katal) but it is a law(kanoon) or compassion(karuna).But then, the path of law would take a lot of years to offer a solution.So compassion is the most efficient way of resolving this issue from this perspective he footmarched in the entire country. This was one of the biggest social movements in this country after independence. It achieved around 62 lakh acre land. Vinoba Bhave realised that solving land problems is important, but, by resolving only individual land problems will not be substantive, so he suggested gramdan along with bhudan. Through this scheme, he thought of overcoming the selfishness that is associated with individual ownership of land. He was of the view that if land is held as a common property then everybody will protect it from any kind of injustice from outsiders.

When he began his journey in Chambal, he encountered that the rebels adhered to a violent path only because of land problems like encroachment from outsiders, from the rich. Even in the 70s, land issues were still pervasive and sharp, so I thought that it needed to be addressed. Only when the problem of livelihood resources gets resolved, can poverty and inequality be removed. Gandhi supported a self-governed, self-sufficient model of development. He gave a model that was based on bottom- up development as against top- down development model. The problems of grassroots cannot be resolved until there is inequality in distribution of resources. Moreover, it needs to be realised that only 5% of the total population can be catered by the larger sectors including government as well as private sectors; the maximum 95% will still have to be dependent on natural resources for sustenance. There are three kinds of primary activities, first is farming on land, second is fishing and third is utilisation of forest resources. You can call them three kinds of farming or agriculture (kheti). India is primarily an agriculture based country which means that a large number of its population rely on either one of these primary activities. Therefore, until we resolve the issues related to distribution of natural resources, a proper development cannot be achieved. Ekta Parishad is determined to take up the question of land resources from where Vinoba Bhave has left (Rajagopal, 2018).

Thus, the objectives of Ekta Parishad,as highlighted by the founder himself, are to put forth strong demands for establishment of a comprehensive National Land reforms Act and its effective implementation by the concerned authorities. The implementation also encapsulates the need of

proper monitoring institutions that will help in checking if the benefits are reaching to the poor and the marginalised sections in a time-bound manner. The movement is for introducing dynamism and proactive attitude of the government with respect to land reform policies. Its objective is to persuade the government to appoint such committees from time to time that can make progressive recommendations after serious review of the status of land reforms on ground from time to time.

Apart from being concerned with the poor, marginalised, so far oppressed tribal population, the Jan Satyagraha incorporated and gave special attention to the deprivation and difficulties faced by the women in this realm of land reform policies. Mostly they are the neglected section in these policies and their rightful benefits are pushed to the corner. In order to redress such injustices, this march moved with the aim of upholding the rights of women. It made the condition of laying down such suitable provisions for delivering the rightful ownership titles of land to women and special priority should be accorded to the single-women. Although many provisions and legislations are present in the form of Panchayati Raj Institutions Act, PESA Act and so on that allows the control of local people over the natural resources available in their vicinity. But, with the mad rush towards industrial development and crony capitalism, there are frequent cases of intrusion and wrongful, unjustified ascendancy of the supporters of market economy and logic of profit earning. Jan Satyagraha directs itself towards ensuring that the government gives enough weightage to the consent of the local individuals and the community and not takes them as a weak party to the negotiation. One of the objectives of Jan Satyagraha is to assure transparency in working of the government and making provisions for undertaking punitive measures for the concerned officials and authorities in case of violation and non-implementation of pro-poor laws, rules and regulations made with respect to conservation and rightful use of local natural resources.

4.1. JAN SATYAGRAHA

Many aspects incorporated in Jan Satyagraha contribute to strengthening of nonviolence as an effective means of resistance. It has a widespread support base nationally as well as internationally. Ekta Europe which is an open network of independent organisations and individuals belonging to Europe, Gandhi International that is a French N.G.O., Sarvodaya USA which emphasizes on self-development, Ekta Canada is a group of organisations, groups and individuals in Canada helps Ekta Parishad in spreading awareness about nonviolence to be used as a means for social change.

With respect to training the activists, SAID India provides training facilities of the people in nonviolent resistance and also offers placements and internships for study and work experience in nonviolent action and social movements in India, South Asia Peace Alliance is an alliance that highlights different forms of structural and other types of violence and teaches how to counter them through nonviolent action in order to establish sustainable peace, and South-South Solidarity seeks to build a support network within the developing countries and interchange expertise. It can be seen from this brief description of Ekta Parishad's partners that nonviolence as a means of resistance is made to be central by this organisation and it has prioritised all the requirements of a nonviolent resistance from training to awareness and from awareness to implementation of the knowledge.

Apart from its international partners, Ekta Parishad has its connections with different regional organisations in India. Pragati Grameen Vikas Samiti in Bihar, Prayog Samaj Sevi Sanstha located in Chandigarh, National Youth Project in Delhi, Naya Savera Vikas Kendra in Jharkhand, Kerala Gram Nirman Samiti in Kerala are some of the examples of national connections of Ekta Parishad.

At this point, it is significant to remind that indeed it is important to have support of the international organizations but it is equally necessary to maintain connections with institutions within the country. This helps in understanding the cause from multiple lenses by looking deep into the different experiences of the marginalized populations located in different regions. It becomes important to have partners from all walks of life because nonviolent resistance is infused with exchange of ideas and words, be it over a pure dichotomy between nonviolence and violence, over diversity of issues, multiplicity and management of concerned parties and so on. Waging a nonviolent conflict is not a spontaneous task, it requires a collective effort to get deep down into the conflict situation, mapping different perceptions and expectations of both the oppressor and the oppressed. There is a greater demand on developing relations with those that are different along with those that possess similar ideas, beliefs and perceptions.

Ekta Parishad considers that another very significant aspect of nonviolent resistance is its organisation. Jan Satyagraha was a movement that mobilised one lakh people in India. In order to assure a proper management of this large peace army, the movement right from the beginning focussed on dividing the activists into small groups and wings. Ekta Parishad contains three wings

that contribute to not only organisation of people but also organisation of issues and activities related to these people. These three wings are as follows:

Ekta Mahila Manch- Ekta Parishad is a group where the values for which it is fighting are first adopted and lived by each individual of the group. One of such values is gender equality. It was established on 21st June, 2001 at the CESCO Centre, Madurai, Tamil Nadu and now spreads in 11 states in India. Women constitute a large part of the society until and unless they are not given their fair share, no struggle can reach its substantive goals. Gender equality is one of the most important and yet the most neglected issues so far. It is high time that women and men both are treated equally as humans. Both are given fair and equal opportunity to contribute to the change and construct a new, just an equitable future for the coming generations.

Ekta Parishad incorporates this significant issue within itself and has given it a shape by forming Ekta Mahila Manch(EMM). This wing gives serious attention to the attainment of women's right of equality, sovereignty and justice through non-violent means. The vision of this wing is the establishment of an equal, just and nonviolent society through women's leadership and participation. It walks with the objectives of ensuring equitable rights over land and livelihood resources to women, helping women to be self-dependent economically, advocating and implementing such rules and regulations that are in favor of women, fighting against all forms of oppression, taking such steps that would guarantee social, political, and economic empowerment of society.

The seriousness that Ekta Parishad devotes to this issue gets reflected in the strategies which it employs to accomplish its objectives. It seeks empowerment of women by making them stand at the equal front with men, not only women but men are also sensitized about the rights of both of them. Women are made to be the participants as well as hold leadership positions in at least half the numbers of the total participants. The women youth are encouraged to be member cadres for fighting the nonviolent struggle for women's rights. EMM makes efforts in establishing Mutual Help Groups, networks, platform for dialogues and constructive activities to promote independence and role of women. An investigation of this self-perception over gender equality was conducted during the fieldwork which is discussed in the next two chapters.

Ekta Kala Manch -Ekta Parishad uses the tool of performance in its struggle. In a nonviolent resistance many options remain at the disposal of the activists, but to put them to use requires a

serious and planned approach. This is because not all the sub-tools can fulfill each and every purpose. They are to be strategically used in accordance with the context, situation and purpose at stake.

Ekta Kala Manch represents the cultural wing of Ekta Parishad and plays a significant role in the nonviolent struggle. It came into existence with the first 'Theatre Workshop Festival' in CESC Centre, 1998. It acts as a way of connecting with people belonging to different villages, languages, castes, and literacy levels. It also acts as a mediator between the movement carried out by the Ekta Parishad and other movements going on in other parts of India.

This platform helps in bringing forth the miseries of the oppressed from different regions of the villages through performances including dance, songs and drama. With the help of such performances the activists identify themselves with others who have experienced the same fate by the hands of the oppressors. One of the remarkable steps that Ekta Parishad takes in enhancing the significance of this nonviolent sub-tool is to use it as a motivator and as a source of energy-giver to the activists during the marches. They have played a great role in Chetawany March 2006, Janadesh 2007 and Jan Satyagraha 2012. A glimpse of this wing is also given the last chapter through songs and slogans raised during the Jan Andolan, 2018.

Ekta Arthik Manch-The Ekta Arthik Manch is the economic wing of Ekta Parishad. This wing looks into the betterment of livelihood and income opportunities of the poor, tribal village dwellers. Such a wing shows the organised approach with which Ekta Parishad is carrying out its nonviolent resistance.

Ekta Parishad puts forth a forward looking as well as a farsighted plan for achieving its goal. It does not limit itself with the attainment of rights over land only but moves beyond it. This means that it also looks into the question of sustainable use of land. Such a concern not only helps in conserving natural resources, helping the individual owners of the land but also the entire society at large gets benefited. Land, water and forest are those precious natural resources that cater to the entire humanity. Mindful use of these resources on an individual basis, when added up, can make a substantive difference in their conservation as well as in meeting the needs of those sections that are deprived of these resources.

Economically too, it has an impact. The problems of unemployment, underemployment and disguised employment in the agricultural sector can easily be tackled if these resources are exploited cautiously. India is a land of acute poverty and also a land of diverse natural resources, the imbalance that occurs needs to be corrected as soon as possible. The method that Ekta Parishad suggests is to establish 'people's economy' by using nonviolence. By 'people's economy', the Parishad aims at developing a model in which economic self-sufficiency or independence of the villages is guaranteed. This can happen only when people are given their rights over their resources which need to be used sustainably. Such an economic framework will also help in reducing migration and it will also enfeeble the exploitative tendencies of the moneylenders.

The Ekta Arthik Manch supports community or group based production, helps in the sale of handicrafts and village industries products like khadi, honey, rice, oil, wool and so on, establishment of small and medium-sized community enterprises. It strives for sustainable development and thus, introduces such work practices that add to the ecology and minimise the negative effects on the environment. Following these lines, it emphasises on organic farming and organic products.

Specifically, for the 2012 Jan Satyagraha March, an organising committee was created that was said to be the 'brain' of the movement. The committee was composed of several teams each consisting of thousand members divided into groups of fifty to hundred for efficient management. These teams separately provided facilities for backup, transportation, accommodation, toilets and showers, food supply, water supply, medical requirements, cooking, program organization, media and documentation, and a team to decide the structure and organization of temporary camps also called advance team. It can be deciphered that such different sections meant for management of the entire March clearly reflect the seriousness with which Jan Satyagraha was carried out. When nonviolence is used as a means of resistance then it is considered as more of a strategic tool than just a principle of life.

Waging a nonviolent resistance with one lakh participants is a task of great responsibility. It has already been mentioned that nonviolent resistance demands greater discipline and homework. There is a greater risk of losing life when only one party is using nonviolence as against the other. If the skills in employing the tool of nonviolence are not honed enough then the cost borne by the nonviolent activists escalates. Keeping these factors in mind Jan Satyagraha spent tremendous

amounts of energy in mobilizing people in a very systematic manner. The meticulous division of people involved in undertaking direct nonviolent action emphasises not only participation but also on leadership. The relationship among the various levels may seem to be hierarchical on the outside but with a closer look a relationship of mutual responsibility of looking after each level for better management can be established.

There were 1 lakh padyatris or foot-marchers that participated in Jan Satyagraha, out of them ten thousand were positioned as village leaders or dustan nayaks that looked after ten padyatris and had the responsibility of making them aware about the reasons for Satyagraha and warning them against the hardships they might face during the course of the struggle. They conducted village meetings for this purpose. These leaders had to convey the exact number of people coming from their respective villages (at least ten), and also their grievances to the section leader. Section leaders or Jathan Nayaks were two thousand in number and were next to the village leaders. A section leader was responsible for leading five village leaders or five villages, about fifty foot-marchers. He assisted the village leaders in taking care of the problems, in village meetings and for his own village he worked in the same manner as the village leader. From the village leaders he collected the grievances and passed them on to the group leaders or Dal Nayaks.

The two hundred Group leaders or the Dal Nayak had ten section leaders or fifty villages under him or herself. He/ She acted as a section leader and village leader for his/ her own village. Like the section leader, he/ she assisted the section leader in his functions and also collected grievances from them which he / she conveyed to the next level of leaders. The next group of leaders were the Camp leaders or Shivir Nayak. The movement had 20 camp leaders with each responsible for twenty group leaders or five hundred villages. The camp leaders had the biggest responsibility as he had to assist the group leaders and collect all the grievances from them in order to direct them towards concerned government authorities. Senior leaders, Rajagopal and Rajendra Singh Parmar⁷ were the linchpin of Jan Satyagraha. They occupied the top position in the structure and were vested with the responsibility of providing training in using non-violent tools like sit-ins, blockades, leadership and capacity building ,conducting village level meetings and so on. Ran

⁷ Rajendra Singh is a well-known water conservationist from Alwar district, Rajasthan in India. Also known as "waterman of India", he won the Stockholm Water Prize, an award known as "the Nobel Prize for water", in 2015.

Singh looked into the logistics of Jan Satyagraha and P.V.Rajagopal walked from village to village in 12 states covering more than 6000 kilometers, gathered their grievances, involved media attention, and he also made the effort of encouraging people to join Jan Satyagraha.

Analysis of the entire structure clearly reflects that the attention is given to multiple factors like people, their grievances, their function, training and leadership. Nonviolent resistance demands acquiring and internalizing suitable skills that may help in making the best use of nonviolent tools and techniques and even allow innovations according to the situation. Ekta Parishad asserts that Jan Satyagraha aimed at bringing change in the status quo. Their approach towards achieving this aim is nonviolent and inclusive. They are determined to question the unjust system and put forth their demands for ensuring a sustainable and just society. The resolute and firm devotion of this movement by walking on the principles of nonviolent resistance and making all possible efforts and sacrifices for achieving the envisaged goals can be seen through the step of advocacy for change. It would not be wrong to argue that a conflict arises only to transform the status quo, the difference that can be seen here is with respect to a violent and a nonviolent conflict. When violence is adopted for struggle, one can observe mostly a clear line of demarcation among the involved parties under the categories of 'supporter' and 'enemy'. On the other hand, when nonviolence is used as a means of resistance, attempts are made to blur this line of division.

Ekta Parishad explains that it undertook advocacy for change by reaching three levels—People's advocacy, State and National advocacy and International advocacy. People's advocacy efforts are made to influence public opinion by using direct action at the grassroots and support of the media is taken to cover that grassroots action. Some of the advocacy techniques included grievance collection so as to show the rampant landlessness and other such problems, using media so as to spread appropriate messages especially in rallies, sit-in and other such social actions, ensuring that concerned politicians at the state and national level are communicated with the help of letters, creating awareness about the gravity of landlessness and other such significant issues by sponsoring and publicizing studies.

Being a nonviolent movement, Ekta Parishad tries to include the state as well as other national institutions within its struggle. This shows that more than animosity, anger, revenge and brute

force, it is courage and love-force⁸ that becomes important. At this level of advocacy, Ekta Parishad directly communicates the needed policy initiatives to political leaders, engaging in dialogue with State-level and National-level policy makers, intellectuals and government officials, Ekta Parishad looked into the matter of fair distribution and accordingly monitored Forest Rights Acts, pushing for pro-poor legislations and policies.

Crossing the borders, Ekta Parishad took up international advocacy through which it persuaded the international institutions, agencies, leaders to write letters to the Prime Minister of India for supporting land reform and non-violent social actions, for supporting volunteers and joining Jan Satyagraha. These tool of advocacy has also been explicated in the preceding section as a part of tools for scaling up the campaign.

From how Ekta Parishad views its Jan Satyagraha campaign, it could be gauged that the movement has been focussing upon and working on its structural organisation, advocacy and also on the front of empowering the marginalised sections. It would be interesting to note the first hand observations from the field in the next two chapters that coincide with some of these views but not with all of them.

4.2. JAN SAMVAD YATRA

After analysing Janadesh and Jan Satyagraha, it is clear that Ekta Parishad emphasises on two main tools: foot-march or yatra and dialogue or samvad. One needs to be reminded at this point that it was Gandhi who was an inspiration behind using March as a tool of resistance. It was under his leadership during the Salt March that people challenged colonial rule for their rights over salt. This March filled the colonized oppressed people with strength and courage that ultimately led to the independence of India.

Inspired by the success of Salt March and the nonviolent struggle for independence, Ekta Parishad has adopted March as one of its assets in carrying on with the struggle. Marching enables the activists to realize their own physical and mental strength. Long marches further the support for

⁸ In Hind Swaraj, M.K.Gandhi (page 65) explains love-force as a force that is opposite of brute-force. It dwells upon the indestructible force that acts as an impetus for the activists to remove themselves from participating and consenting to unjust actions of the opponent, without adhering to any violence.

the cause and give it legitimacy in the eyes of the audiences. March is a manifestation of the sacrifice and resilience that the activists possess. It establishes that instead of escalating violence that also requires courage and immense sacrifice, the activists have made a conscious choice of bearing the pain and not inflicting violence so as to achieve goals through nonviolence as a means of resistance.

It also needs to be noted that marching is a symbol of unity and independence at the same time. Just like Gandhi began as an individual to March for demolishing the British monopoly over Salt, the fight for the rights of the marginalised and poor began with a few, it grew into a movement when the marginalised unified and gave this unity a real form through March. But, at same time, every single activist had his/her story of oppression that made him/her to stand up and walk against injustice. Many such stories have been captured in the narratives mentioned in the next chapter. Every activist is independent in making the decision to join the March till the struggle reaches its goals. It lends them dignity and instills enough faith in their own abilities.

Another major tool of resistance that the struggle of Ekta Parishad has employed is dialogue. It would not be wrong to argue that dialogue seems to be a mild tool at first but it contains immense power to fulfill goals. Nonviolent resistance insists on the fact that not every change requires a complete turn-around in a single day. Through dialogue, well informed, mutually consented, constructive change is made possible. Dialogue provides an opportunity to bring different parties to the struggle at one table. Though it is not necessary that every party agrees with one another but it does build a sense of confidence for each other, it helps in communicating the ideas and concerns of all the parties in a firm and nonviolent way.

One can also assert that the process of dialogue does not mean only talking, it refers to presentation of arguments, central concerns, grievances, messages of people, deliberation over finding solutions, agreements and disagreements over various issues. It requires skills, knowledge, wisdom and serious commitment towards the cause. Ekta Parishad understands the power of dialogue and considers it to be an important part of the struggle as it acts as a tool in the hands of those at the grassroots to fight for their rights by applying the right to speech at the top level. Those at the top level also get a chance to stand with the grassroots after having a dialogue with them. The top level actors make way for the activists and their concerns by extending the boundaries of their role by establishing dialogue with other top level actors in a democratic way.

Ekta Parishad believes in striking a continuum in its movement by ensuring a linkage between dialogue and struggle. This interlinked continuum of ‘struggle-dialogue’ or ‘dialogue-struggle’ allows the movement its dynamism. At the grassroots level the struggle is supported by dialogue at the top-levels. In addition, dialogue at the grassroots provides a base for the struggle at the top-levels. Thus, the combination of both the directions in the continuum makes it difficult for the state to ignore the movement’s presence. The two consecutive tables below extensively present this continuum in different situations.

Objective	Method	Tools	Kind of tool
To get people mobilised to get redressal from the state.	Carry out a process of leadership development at the village level so that people can create their own formation within the village itself.	Give them tools for mobilisation i.e. socio-economic and political understanding of the power relations; introduction to nonviolent action and their methods; methods of implementing an action strategy.	Struggle
To get young people trained so that they can return to the village equipped to help villagers in leadership development.	Train youth so that they can act as catalysts at the village level helping to shape the formation giving it a nonviolent quality.	Provide them with some support so that they can stay in the village and do organising.	Struggle
To start bringing the community leaders and villagers into a kind of formation.	Work with women, panchayat (local government) leaders and community groups on education, economic and advocacy programmes.	Use morcha (mini-campaigns) to draw attention to the situation faced by people.	Struggle

To mobilise at a wider level.	Link many villages into a larger cluster unit so that mini-campaigns can be carried out at the district or regional level.	Identify a larger campaign to galvanise sets of mini-campaigns.	Struggle
To expand mobilisation so that one is beyond a set of vested interests.	Link multiple struggles into a state-wide campaign.	Create a larger action such as padyatra (long march) to create a larger action front.	Struggle
To expand mobilisation so that one can link to national government structures.	Link multiple state-level struggles to a national campaign.	Facilitate multiple state-level struggles that can converge at a national level.	Struggle
To use this pressure to dialogue with the State (provincial and central levels).	Give options to policy makers that they can choose to struggle or dialogue.	Create state level fora for dialogue.	Dialogue
To pressure the national government by interacting with international groups and organisations.	Set up email campaigns and letter writing exercises, engage different sensitive people externally.	Have external people write to the President, Governors, Prime Minister or Chief Ministers to remind them that their actions are transparent.	Dialogue

1. 'Struggle to Dialogue' direction in the continuum(Harris, 2005, 3)

Objectives	Methods	Tools	Kind of tool
To have a consultation process so that grassroots groups can consult with various government officials.	Give well thought-out papers and discussions that represent strategies for advancing the land rights agenda and bringing it to the attention of policy makers and administrators.	Provide situational analysis and case studies to enable policy implementation. Set up a Task Force.	Dialogue with some sense of the urgency of the issue. Use of non-violence as preferable to policy makers
To insist that the government distribute land after a politician has made numerous promises to his constituency.	Demonstrate.	Surround a political representative until he agrees to take action.	Dialogue with a small component of struggle.
To get a response from the District Administration.	Submit written grievances to the District Collector to ensure that he understands the numbers of people who are suffering land alienation.	Sit in front of the District Collectorate and force him into listening to the grievances that have been provided and demand action.	Dialogue with a higher magnitude of struggle because attracting media and public attention.
To get a response from the District Administration.	Find methods for persuading the District and State Administration into action.	Get third party interventions to support the grievances through a tribunal process.	Dialogue with third party verification to give moral grounds for the struggle - a kind of legitimization.

To get a time-bound active response from the State and District Administration.	Provide the District Administration with a mechanism to monitor its own land distribution system.	Set up a State and District wide Task Force that ensures the proper distribution of land.	Dialogue keeping in mind a modality of action.
To make a big public outcry about the lack of government action.	Court arrest to bring attention to this matter.	Set up a road blockade. Re-occupy land.	Struggle- this usually comes when all avenues of dialogue have been exhausted.

Chart 2: 'Dialogue to Struggle' direction in the continuum (Harris, 2005, 4)

While the first table explicates mostly about those tools which ready the young as well as adult members of the movement for struggle but also make them first chose the option of dialogue to create pressure on the state and its agencies, the second table primarily continues the emphasis on how dialogue can be used to elicit response from the state and its associated institutions till the time there is no way but to adhere to the path of struggle. In the next section, Jansawad Yatra presents how dialogue and march as a tool of struggle is used in Ekta Parishad's resistance.

As explained in the previous section, Dialogue and March are two of the most indispensable techniques of successfully and forcefully carrying out a nonviolent struggle. Rajagopal along with some of the members of Ekta Parishad planned to march from the southernmost tip of India to the north of India. In the course of the journey, dialogue was employed for relating with the local people and local leaders in order to understand the exact condition and situation of the people at grassroots. This was also to serve as a grievance-collecting mechanism and as a platform for encouraging people to speak for your rights peacefully and in a nonviolent manner.

Through this yatra, Ekta Parishad claims to have unearthed the reality of broken promises made to the tribal and poor sections of the society in the constitution. While covering regions in states like Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Assam, Jharkhand, it was noticed that even when many laws have been passed by the government in favor of tribal people's rights over their forests, land and produce, still, because of poor implementation, unawareness among the tribal people about the laws, greater inclination of the government towards market, tribal are not able to realize these rights in reality. There are frequent instances of illegal encroachments, displaced people living on the edges, tribal

people losing their land, property, life, feeling duped by the government agencies, disgruntled and neglected with the government especially tribes in the north-east. Such a rigorous yatra helped in highlighting the sacred position of land and forest resources in the lives of the tribal poor people, as perceived by Ekta Parishad.

Ekta Parishad makes it clear that the dialogue process also helped in elucidating the objectives as well as erasing the doubts that people had with respect to the nonviolent struggle. Mostly it was being misunderstood as a Maoist struggle, but Rajagopal made it clear that their resistance is nonviolent resistance adopting the Gandhian techniques of Ahimsa. On the other hand, Maoists follow the path of violent resistance. This yatra enabled the activists and leaders of Ekta Parishad in giving a sense of confidence to the people for taking up the weapon of nonviolence against the unjust state institutions and laws. It also constructed bridges amongst people of different villages, activists of Ekta Parishad and local decision-making authorities which gave way to charting out the blueprint of a strong, holistic vision of a sustainable future. How the leaders of Ekta Parishad understand dialogue as a part of their movement is further elucidated in the succeeding chapter.

4.3. JAI JAGAT

In his address P.V.Rajagopal briefly explains about Jai Jagat in the following words:

A country like India where problems are so many will demand larger mobilization to bring about basic change. We are trying to address change at the social and economic level. We are also interested in strengthening a process of participatory democracy and responsible governance. Though the action is in India, we want the world at large to join this process. We believe in Jai Jagat and Sarvodaya - Jai Jagat means Victory to the World, Sarvodaya means Well-being of all through the well-being of the last (Rajagopal, www.ektaparishad.com).

This address by the President of Ekta Parishad reflects that change can happen only when basic questions are asked, when the foundation is made stronger, when the development begins from the grassroots, when governance adopts a bottom-up approach and when the collective consciousness gets enlightened and motivated enough to fight for their rights. It is clear that a movement like Jan Satyagraha, Jai Jagat does not envisage constructive change only within India but for the entire world. It is not limited to immediate benefits for a small section of Indian society but wants a long lasting, sustainable change even for the last individual in the world. It seeks fundamental transformation of not only the civil society which is also indispensable but it also targets the achievement of participatory democracy that also calls for establishment of deliberative democracy

and responsible government. The Jai Jagat is a movement that seeks change from multiple dimensions and areas of life.

It is true that we witness nonviolent struggles dispersed incoherently everywhere, but nonviolence as a means of resistance can take the forefront and achieve its full potential only when the message of nonviolence as an efficient means of resistance can be spread in the entire world in a more structured manner. Human life throughout the world is considered to be precious, in order to build a greater consensus over the relevance of nonviolence especially with respect to saving human lives, greater efforts have to be made in a direction that builds suitable conditions for propelling nonviolent resistance as the most preferred form of resistance. Ekta Parishad through 'Jai Jagat 2020' plans to work at a global as well as at the grassroots level for bringing about constructive changes for the poor, marginalised, oppressed sections of the society with nonviolent resistance.

It can be distinctly discerned that due to globalization, ruthless competition, profit-making mindset over welfare orientation of the society, excessive hold of market and capitalist elites, the marginalized sections are further pushed towards the corners all over the world. It is high time that the suppressed no more remain voiceless, that they wield the means of nonviolence to give strength to their stifled voices. Ekta Parishad believes that 'Jai Jagat', which actually means 'victory of the world' is considered to be a concept closer to the Gandhian concept 'Sarvodaya' that concentrates on the wellbeing of all. Through 'Jai Jagat', Ekta Parishad strives to demolish the selfish interests that lie in raising more boundaries among nations, gender, and so on.

This movement identifies that the bone of contention which mostly causes an upsurge in the form of people's movement is the artificial and forceful dichotomy created between human and nature. Efforts made towards establishing ascendancy over nature and its resources is proving to be fatal for the entire humanity yet the greed for immediate profits has made the minority to overlook this fatality. Jai Jagat aims to re-establishing the fractured relation of humanity with nature. It is launched with the idea of victory for everyone. This idea implicitly conveys that genuine change cannot be achieved in isolation, it cannot be a work of one country or one group.

With this assumption Ekta Parishad sought to build a global campaign under 'Jai Jagat' that would help in taking nonviolent, co-ordinated action in order to challenge and sensitize the global players. This does not mean that Ekta Parishad has lost touch with the local struggle and local issues, which is most often the case with many of the movements going global. The reason for continuity

between the local and global struggle is that it tries to see the local issues in the light of global issues, understands the issues at hand with respect to their impact at the global level and also establishes a connection not only with the local leadership but also with the global leaders through national as well as international advocacy.

The movement further assumes that 'Jai Jagat 2020' is a long term endeavor for change. Some of the action plans were put forth for implementation that reflected its vision of building a nonviolent world. It proposed youth training camps for youth in nonviolent action, collaboration with civil society groups in other countries and continents like Brazil, France, Belgium, England, Sri Lanka and so, organizing an international youth program for offering a platform to young social leaders, arrangement for international women activists that can help in the growth of local women leaders, conducting an international conference on nonviolent economy also termed as 'social economy' and 'solidarity economy' for encouraging a development model based on self-reliance, reciprocity and equitable and fair exchange, also for challenging and countering the present violent economy.

'Jai Jagat 2020' plans to assemble a larger nonviolent community by undertaking a global march from Delhi Rajghat (the resting place of Gandhi) to Geneva or the United Nations. These places are symbols of nonviolence and humanity. The United Nations, as the name signifies, is meant for unity, dignity and human rights of every individual in this world. If it is not able to listen to the voices of the marginalized due to the noise of the powerful sections, then, it is time for the marginalised to make their voice through active nonviolence. Ekta Parishad introduced the campaign, 'Jai Jagat 2020' around the notion of making a difference by challenging indifference and to introduce and firmly establish the culture of active nonviolence by confronting silence and violence.

The comprehensive self-perception laid down in this broad section about different nonviolent resistances led by Ekta Parishad speaks volumes about how this movement coalesce different realms like that of social, political, economic, environmental in the larger fabric of Gandhian principles and values. It has been doing so through different tools and strategies as it asserts in these struggles. The next two chapters present an exhaustive critical analysis from a researcher's lens, of how far has Ekta Parishad really been following the Gandhian path to build its own narrative of 'political'.

5. NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE: GLOBAL DIMENSION

It would not be wrong to say that rampant inequalities, displaced, helpless communities and unjust institutions are not exclusive to India only. They are widespread and dispersed in the entire world. Therefore, it is necessary to build alliances and form networks so as to uproot these problems. It should be kept in mind that the force to retain the status quo is equally strong as the force to change it. Ekta Parishad understands that the call of the hour is to challenge the violent, oppressive, conservative institutions with nonviolent and democratic resistance. It resolves to fight burgeoning inequalities that further oppress the marginalised sections, by joining hands with different movements, strengthening them and reorganising them so as to make them realize their full potential. In this daunting task it makes sure to use nonviolence as the common tool to face injustice and ensure constructive change in the process.

Ekta Parishad contends that although it questions the ascendancy of the State, it seeks to do so within the bounds of the constitutional provisions based on the principles of equality and justice. It directs all the movements that are members of this larger people's movement to walk on the lines of equality and justice. It suggests repudiation of being stuck in the little circles of the ideologies hampering their reach towards the larger goals. In order to put forth a strong struggle, Ekta Parishad highlights the need for the movements to work collectively which would require them to re-strategize and restructure. It visualizes the poor, the deprived, the youth and women to be the flag-bearers of their struggles. Such a vision clearly indicates the will of the movement of empowering the subjugated masses so that they can speak for themselves. The list of resolutions of Ekta Parishad mentions that "non-violence should just not remain an ideology but should reflect in non-violent direct action on ground leading to a change in the way of life (non-violence as a way of life)"(Rajagopal). The strong thrust on nonviolence in its active form constitutes the essence of the struggles undertaken by the Ekta Parishad.

The structure of Ekta Parishad is highly decentralised and democratic but it is also a complex set of interrelationships because of its ties with civil society organisations, international and national groups and partners. The international groups spread awareness about its agendas all over, provide financial resources and offer assistance in training activists in the national institutions. Such training helps the leaders at the national level to engage in capacity building of the marginalised and poor grass root level activists. The activists devote themselves at three levels:-a) economic

programs (b) advocacy and (c) mobilisation of people. Through their struggles the grassroots convey their messages not only to the top-levels but also help in spreading awareness at the international level also. Therefore, the struggle is structured such that it flows from one level to another. The international institutions connect with the local activists who establish a relationship with the grassroots leaders and people that in turn demonstrate their power through nonviolent resistance and also help in communicating at the international level through international institutions.

At this point, one can refer to the 'Onion Theory of Nonviolent Protest' given by Bruce Hartford, according to which, the actual impacts of nonviolent resistance can be seen as the layers of onion, with each layer representing a different audience. When studied from the core to the outer layer, the impact on each level of audience is different with respect to the number of people influenced, the intensity of people, and the control of the actual activists over the content of the message they receive. The four layers that form the basis of the nonviolent protest are: 1. Participants: The resistors that are directly involved in the protest. 2. Observers: The parties that are targeted and those that are uninvolved bystanders encountering or observing the protest. 3. Grapevine: It refers to those who get to hear about the protest from some other source be it individual whom they know or social media, they are a part of. 4. Media: It includes those that learn about the protest through impersonal mass media. The core layer is represented by the participants. They are more closely connected to the resistance than anyone else and they have the greatest control over the content of the experience. They can to an extent manipulate the reactions of those presenting the other three layers by choosing their course of actions. It can be deciphered that Ekta Parishad uses this kind of knowledge and in the process of its nonviolent struggle, it tries to touch the lives of every participant involved. With its training and democratic deliberation, it makes the marginalised and so far oppressed capable enough to fight for their rights, it reminds them of their self-worth, dignity, and courage. It makes them internalize that they don't have to be suppressed and live in conformity with the societal norms that make them subjects of humiliation and injustice. This spirit of non-confirmation gets reflected in their nonviolent protests.

The second layer is formed by the observers. They are mostly large in number but the effect of resistance is lesser on them when compared to the participants. The participants possess less control over how they experience and perceive their message. Ekta Parishad attempts to create

awareness at every level with the help of its partners. In a nonviolent struggle, the observers play an important role in strengthening it. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the resisters to take observations in confidence by gaining their faith in their cause. This can happen only when any kind of discomfort related to resistance is eliminated. The participants have to make sure that their actions are not threatening to the observers, that they do not cause a major disruption or disturbance in their normal environment. The activists also need to take care of the fact that their messages, thought provocative, are not insulting and do not sound as if they are blaming the observers for the disappointing plight of the resisters. The messages should be engaging, encouraging the observers to know more about the real situation and contribute to the cause. Therefore, the actions in this direction should be designed to elicit from the observers sympathy, empathy and support rather than fear and opposition. Grapevine forms the third layer. In this age of social media it becomes easy to connect with any issue in a matter of seconds. With the same speed opinions are formed. It becomes the responsibility of the protestors that even though their issues and concerns are being communicated through second or third hand, the information that gets circulated propels a positive reaction. This can happen only if first hand actions of the resisters are such that they do not violate the faith of people. For instance, if they start taking lives, creating nuisance every then and now, or create any kind of threat to the safety of innocents then even the word-of-mouth that others will hear would be negative, which will make such people connected through grapevine incline more towards the oppressors that term the resisters as ‘anti-development,’ anti-national’ and so on.

Two of the ways that Bruce Hartford suggests for gathering a positive reaction are audacity and humor. Bruce states that audacity refers to non-violently doing something that is unexpected, it is breaking the cultural taboos, demolishing stereotypes in ways that can provoke a response without alienating the potential supporters. Ekta Parishad attempts to break the commonly held beliefs that are adverse to the marginalised and the poor sections of the society but it does it in a manner that keeps the supporters and space for gaining more support at all the other levels along with the grassroots level. According to Bruce Hartford, commercial media is not a very effective tool in nonviolent resistance. It is the least impactful and its content cannot be controlled by the movement activists. He suggests that it is the least reliable layer in achieving goals. In order to avoid being fabricated according to the whims and fancies of the commercial media, Ekta Parishad depends much on its own resources for coverage. These include articles, case studies, videos and photographs mostly produced by its organizations and partners.

This section presents how Ekta Parishad looks at itself trying to build linkages within and outside the country. Such interconnections extend at multiple levels like issues, strategies, people, institutions, cultures and so on as elucidated above in detail. Therefore, it can be argued that Ekta Parishad's partnership at national and international level also indicates how it embeds itself in the 'social' and 'political' by creating alliances.

CONCLUSION

From its self-perception, one can conclude that Ekta Parishad stands as an example for organised resistance that seeks to combine the 'social' and the 'political'. Nonviolent resistance that it led, plunged into the middle of those areas that are being handled with violence so far. In the next two chapters, it will be noticed that it is through these nonviolent resistances that they are seeking to build their own 'political' and also make sense of the conventional politics. I think that much needs to be learned from these struggles. Jan Satyagraha, for instance, reflects the power of nonviolence in the people. It shows how people's power can be harnessed more when nonviolence is used as a means of resistance. It encapsulates within itself many important lessons.

One of the lessons that should be taken from its resistances is the relevance of a structured approach with which a nonviolent resistance could be carried out. The other thing that made this resistance come in the limelight is the way in which it empowered, mobilised people in the form of activists, leaders and change makers. Here, it can be said that one can observe that Ekta Parishad aims at focusing on social as well as political empowerment of its members. These members are made a part of resistance as aware humans who deserve to be treated with dignity by the society and also as awakened political citizens whose rights that are constitutionally guaranteed should be given without any discrimination.

It is often noted that the advocates of nonviolence endeavour to support it as a way of life. Ekta Parishad also asserts that nonviolence should be treated as a way of life but along with this idea it also emphasises that the nonviolent struggles should be solution-seeker resistances. P.V.Rajagopal, the President of Ekta Parishad, advocates a movement of nonviolence from being used as resistance towards being a part of life. I think that this metamorphosis makes more sense as it sets a logical connection between the strategic and the moral aspect of nonviolence. Nonviolence does not cause a total and sudden digression from the day to day life. Due to this,

some of its aspects like resolving matters through dialogue, focussing on constructive change, and such other values and methods can gradually seep into personal, individual lives as well.

I think this is where the myth of nonviolence being an easy and a weak tool also emerges. Silence and passivity that people adopt in their daily lives is often misconstrued as nonviolence, but actually nonviolence is not such an explicit part of our day to day lives. Nonviolence is a practice. It requires devotion and courage in both its strategic as well as in its moral form. Incorporating nonviolence, though, does not cause a complete rupture from the daily routines but it does demand a change in the fabric of life. Inculcation of values of patience, fearlessness and commitment to follow a nonviolent lifestyle can come only when one is trained in consistently retaining these values. So the misconceptions associated with nonviolence being for the weak are clearly wrong as both nonviolent resistance and nonviolence as a way of life takes immense strength.

Another point that Jan Satyagraha highlights is that there needs to be a balance between the knowledge about nonviolent resistance in the books and the practical knowledge that is gathered through experiences. It can be seen that prior to Jan Satyagraha, Ekta Parishad carried out Jan Samwad yatra that acted as a grievance collecting mechanism. By undertaking such an exercise, the struggle got its major issues which directed it further to formulate its course accordingly. Even though the activists were trained by the experts also, these experts were made aware of the context as well by encouraging them to be activists first. Similarly the activists that came from the practical contexts were made to lead after they understood the nuances of leadership skills. This important and unique technique helped in erasing the mismatch between the trainers, experts, scholars in nonviolent resistance and those that are at the ground or are situated in the problem area. Therefore, there is an urgent need to remove the isolated moulds in which both of these areas remain by ensuring a constant close interaction between them. By such an exercise, the 'political' that these movements are trying to form could be made more concrete and effective.

Jan Satyagraha and other struggles by Ekta Parishad reflect the importance of having a wide base of alliances from different walks of life. Building such a large network is not a one-day task, it requires recognising the points which overlap, points that can be compromised with and points that can be brought closer to the concerned issues. It takes a lot of effort in the form of dialogue, persuasion, offering assistance and resources. The other thing that remains implicit in these lines, yet, is one of the significant factors to be taken into account is the elimination of boundaries. By

this I mean demolishing the meaning of ‘us’ and ‘them’. In a nonviolent resistance there is no particular enemy that is targeted at the gunpoint. It is more issue-based than enemy-based. Due to this reason, P.V.Rajagopal asserts that even those from the government that can help should be made to participate in the resistance. I think this is one of the ways through which the movement is trying to connect the social and the political together by understanding that state institutions are as much a part of the society as the latter is a component of the former. Thus, the social and the political are accountable to each other.

One of the significant points that P.V.Rajagopal highlights is the nonviolent struggle which Ekta Parishad leads are ‘manageable’ conflicts. By this, he means that when nonviolence is used as a means of resistance, the costs of it are mostly minimal, sometimes even reversible and mostly in control. Nonviolent resistance offers enough scope to find out alternative ways to deal with difficult situations and thus, switching over to plan B becomes more convenient and with least losses. This forms one of the core and often unnoticeable elements of nonviolent resistance. In fact, the concept of ‘backfire’ by Erica Chenoweth (Stephan, Chenoweth, 2008) is also a concept closer to such an explication about this aspect of ‘manageable conflict. ‘The concept of backfire indicates how, when the violent opponent tries to suppress the nonviolent resisters, violence adversely affects or backfires the originator. Such costs are not borne by the nonviolent party. Due to the manageability of the nonviolent strategies, the nonviolent resisters mostly bear lesser costs. I think it again needs a thorough understanding of how the ‘social’ with which this movement is dealing with impacts its political struggle and goals, which in turn, may impinge on its formation of the idea of ‘political.’

To culminate, it can be said that the perception with which this movement views itself moves around conglomerating the social and the political. The way it defines its mission, future visions and its modus operandi as a nonviolent movement encapsulate such an analysis. How far does the self-perception embedded in the ‘social’ and ‘political’ reflect in the field observations is the subject of the next chapter. The next chapter analyses first hand encounters helping in understanding the formation of ‘political’ and also its link with the ‘social.’

CHAPTER 4: ASHRAM'S LEADERS AND ACTIVISTS: CAPTURING THE DYNAMICS OF 'SOCIAL' AND 'POLITICAL'

1. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter laid down how Ekta Parishad connects the 'social' and the 'political' according to its own perception. This chapter elucidates the views of leaders and members of Ekta Parishad which primarily substantiate the stand of Ekta Parishad on 'What is political?' according to this Gandhian Movement. It identifies how in the process of connecting the 'social' and the 'political', it also tries to construct its own idea of 'political.' The chapter has been formed out of the field work done in 2018 roughly from May onwards. It presents the findings of the second phase of the field work, the first being analyses of the content analysis laid down in the previous chapter. In the previous chapter, Ekta Parishad, as a Gandhian Social Movement was being understood from secondary sources and in a more theoretical perspective. In the present chapter, the Gandhian element of this movement is being analyzed through a series of visits to their centers/ashrams in Bhopal and Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh and in Tilda in Chhattisgarh. The reason behind choosing these centers is that major pre-election meetings were held in these centers on consecutive basis. These meetings were attended by the leaders of the movement, national coordinators of the movement and also all the grassroots members of this movement from Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

The chapter is based on general observations that were collected during the stay in the ashram, interviews based on targeted as well as snowball sampling, participation in activities of the ashram like prayer meetings, play performance, group singing and group discussions. The chapter is primarily organized on the lines of issues covered with the help of the aforementioned avenues observed and participated in. There are no fixed dates mentioned because of the qualitative and continuous nature of the work in different places of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh through different mediums. The first main section puts forth what the leaders, especially Mr. P.V. Rajagopal, Mr. Ransingh Parmar and Mr. Ramesh Sharma had to say about the general analysis of Gandhian social movements post-independence, the present status of Gandhian social movements and their weaknesses, how Ekta Parishad has been making its mark as a Gandhian social movements in the contemporary times by strengthening its basic features. The second section describes the stand of the members of Ekta Parishad from the grassroots on various issues

which can be said to be centered on justice. This section is divided into subsections on the basis of the ashrams visited. Although these sub-section discuss what people from grassroots think about various issues, it also includes relevant inputs of the leaders on some of those issues. The last section of the chapter highlights the views on why this movement does not want to be a political party.

2. REFLECTIONS ON POST-INDEPENDENCE SCENARIO: DISCUSSING THE 'POLITICAL' and THE 'SOCIAL' TODAY

This section elucidates the views of the top most leaders of Ekta Parishad, largely about the current dimension. It basically highlights that the senior members of Ekta Parishad believe that the current political scenario has created a disjuncture between the 'social' and the 'political' due to various reasons. According to Mr. P.V.Rajagopal, just after independence, two divisions, based on consent, were formed. First group was led by Nehru, for bringing about a change through political means and the second, led by Vinoba, who emphasized on introducing change through social as well as spiritual realm, that encapsulates going back to the villages and strengthening the grassroots. The latter, thus, manifested in the form of Sarvodaya. Hence, it can be observed that the process for change was undertaken from top-down through the political path as well as from bottom-up with the help of the social and spiritual sphere. It is because of such a two-way change-making process that Nehru always consulted social leaders like Vinoba while taking major decisions. Therefore, it can be said that, at that point of time, those, representing the political, held respect for those working in the social sphere. But at present, such a thriving relationship between social and political leaders is not really visible.

Mr. Ramesh Sharma, who has been a part of Ekta Parishad since 1998, adding to Mr. P.V. Rajagopal's argument explicates that there has been a transition of the support base with respect to Gandhian values. Before independence, Gandhi and his values were being supported by the learned, educated middle class but post-independence, this changed, as the intellectual middle class started to work for their own self-interest. For example, he says, J.P.'s movement represented by an intellectual section of the middle class began a movement, initially hitting the right political note, but, as soon as this section entered into politics, it got engaged in fulfilling their own narrow interests. Such catering to narrow self-interest has kept Gandhian values that saw the 'social' and the 'political' in holism at the backseat.

In recent times, Mr. Ransingh Parmar argues that the political system is filled with representatives that belong to a small section of the society. According to him, those who have had criminal records in the past have entered politics by making money as their means to becoming politicians. Overall, such a trend has made representation more or less homogenous and the doors for pondering over a constructive future are closing gradually. It needs to be noted at this point that the issue of criminalization of politics was also taken up by a five-judge constitution bench headed by Chief Justice Dipak Mishra in 2018. The bench, which also comprised Justices R F Nariman, A M Khanwilkar, D Y Chandrachud and Indu Malhotra, in the unanimous 100-page verdict said that, “A time has come that the Parliament must make law to ensure that persons facing serious criminal cases do not enter into the political stream” (“Criminalisation of Politics of Largest Democracy Is Unsettling, Says Supreme Court,” 2018). Thus, this bench pushed the law-makers to enact such laws that would keep the political parties accountable for their selection of candidates. According to the Association of Democratic Reforms findings in 2019, nearly half of the newly-elected Lok Sabha members have criminal charges against them, a 26% increase as compared to 2014. This fact was duly noted by Justice Nariman in 2020, who wrote that,

It appears that over the last four general elections, there has been an alarming increase in the incidence of criminals in politics. In 2004, 24% of the Members of Parliament had criminal cases pending against them; in 2009, that went up to 30%; in 2014 to 34%; and in 2019 as many as 43% of MPs had criminal cases pending against them (Rajagopal, 2020).

Following this observation, a bench, in the year 2020, headed by Justice Rohinton F. Nariman, ordered political parties to submit compliance reports with the Election Commission of India within 72 hours or risk contempt of court action. It can be argued here that the reason for a corrupt politics of today is given as the inclusion of corrupt social elements by Mr. Ransingh Parmar. Even though legal measures are being taken to ameliorate the situation, a Gandhian movement as Ekta Parishad could understand that how it is the flow of moral values, rising of ethical standards and matching up with the spiritual dimension of the self that a pure ‘social’ and ‘political’ could be created. One can also raise a question here that, is it only the current politics that is flawed or do Gandhian social movements that question such flaws also have loopholes. The next section tries to produce some answers to this question.

In the above section, a few observations were highlighted on the political status of the country. It was also argued that even the dismal political situation has largely been devoted to a disunion between the ‘social’ and the ‘political.’ Continuing the discussion further, this section aims to

present those arguments that throw light upon Gandhian social movements broadly. Expressing his hope in Gandhian social movements as agents of building a constructive future, Mr. P.V.Rajagopal explains that, though, only political power is visible at the first instance, the Gandhian social movements that operate in the sphere of the social, also contain immense power to make radical changes. Thus, according to him, both political and social spheres, encapsulate power within themselves. Hence, it is important to ponder over how to use power by social movements today. He believes that most of the present nonviolent movements have failed to understand this power. Due to this reason, he insists that social movements are becoming weak. Unlike political parties, they lack discipline and a respectful position of the social workers in the eyes of the political leaders is dissipating today. Thus, the major challenge before social workers, at present, is to regain that lost respect. They have to make the politicians realize that social work and social change are both responsible endeavors and should be taken seriously, not only by the social workers themselves, but also by those upholding political power.

Mr. Ramesh Sharma also highlights that one of the weaknesses of Gandhian social movements is that most of these movements are still unable to place those at the margins, for whom these movements actually fight, at the leadership positions. Contributing to the same discussion on the lack of proper leadership, Mr. P.V. Rajagopal asserts that apart from Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela and now, to an extent Dalai Lama, hardly is anyone present to be the torchbearer of leading the society towards a nonviolent path. Looking at the burgeoning trend towards NGOisation of social movements, Mr. P.V. Rajagopal cautions against social movements getting reduced to NGOs. He says that social activists also have to adhere to the path of advancing their behavior and thinking, so that they, themselves, can become the real change makers and simultaneously, instill trust in self and in community. Otherwise, social movements can turn into NGOs that convert social activism into a mere profession. So, it is significant to view social activism from the vantage point of making a constructive change in the society, rather than treating it as an option of employment only. Arundhati Roy aptly asserts that with the advent of neoliberalism in India, the funded NGO boom appeared. These NGOs, mostly funded and patronized by aid and developmental agencies, which in turn are funded by Governments of the West, the World Bank, the UN and multinational corporations. Therefore, NGOs seem to push forward the neoliberal project ultimately. But this agenda of introducing and encouraging neoliberal may be done in a disguise by the NGOs. They act as a buffer between the government

and the public by playing the role of arbitrators, interpreters or facilitators of the neoliberal discourse. What they do is that they implicitly quell the anger against the injustices perpetrated by the neoliberal system by putting up a beginning, charitable and an apolitical innocent face before the suppressed sections. The ulterior political motive easily gets veiled behind the impression that these NGOs are providing a platform for resistance along with livelihood means. Thus, she states that,

It (NGO-ization of resistance) turns confrontation into negotiation. It de-politicizes resistance. It interferes with local peoples' movements that have traditionally been self-reliant. NGOs have funds that can employ local people who might otherwise be activists in resistance movements, but now can feel they are doing some immediate, creative good (and earning a living while they're at it). Charity offers instant gratification to the giver, as well as the receiver, but its side effects can be dangerous. Real political resistance offers no such short cuts. The NGO-ization of politics threatens to turn resistance into a well-mannered, reasonable, salaried, 9-to-5 job. With a few perks thrown in. Real resistance has real consequences. And no salary (Roy, 2016, 335).

Mr. Ransingh Parmar, too, argues that Gandhian Social Movements have to forgo all kinds of selfish interests and selflessly work for the poor, so that people can believe in them and remain with them. Moreover, he asserts that in contemporary times, some Gandhian social movements have limited Gandhian principles to the books. To quote his exact words, he believes that, "*Vichar ko vayvahar mein parivartit hone ki zaroorat*" (Parmar, 2018). Thus, by arguing that Gandhian social movements have to bring Gandhian thoughts into practice, he clarifies that Gandhian social movements are built on sustainable, sensible and pragmatic ideas. Continuing the same discussion, Mr. Ramesh Sharma points out that, "when you get obsessive for social change, you wish to change the outside and do not see internally, thus, it leads to stagnation" (Sharma, 2018). Hence, he emphasizes on the indispensability of transforming the inner self first, so as to ensure an ordered, peaceful and substantive change in the future.

Describing his intentions behind highlighting the weaknesses of Gandhian social movements in the present times and suggesting the same to make themselves stronger, Mr. P.V. Rajagopal emphasizes that his goal behind arguing for strengthening social movements is not to place them over political parties, but to break the existing hierarchy, so as to establish a harmony between the two. He reasons that the present oppressive relationship between political and social is because of the disharmony between the two caused by intolerant attitude of the political parties, on the one hand and lack of discipline and strength within the social movements, on the other hand. Mr. P.V.Rajagopal, further, explains that for establishing a nonviolent society as well as Gandhian

social movements, the power of ethics needs to be harnessed that is possible through sacrifice and hard work, instead of, money or political power. For him, Gandhi, Vinoba and JayPrakash are the stalwarts that harnessed this power of ethics for making a change in the society. Today, the social activists have the responsibility of spreading this power. Supporting his point, Mr. P.V.Rajagopal narrated the story of Buddha and the rich man. In this story, Buddha goes to ask for alms from the rich man who rebukes him for doing so, even after having a healthy build. Buddha keeps his patience and smiles persistently. Looking at Buddha being so calm, the man gets agitated and starts abusing him. Buddha still maintains his calm and composure. Ultimately, the man gives up and asks the reason for not getting furious because of his abuses. At this instance, Buddha replies that, if supposed, in a hypothetical situation, the rich man would have offered Buddha, a cow that, the latter, would not have accepted. Then, in such a scenario, asks Buddha, to whom would the cow have belonged. The rich man replies that it would have still remained or belonged to him, as Buddha had refused to accept the cow. Buddha, then, explains that in the same manner, the abuses that the rich man hurled at him [Buddha] are not accepted by him and thus, they still belong to the rich man. Through this story, Mr. P.V.Rajagopal highlights that provocation on unsubstantial issues leads to wastage of energy and also deteriorates the ethical strength in social activists. Thus, he suggests that the social activists need to ignore such frivolous issues, so as to keep their ethics over and above such matters.

Quoting Kabir, his advice to the social activists pertained to keep adding to their humbleness, as they keep on gaining knowledge in the field of social activism. He explains that, social activists have to graduate in nonviolent struggle like Gandhi, who graduated in the same and propounded transformative nonviolence, which encompasses the idea that self-liberation is the liberation of all. Such an idea emphasizes not only freedom from oppression on a formal level, but also freedom from oppression, exploitation and poverty on a substantive level through mutual efforts. Such graduation pertains to moving far away from the point where belief in violence gets firm towards a point where establishing a nonviolent society can be envisioned. This happens through change in how one thinks that is, again, a step-by-step process. Their experience through such a step-by-step journey should make them more kind, which will ultimately attract people, suggests the leader of Ekta Parishad. It is because of the absence of such humility in the political sphere, argues Mr. P.V.Rajagopal, that today there is no popular leader who is considered to be truly kind and compassionate by the masses. The present day leaders have lost the power of appealing the

compassion of the masses, asserts Mr. P.V. Rajagopal. As a consequence of this, he believes, the country has been divided, on the basis of caste, religion, gender, class and so on, by the hands of politicians seeking a portion of political power.

Throwing light upon how significant kindness, ethics and compassion are, Mr. P.V. Rajagopal, cites the example of Bhoodan Movement started by Vinoba in 1951 and asserts that the most significant lesson that this movement teaches is that of the path to be taken for resolving land issues. Mr. P.V. Rajagopal lists three ways in the same context: Firstly, it can be resolved through violence, secondly, by adhering to legal discourse and thirdly, through compassion. Vinoba awakened the compassion among masses through his Bhoodan movement and Sarvodaya. According to him, Vinoba created such a source of compassion through his Bhoodan movement that soon progressed into Gramdan movement, depicting how people transgressed their self-interest by donating land and then, the entire village, in order to cater to the interest of the community. He further explicates that though Vinoba agreed that, even though change could come through the means of violence and law, but that would remain formal and so, in order to bring deep-rooted and substantive change, a source for compassion is required to be built within the society.

In this section, the interviews emphatically put forth the urgent need to fill the chasm between the ‘political’ and the ‘social.’ This section also mentions briefly about the shortcomings of Gandhian Social Movements at present. From the next section onwards, an attempt is made to understand how Ekta Parishad as a Gandhian Social Movement tries to address these flaws and also on what values it believes in.

2.1. ANALYZING EKTA PARISHAD AS A GANDHIAN SOCIAL MOVEMENT: UNDERSTANDING THE NUANCES

In this section, Mr. P.V. Rajagopal and other members of Ekta Parishad explain through examples, stories and issues that how Ekta Parishad has contributed in giving a substantive and strong meaning to Gandhian social movements. As a Gandhian Social Movements, it plays a major role in addressing, restoring and expanding the boundaries of democracy as they offer a possibility of informed and constructive deliberations. This broad sections presents how Ekta Parishad tries to

construct its own idea of ‘political’ in a way that it keeps the ‘social’ and the ‘political’ realm in tandem with each other.

Here, an analysis of modern societies by Prof. Ajay Gudavarthy (“Citizenship and Social Movements: Issues beyond Liberal Democracy,”2006,) seems to be significant in explaining the point clearly. He differentiates these societies into two structures, that of dynamic and dialectical structures. Placing social movements in the latter kind of structures, he states that dialectical structures try to resolve contradictions rather than just balance them which the dynamic structures do. Moreover, the dialectical structures are transformation centric as they look at relations in terms of a process. Thus, they aim at realizing substantive democracy as these structures focus upon building human solidarity instead of functional solidarity which moves according to the dictates of the market and guarantees execution of transactions in a market society in a successful manner. The next section explains how Ekta Parishad contributes to extending the boundaries of democracy by focusing upon the most important and indispensable power in a democratic framework, that is, people’s power.

In the first section, it was highlighted that according to Mr. P.V. Rajagopal, both political and social spheres, encapsulate power within themselves, but the present nonviolent social movements do not realize their power. The members of Ekta Parishad are of the opinion that Ekta Parishad not only believes in this power but also exercises it. Calling it as ‘people’s power’, Mr. Aneesh states that Ekta Parishad as a Gandhian social movement believes in giving significance to the people who form the core of the movement. Unlike conventional political systems that follow a top-down approach, Ekta Parishad employs a bottom-up approach. Following this approach, people’s will, their demands and their participation is given significance. Apart from mere participation, Mr. Aneesh points out a far-sighted step that Ekta Parishad takes. He explains that this movement empowers people who mostly belong to the marginalized and deprived sections of the society. Instead of perpetuating the image of being a victim to the injustices, Ekta Parishad instills in them confidence by making them walk on the Gandhian path. Adhering to this path, they begin seeing themselves as strong enough to question the unjust structures and lead those that are suppressed.

Mr. Anil, during his interview, presented an example of such an empowered citizen. He cited the example of Gangaram Sahriya from Sheopur, who stood for Vidhan Sabha elections in 2013 on

Samajwadi Party Ticket. He was a bonded laborer, released by Mr. P.V. Rajagopal in 1995 and rehabilitated by Ekta Parishad. He became an adivasi leader and fought for giving women their land back and restoring their dignity against upper caste atrocities. He succeeded in releasing the land from the clutches of the upper class. After Gangaram became an adivasi leader, Mr. Anil claims that, the former said that “never in his dreams did he imagine that the people who had repressed him, would be greeting him” (Anil, 2018). Such example leads to the next section which seeks to understand how in Ekta Parishad leadership manifests.

The example in the previous section clearly highlights how with Ekta Parishad’s endeavors a man as a bonded labor overcomes his own atrocities and becomes a leader, helping others in questioning the injustices meted to them. Talking about leadership with me, Mr. Aneesh highlights how Ekta Parishad’s leaders and national conveners view every participant as a potential leader of the future. This is something unique to Gandhian social movements. It can be observed that leadership positions are fought for and protected, even misused in the conventional political corridors. In contrast to this trend, an entirely opposite strategy is applied in Gandhian social movements. A kind of selfless flow of knowledge and leadership skills, visible in Gandhian social movements, explains the negation of binary between the leader and the masses. He points out that in Ekta Parishad it is believed that all the comforts belong to the people and the leaders will have to take the difficult path. He exemplifies it through two instances. He explains that, suppose, there is a car and a rickshaw available, then, the leader will choose rickshaw leaving the car for the people. Similarly, he says that, unlike the common tradition, where everyone would wait for the leader to have his food first and then, the other people would have their lunch or dinner. In Ekta Parishad, he asserts that this is not the case, as the leader will be happy to feed people first and then eat. This kind of a reversal in the meaning of leadership is a special characteristic of a Gandhian social movement. A kind of circular, non-hierarchical, leadership can be observed here.

According to Mr. Ramesh Sharma, Ekta Parishad believes in *‘jiski ladai, uski agwaai’* (those who struggle are those who advocate their fight). He, further, says that in Ekta Parishad there is an emphasis on transforming the contours of leadership so that those at the grassroots could be raised to become leaders. This process, he explains, is not an easy one because it demands de-learning and de-orientation from the side of those already equipped to become leaders, so that the people who have hidden potential of becoming leaders could be respected. In Ekta Parishad, those from

the bottom layers of society are not only respected but considered as assets. In the context of respecting people from the grassroots, he points out that in Ekta Parishad, two things that remain prohibited in Ekta Parishad are asking for any information related to caste and qualification of the people. Such a rule helps in accepting everyone as equal, placing them in a horizontal relationship than in a vertical relationship. So as to build and sustain such a relationship, not only within but also with external parties, this movement follows three core steps as discussed in the next part of the chapter.

2.2. SAMVAD, RACHNA AND SANGHARSH: STEPS TOWARDS CONSTRUCTIVE TRANSITION

The three core steps taken by Ekta Parishad elaborated in this chapter primarily present that although the movement focuses on creating a strong self-dependent society, it neither operates in isolation nor does it seek to overthrow or have sheer hostility towards any actor. Instead of strengthening inimical ties, this movement aims to build sustainable, constructive relationships amongst different stakeholders in the political, social as well as economic realm. As the sangharsh or resistance part has already been explained in the previous chapter and will also be discussed through narratives from the field in the succeeding section of this chapter, the present section focuses on throwing light upon samvad and rachna.

SAMVAD: THE INDISPENSABILITY OF WORDS

This part of the chapter throws light upon how members of Ekta Parishad understand the significance of dialogue. Mr. P.V. Rajagopal asserts that a way is to be constructed for nonviolent expression of grievances. The onus of establishing such a path does not fall on the government alone, but it is to be shared by the social movements also. Both, the government as well as the social movements, have to challenge the penetration of violence in the three realms of social, political and economic. In his speech, he further adds that not only a nonviolent society is to be aimed for, but also, the political realm has to be reformed on nonviolent lines, to be made inclined towards nonviolent governance and to be taken along in the project of establishing such a society. He states, how in his earlier speech before Charandas Mahant, an Indian politician and also a member of Chhattisgarh Legislative Assembly, he argued that, even though there is a minister to oversee army, to control the police department but there is no minister responsible for peace-

keeping. Narrating how even the politicians present during the time of his speech were receptive to his ideas about creation of a ministry for peace and nonviolence, P.V.Rajagopal espouses that there is a need to re-awaken the real meaning of political governance, which is to engage in dialogue rather than to confront every issue with violent forces.

In fact, Mr. Aneesh explains how Ekta Parishad does not see the government as an enemy. He highlights that, if the government authorities accept the demands of Jan Andolan, 2018 led by Ekta Parishad, then, due credit will be given to the government and a jeet yatra will be carried out, celebrating the victory and thanking the government. He also mentions the significance of dialogue in building a healthy relationship between people and government. To emphasize his point, he says “Finally, all violence ends on a table and not with guns” (Aneesh, 2018). This line reflects the futility of violence and the ultimate adherence to a nonviolent method like ceasefire even in violent resistance. Mr. Ramesh Sharma views dialogue to be a major factor driving democracy in the right direction. He explained that re-exploration and dialogue is supported by Ekta Parishad. He says that, “Nobody is ‘enemy’, it is ‘opponent.’ Democracy moves through dialogue with the opposition, while enmity stops this” (Sharma, 2018). From these sentences it is clear that Gandhian social movements, like Ekta Parishad today, have succeeded in erasing the difference between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’.

Along with dialogue, he also emphasized on the need to understand the art of negotiation. He explains that negotiation is to strike at a 100 per cent solution. This is possible only when we understand that both the parties *together* have to reach 100 percent. But, what actually is happening right now is that both the parties come to the table with their respective solutions trying to reach a 100 per cent solution on their own. This kind of approach, according to him, does not leave the scope for change and negotiation. Hence, it is important to make sure that both the parties are actually ready to negotiate, in the sense that both parties are willing to listen to each other’s views and respect them. If both find some of the views significant for reaching a particular goal, then, they should accept the other parties’ views and leave out some of their own views. This requires farsightedness, suggests Mr. Ramesh Sharma. According to Mr. Ransingh Parmar, the struggle for rights is not easy and as simple as it looks from the outside. He argues that rights have been achieved through pressure that requires a democratic space for dialogue first. Government has not voluntarily given them. He keeps emphasizing that it is only through nonviolent path, that rights

could be attained and issues could be resolved sustainably. He demands that not only people and social movement leaders, but also the government should recognize the power of Satyagraha. Adding to this discussion, Mr. Prashant from Chattisgarh says that

dialogue is open for any political party belonging to any ideology, but we make sure that politicians listen to our issues and act on them. Till they don't act on them, we will not leave them alone. They also know that they will have to come back to seek our votes in the next elections, so they do act but still the ratio of such political actors is less right now, once they get votes and win the elections, they do not look back to these villages. Our politics pertains to creating power among the people so that such politicians can be made accountable and this we do through our nonviolent struggles (Prashant, 2018).

Mr. Anil, further explains three premises based on Gandhian values on which the politics of Ekta Parishad rests. These three are samvad (Dialogue), sangharsh (Struggle) aur rachna (Constructive Work). Taking clue from what I understood from my acquaintance with the movement and from what Mr. Anil says, it is clear that there is an inextricable link among these three. The first step, as mentioned by Mr. Anil, is to strike a dialogue with the state representatives. This stage is to communicate the grievances, try finding out the temper of the party the movement is dealing with, and also, if possible, come up with sustainable solutions, with the mutual efforts of both the parties. Throwing light upon the significance of Samvad or dialogue, he states that Ekta Parishad is well versed in the art of dialogue and advocacy. Explicating the matter through an example, he tells that, in 2008, Mr. P.V. Rajagopal began with the 'Adivasi Saman aur Samman Wapasi Abhiyan' for putting forth the double standards of the Forest Rights Act. This Act allows right to live on the forest land and grant entitlement deeds to those tribal people whose three generations have been living on the same land till 13 December, 2005, while, it excludes those tribals who live on the forest land after 13 December, 2005 after clearing a small piece of the forest. Mr. P.V. Rajagopal, suggesting that where would the latter go, placed the matter before the then Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh Shivraj Singh Chauhan and asked for dropping legal charges for small offenses against such tribal people.

Mr. Shivraj Singh agreed to this demand and was impressed by the results. As a consequence of this effort by Ekta Parishad, Mr. Shivraj Singh got inspired and began with the same abhiyan in Dindori village, following which, around two lakh twenty thousand cases were dropped. Therefore, with the skill of placing the issue at the right time, advocating for it and striking a dialogue with the then Chief Minister, Mr. P.V. Rajagopal saved many tribal people from going to jail for petty offenses like clearing of forest land for their residence and he also influenced Mr.

Shivraj Singh Chauhan that, he too, began with the same movement in one of the regions. This section elucidates how Ekta Parishad employs dialogue to build sustainable relationships with other parties. The section also implicitly gives an inkling of how a movement can slip into becoming a pressure group. The interviews also highlight that the idea of 'political' as being envisioned by Ekta Parishad focuses on communication as both a social tool to convey grievances and also a political tool to strike correct cords with the concerned authorities so as to resolve the issue. In the succeeding section, it is explained how within the movement, cohesion is introduced among members by using equal and democratic participation in the process of contribution.

RACHNA: THE POWER OF CREATION

Continuing the same discussion, Mr. Anil throws light upon how a struggle begins. He says that, if the first stage does not crystalize in reality, then, at this very stage the movement makes its intentions clear with respect to carrying out a nonviolent struggle. From here, the second level comes up which is that of Sangharsh. At this level, Ekta Parishad being a nonviolent movement begins to train people for the struggle, as nonviolent resisters. This is done in two ways. One, by educating the grassroots about the political problem and also about how they play a primary role in the Gandhian movement. Therefore, it can be said that the idea of struggle or saghrash seeks to combine both the 'social' and the 'political.' The second way is through focusing on the overlapping problems of different sections of society. This is achieved by the means of Rachna. Explaining with the help of an example, Mr. Anil says that suppose for instance, land is a problematic issue in a certain area and the middle class of that area is supporting the government, instead of siding with the grassroots farmers. In such a scenario, in order to combine members from other communities, we pick up topics that are of overlapping interest, like road construction. When the middle class encounters the work of Ekta Parishad, they realize that the movement is working for the right issues in which even they have a stake and thus, support it. At present, Khadi Gram udyog attracts people from different classes and thus, makes them neutral. Thus, it can be claimed that the process of rachna seeks to work in the sphere of 'social' so as to address political issues.

Considering the aspect of Rachna to be the most important, he further narrates the role of this aspect in the andolan that Ekta Parishad carries out. He states that '*anaaj kosh*' and '*gram kosh*' is one of the significant examples of Rachna. For instance, he says, if suppose, ten people from an

interior tribal area have to go to the tehsil, for ventilating their grievances and for putting pressure in a nonviolent manner on the concerned authorities so as to resolve a particular issue. Then, in such a case, it is obvious that a certain amount of funds, food and other necessary resources for these ten families will have to be required. For fulfilling this requirement, an '*anaaj kosh*' and a '*gram kosh*' are formed. He highlights that the contribution to these two is based on the rule of the 'magic of one', that depicts 'the power of one. One person contributing one handful and one rupee can make a difference, explains Mr. Anil. Thus, those people who are in support of the nonviolent struggle, and those, who are directly involved, can contribute at least one handful of rice, some amount of money, be it one rupee or ten or hundred, whatever is in the capacity of the individual. Like this, without depending on any other party that could have taken advantage of these tribal families, without being engulfed or co-opted by the corrupt system and without being pressurized to follow anybody's conditions, these families can successfully gather enough resources for themselves to carry out a sustainable struggle for their rights, argues Mr. Anil. Such a method is beneficial also because it does not put unnecessary pressure on any particular individual.

The contribution remains absolutely voluntary and it divides the pressure of contributing, as a result of which, the economically weak people from the grassroots do not bear the entire brunt of gathering resources. Such a practice also helps in forging a strong bond among people. Thus, it can be said that through rachna, Ekta Parishad aims to function in the social, economic as well as political realm simultaneously. It is these aforementioned three values that form the stepping stones of understanding of 'political' by Ekta Parishad. Mr. Prashant, interpreting these three values, states that,

people have immense power, social movement workers and leaders are to reawaken this power among people and make them independent. First Rachna, Nirman and then, Sangharsh. Only resistance will not work. *Pait ke liye roti, roti ke liye zameen, zameen ke liye andolan.* (For feeding ourselves, we need food, for food, we need land and for gaining our land rights, we need to struggle) With an empty stomach, people cannot resist. According to him, the aspect of Rachna and Nirman lend dignity to people that in turn, becomes an impetus to struggle against injustice, in this context, he asserts that, Ekta Parishad supports, "*Samman ke sath jeena, nayaya sangath samaj ke liye kaam karna* (Living a life of dignity and working towards creating a just world) (Prashant, 2018).

Mr. Ramesh Sharma also highlights the centrality of the idea of contribution in Gandhian social movements. He says that Ekta Parishad promotes this culture of contributing grains and money because it believes that our country's culture has always been of *daan* (charity). According to him, not only the idea of leadership, but also, the idea of Gandhian social movement as a whole, is that

of belongingness. Contribution as a practice, in Gandhian social movements, is thus, a symbol of connectedness that enhances belongingness. He believes that Ekta Parishad promotes this culture and due to this reason, mass movement is possible with proper organization, discipline and honesty. At this juncture, it becomes important to recall Vinoba. Along with sampatti-dan, he supported sammati-dan. Sammati-dan, according to him, meant the gift of approval, which means to declare one's belief in Sarvodya, Shanti-sena, gramdan and khadi. This approval was to be shown by putting aside something every day towards the welfare of society, like a daily handful of grain from every household in token of their faith in the work of nonviolence. Inculcation of such skills in the social can flourish and succeed only when the education system at large also focuses on developing a system that helps in strengthening the moral values of young students making them such adult individuals that are able to lead their region, state, country and world on the path of substantive equality, liberty and fraternity.

Mr. Ramesh Chandra Sharma also underlines the importance of understanding the significance of mobilizing large numbers of people. In this context, he argues that Gandhian social movements need to understand that they have to follow a ladder approach. Only if they move step wise and mobilize people accordingly, can they achieve their goals. Moreover, "like a good pilot, social movements should know both take-off as well as landing" (Sharma, 2018). Here, he wants to convey that Gandhian social movements should be aware of how they have to begin as well as end a certain campaign. Talking about Ekta Parishad, he says that Ekta Parishad knows how and when to regulate the pace of the movement, so as to bring forth substantive results. The section thus shows that Ekta Parishad devotes intense efforts in building the movement.

I think that though the movement makes sangharsh, samvad and rachna to be the core steps of engaging with the social and political realms and also for scripting their own idea of 'political' in the process, it needs to be asked that how far do these steps open the possibilities for the movement to get co-opted by the other parties involved? Nevertheless, it is to be noted that Ekta Parishad's idea of 'political' reflects these three core values which is different from conventional politics based on electoral processes and views all spheres in isolation from each other. In the next section, such narratives from the field are put forth that highlight a critique of the present system. The succeeding section also traces the struggle of the marginalised sections faced by them in the process of challenging the unjust political and social structure.

3. VOICES FROM THE MARGINS: SUBVERSIVE NARRATIVES

This section highlights that Gandhian Social Movements have the strength to put forth a substantive form of dissent that can meaningfully question the exploitative structures and can also highlight the on-going crisis of liberal democracy. In this context, Alberto Melucci in one of his articles (*The Process of Collective Identity*, 1995) explains that contemporary forms of collective action act as revealers, unearthing the hidden or excluded by the decision-making process. Collective protest and mobilization highlight the silent, obscure or arbitrary elements that often arise in complex systems decisions. The Gandhian Social Movements as a form of collective action act as ‘revealers’ as suggested by Melucci. These movements unveil the exploitative ploy that the state builds up in the name of ‘development’, ‘national interest’ and ‘welfare’

It, further, attempts to present how the values, methods and means, mentioned in the previous section that Ekta Parishad seeks to teach its members, manifest in reality. It puts forth the voices of people whose interests are marginalized by those holding positions of power in the state structure. These two sections largely elucidate what these people think about different issues that affect them and how they fight oppression.

3.1. MADHYA PRADESH: BHOPAL CENTRE

In this section, the visit to the Bhopal Centre of Ekta Parishad is elucidated. It captures voices from the grassroots and also from the urban youth based in Bhopal. My journey with Ekta Parishad began from May 21, 2018 in Bhopal. A meeting for the preparation of Jan Andolan was to be held on this day and fortunately, I got to witness it. As I already had some idea about Ekta Parishad through secondary sources because of my M.Phil research, I decided to take up primary research of this movement. It was Mr. Aneesh or Aneesh bhaiya, as he is addressed by other members of Ekta Parishad, who was kind enough to invite me to the Bhopal center. A district level meeting was to be held there for two days. I packed my bags and was all set to go there and so, the journey began.

One of the members of Ansh society, a very close part of Ekta Parishad, by the name Krishna, guided me to the center. It was named ‘Gandhi Bhawan.’ I was asked to sit in an office with a few members of Ansh society. I introduced myself and began asking questions to those young members

of Ansh society. While asking questions, I could understand how the younger generation sees Gandhi and politics today. These young individuals, who were not more than 25 years of age, had an inclination towards knowing Gandhian ideas, but not with an intention of becoming blind followers of him. Rather, they had a skeptical lens of viewing Gandhi. Their political vision, though sharp, yet still, not entirely shaped, indicated the contribution of a political movement like Ekta Parishad in their lives. The latter became explicit on the last day of my visit in Bhopal when I was invited to a heritage walk organized by Ansh members. I could notice that youngsters from all backgrounds, educational and financial were involved. The best thing that this movement had done was to engage them in such activities that prevent them from going astray. Their connection with other people, their political as well as social disposition was worth noticing. They had strong political questions to ask, they had those eyes that could see how commercialization, modernization has deteriorated the heritage sites of their city and they knew how to not discriminate among people from different backgrounds. One such young fellow was Neeru. In my first meeting, I could not make out that he was married, leave alone him, being a father. It was after sometime that I got to know that because he was not good in his studies, his father got him married and told him to handle the family business. His cheerfulness was so deceptive that I could not believe he had so many responsibilities to fulfill. I silently appreciated Ekta Parishad for giving the space to youth for expressing themselves and for showing them a way which could educate them and at the same time, make them capable enough for choosing the right from wrong.

The time period between transcending the boundaries of childhood and before reaching adulthood is very crucial in forming an individual. These formative years are marked with certain kinds of flexibility that may strengthen or demolish the plausibility of an individual turning into a responsible citizen in future. These years utilize good points of childhood and add to them positively or negatively to shape an individual into a citizen. I believe that Ekta Parishad has been helping youth with a positive intention. I could see that it has given a platform for the youth to express their creativity. There were young boys and girls who were enrolled in B.Tech on the one hand but on the other, they were also good painters, poets, and actors. I met an individual who was studying architecture and used his skills to develop environment friendly structures. Sensitivity that Ekta Parishad has inculcated in the youth towards the grassroots, environment, development, gender equality and other burning issues is remarkable. The only question that needs to be asked

here is that how far the Gandhian ethics get percolate down to the youth amidst pervasive capitalist values.

After talking to the youth connected with Ekta Parishad and Ansh Foundation, I was told to attend the district meeting that was to be held in a hall of the same ashram. I entered that hall, nobody was there, except Mr. P.V.Rajagopal. Mr. Aneesh introduced me, I said 'hello sir', and Mr. Rajagopal shook my hands and gave a very welcoming smile. The meeting started. Members from different districts filled the hall. They were sitting in well-organized queues. I sat at the back. After a while, Mr. Kamal Nath, a Congress representative then and the former Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh (2018-2020), entered and sat beside Mr. P.V. Rajagopal. I could see how peaceful everybody was. After Mr. Rajagopal's speech, a member from each district stood up and very briefly mentioned the issues that his or her district was facing. They addressed Mr. Kamal Nath. I was amazed at the frank approach with which these people expressed their problems. Most of the time it happens that the grassroots are made to believe that state representatives are superior to them, that they are their '*Mai-Baap*'. Such an image makes them dependent and timid. But, in that hall, I witnessed a totally opposite case. This fearlessness got more visible when Mr. Kamal Nath stood up for leaving and suddenly, people were also about to stand. At that moment, Mr. Ransingh Parmar said,

Sab baithe rahiye.... Apne dekha hai na ki sipahi khade hote hain jab commander jata hai, dekha hai na? Ye koi commander thodi hain aur aap koi inke sipahi thodi hain (Parmar, 2018).

[Everybody keep sitting. All of you must have witnessed that the soldiers stand when the commander is leaving... He is not a commander and you all are not his soldiers.]

Even the media persons were not allowed to enter the hall. The meeting was a serious endeavor to not only express their grievances in front of the politician but also to hold them accountable for doing their duty. It needs to be mentioned here, that this meeting was held before the state elections that were to be held in 2018, when Mr. Kamal Nath was not the CM of Madhya Pradesh. The meeting was also a reflection of the power of voters, it was an assertion that their voices should be given a priority in a political party's manifesto. In this meeting, I observed how politically aware and significant those people from the grassroots were.

After the meeting, there was lunch and then everybody was allowed to go to their respective rooms. These rooms were actually dormitories. An entire dormitory was meant for women and the other

was for males. There were women from different districts. While talking to them, I understood how the term ‘political’ has different facets and meanings. How deeply this term is connected with the location of the individual. By location here, I mean the placement of a person in the broad spectrum of gender, caste, community, tribe, and religion as well as regional. But, it is to be noted that the sense of ‘political’ in these movements is still in the making, it is dynamic and yet very much visible on the ground level only. Therefore, theorizing this sense is a difficult task that demands understanding the nuances. The chapter ahead, thus, focuses on producing many first hand experiences and parts of interviews with the members and leaders of the movement in Bhopal Centre.

The national convener of Ekta Parishad, Mr. Ransingh Parmar views structural violence to be pervasive. He asserts that this kind of disease, that has deeply penetrated roots, can be dealt with only when people are given substantive rights. Throwing light on the period before Ekta Parishad came into existence, he informed about the attempt that was made to create a collaboration of organizations focused on fighting for the rights of the marginalized and poor. Though this endeavor did not achieve success, in the process, it was realized that when people come together, a display of people’s power can be seen. With this realization, another attempt was undertaken in order to combine organizations on Gandhian lines in 1990. This attempt proved to be fruitful as a large movement emerged from it. This was led by Ekta Parishad. Since then, the focus has been on three main issues pertaining to three main natural resources: water, forests and land (*jal, jungle aur zameen*). The narratives around these three issues in this chapter highlight how Ekta Parishad has been moving towards engineering its own idea of ‘political’ that is in consonance with the ‘social.’

Stating a case where the government authorities made a tribal family evict a small piece of land that was the only source of sustenance to them, Ms. Simran Rajput, a social worker of Ekta Parishad says that:

hawa hai, pani hai, jameen hai, ye kisi ke usmein (control mein) nhi hai, ye sab samaj ke liye bane hai, toh ye sab swatantra roop se unn tak pahuchepar aaj aisa nhi hai, sab cheez ka charge le rahi hai sarkar....sarkar kagazo mein dekhti hai ki iska patta hai, woh ye nhi dekhegi ki iske bache kia kha rahe hain, uski jo arthik sthiti hai woh kia hai...(Rajput, 2018)

[All natural resources ranging from air, water to land are common and not under anybody’s control so they should be freely distributed amongst everyone, but this is not the case today. Government has gained control over these resources by charging money for distributing them. It is not concerned if these resources are a source of support to those who are poor and marginalized. All it wants is the proof of ownership on a piece of paper,

it has nothing to do with how those who do not have such papers would survive ,how their families would survive without a little share in land, air and water resources.]

These lines clearly reflect the situation of rural commons, how the government has gained ascendancy over these resources by evaluating them in economic terms and fixing criteria over their ownership. This indicates an extension of modern, capitalist mentality basing itself on false premises of humans, being the master of nature. Such a mindset has marginalized those sections of society that believe in living in harmony with nature. These marginalized sections include tribals, SCs as well as economically poor. Not only their rights over the pool of natural resources that are supposed to be common have been snatched away just because they do not hold entitlement proofs of their holdings, but also their right to live a life of dignity and respect are being violated in the process. Therefore, the issue of rural commons is not just about absence of resources for economic wellbeing, but it penetrates deep into the issues of social and moral standing of the marginalized sections in the eyes of the rest of the society as well as the government. Such a concern coming from a member of the Gandhian movement is not surprising.

In this context, Akeel Bilgrami's question speaks volumes. He asks in one of his articles that "How and when did we transform the concept of nature into the concept of natural resources?" (Bilgrami, 2009, 48) In his analysis, he shows that Gandhi's conception of nature was closely associated with the divine, with atman that resided not only in nature but all its inhabitants. Therefore, this conception of divinity connected every living being with nature. Gandhi's understanding of a sacred bond with nature coincided with the interpretation of the Early Dissents of Europe of the seventeenth century according to whom a conception of an inert and brute nature had been spread by the orthodox figures in the Royal Society.

The Royal Society had an alliance with the commercial and mercantile interests and with Anglican orthodoxy to master nature. They followed the deliberately constructed ideology reflected in the remarks of one of the prominent members of Royal Society, William Petty. William Petty said in one of his works of 1682 that, "What may be the meaning of the glorified bodies, in case of the place of the blessed shall be, without the convex of the orb of the fixed stars, *is that the whole system of the World was made for the use of our earth's men*" ("Gandhi's Radicalism: An Interpretation," 2016, 221(emphasis added by the author). Thus, Bilgrami unfolds the evisceration of divinity from nature by a ploy manufactured by the early modern thinkers of the Royal Society

which destroyed the ethical value of nature and treated it as a mere commodity. Gandhi, rightly, predicted the same fate of nature in his times. During colonization, the modern duality between nature and humans had already crept in. That started transforming nature into natural resources that Akeel Bilgrami is talking about. Such a trend has had implications on the understanding of politics as well which was seen as detached from the rest of realms including nature.

Coming back to the narrative, it can be observed that binaries between nature and human and also between state and civil society have created a large gap that only Gandhian values can fill. Withdrawal of Gandhian ethics from the political sphere of contemporary times has led to sustenance of such bifurcation further. Ekta Parishad questions such politics and highlights injustices that are going on with respect to land rights usually ignored or justified by the political realm under the influence of capitalism. The next section throws light upon how the members of Ekta Parishad interpret conventional political sphere.

3.2. VIEWS ON CONVENTIONAL POLITICAL SYSTEM: ANTI-POOR, UNJUST & APATHETIC

As stated in the above section, the present section presents how the members from the grassroots understand the present political system. A news report stated that in Madhya Pradesh Assembly Elections, 2018, rights of tribals over forest land formed the key election issue. It mentions how the manifestoes of both Bharatiya Janata Party and the opposition Congress placed a priority over this issue. The Congress manifesto assured that, “We will ensure those tribals who did not get pattas (land) under the Forest Rights Act of 2006 get it and we will also ensure it is made cultivable. We will give ownership rights to the tribals of the land,” (“Madhya Pradesh Assembly Elections 2018: Rights of Tribals Over Forest Land Key Election Issue,” 2018) while the BJP manifesto states, “We will give priority to develop and protect forests through forest management committees and forest communities” (“Madhya Pradesh Assembly Elections 2018: Rights of Tribals Over Forest Land Key Election Issue,” 2018). In fact, the Congress manifesto promised loan waivers to farmers, cutting the tariff rates for electricity into half and more power to panchayats in scheduled tribal areas. Tushar Das of Community and Forest Rights- Learning and Advocacy(CFA-LA) highlights that, “The habitat rights of particularly vulnerable tribal groups like Baigas, Bharias and Saharias haven’t been recognized. Tribal people are affected by large scale acquisition of forest land and lack of livelihood opportunities” (Tripathi, 2019). Even with respect to the 2019 general

elections, the same NGO, CFA-LA, analysed that, “poor implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) could be a deciding factor in nearly a quarter (133) of the 543 parliamentary constituencies in the 2019 general elections” (Tripathi, 2019). The point that could be deciphered from this analysis is that in the conventional politics based on electoral politics, land and forest rights remain primary issues. But these issues are catered only on paper, in the manifestoes so as to gain political mileage in the elections.

The irony is that the idea of private investments in forest projects has returned: The Madhya Pradesh government has proposed to hand over acres of degraded forest to corporates for afforestation. The state government based the proposal to hand over 37,420 square kilometres of degraded forest lands to private companies on a concept note (a summary of the project) prepared September 23, 2020. It was titled: *Concept Paper on Private Investment in Rehabilitation of Degraded Forest in Madhya Pradesh*. It said the restoration of the degraded forest land would require an investment of Rs 56,130 crore and the government would not be able to afford it on its own. A degraded forest is a patch of forest with a canopy density of 40 per cent or less...The Madhya Pradesh government has a long history of trying to get private companies to invest in forests. In 1992, Kamal Nath, the then minister of state for environment and forests, proposed to give 1.7 million hectares of forest land to private players for captive consumption of paper and pulp industries. A proposal was made to the cabinet committee on economic affairs to amend policies that barred the government from granting land for captive plantations (Kukreti, 2020). Ekta Parishad rightly asserts that if tribals were not evicted from their forests then there would not have been any kind of degradation in the first place. It further argues that tribals are the real restorers of the forests as for them these are their sacred homes. It can be argued here that the decision to involve private players so as to restore forests marks the utter failure of the government to recognise the argument given by the Ekta Parishad. In addition, it presents the victory of liberal capitalist forces in usurping the rights of the forest dwellers and controlling the politics today.

The entire scheme of the liberal state to overtake community forest rights of the indigenous communities and handing over the forests to the private individual players has been aptly analyzed by Aditya Nigam. He argues that the economic vision of ‘modernist utopia, whether they are Marxists or liberal free market type, also called capitalist utopias, relied on violent suppression of “pre-capitalist’ forms of ‘ownership’-non-individual, not codified in legal instruments, often based

on use and access by communities. This was particularly true of adivasi or indigenous people's relation to their land and habitat, to the resources they accessed from them...In other words, it instituted mass dispossession and concentration of property in a few hands as part of the same mechanism, just as we see happening before our very eye today. The political form so far called 'democracy' was, in effect, one of electoral oligarchies-call it 'party-crazy', if you will. The institutions called political parties became the instruments of keeping the new economic dispensation in place, thanks to their state-centric nature. Representation through parties was a way of containing egalitarian democratic urges, not a way of expanding them, as the philosopher Jacques Ranciere has recently reminded us (Kothari, Joy, 2017, 166). This observation made by Aditya Nigam presents an exploitative chain which is currently legitimised as 'modern development.' This vicious circle of exploitation begins and ends with annihilating the rights of the marginalised that do not form a part of the individualized, market-based economy. The ally to perpetuating and sustaining violent suppression of such rights has largely been political parties that seek vote by making modern development to be their primary agenda and thus alienating those that do not recognise such a developmental model. This is how certain sections are forced out of the framework of democracy by the hands of a party dominated economic and political system.

It may seem strange that even in the series of degradation, the realms are all interconnected. It can be said that as Gandhi's 'political' successfully saw the holism that could be harnessed to bring the entire framework move towards a constructive direction, similarly, liberal capitalism, even on being based on dividing different spheres have really been having a spill-over effect or a domino effect that has spoiled not just one but all realms. If this could be understood, then, one can easily deduce that the path towards a radical, holistic and meaningful transformation is only by adhering to Gandhi's idea of 'political.' Ekta Parishad seeks to follow this path and build its own Gandhian 'political. 'It is aware of the loopholes that the present political system encapsulates and is vocal with respect to criticizing the same. Such sharp critique of political parties came from the interviews conducted during the field work. When asked about the feasibility of social movement activists directly entering the realm of party politics, Ms. Aparna, a social worker in Ekta Parishad, says that,

Political line ek aisi line hai ki jesse daldal...usmein paer rakhte hi logo ki vichaardhara badal jati hai...koi kitna bhi kahe ki hum gareebo ke liye kaam karenge, mujhe lag raha hai aise bahut kam log hai....jitne bhi

sansad vidhayak bane hain, kiya kisine aaj tak palat ke gareebo ke beech mein jake pucha hai ki apki kiya pareshaani hai, ki apke gaon mein kis cheez ki kami hai jinka humne aap se vada kia tha... (Aparna, 2018)

[Political realm is like a quicksand out of which, once trapped, you cannot get out. The motive with which a person enters the political realm changes once they get established in this sphere. No matter how much a political representative claims to be pro-poor, except some, none of them come back to the villages to pay heed to their needs and inquire about their problems or fulfil their promises made during the time of their elections.]

Several such negative perceptions were encountered during the interview sessions. The most common perception being '*rajeeniti daldal hai*' (Politics is like quicksand) and the other being '*dalgat rajneeti*' (Politics is partial). These people who are at the receiving end refuse to become a part of the conventional political realm and their distrust with politics and political institutions has been accentuating with every atrocity they face. Even the administrative structures have lost faith in the people. Their despair with respect to the politics and administration came forth every time they said '*ye system toh fail hai*' (the entire system has failed).

The incident regarding a social worker of Ekta Parishad belonging to the Sahariya tribe in Maharajpur district needs to be mentioned here. She has been fighting for her right over the ownership of her and other Sahariya's ancestral land being taken away by the government because they are unable to produce evidence of their ownership. Before producing what she had to say, it is important to make note of some data regarding distribution of property under the Forest Rights Act. According to the *Forest Survey of India's State of Forests, 2019*, the population of forest dwellers in MP is 38,766,588. According to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs' June 2020 progress report on FRA, however, only 6,27,435 claims under FRA have been filed so far, of which only 2,68,404 have been approved (Kukreti, 2020).

Stating that she has lost faith in Shivraj Singh Chauhan's rule, as he did not fulfill his promise of giving the entitlement papers of their land, she further says,

itna vishwaas deke, itna vishwaasghath kar rahe ho, toh je vishwaasghath toh galat hai....agar Shivraj Singh chahe toh do dinna nhi lagegnye aur patte adivasi ko diye jayenge.... hum tumhe pandra saal se vote de rahe hai, toh tum ek patta nhi de sakte (Bai, 2018).

[It is wrong to break the promises that (the then) CM Shivraj Singh himself gave with respect to giving ownership rights to Sahariya people. If he wants he can redress the issue in no time. Understanding her power as a citizen and voter of this country, she says that we have been giving votes in favor of the CM's party for the past fifteen years and in return, the latter has not been able to give us a single piece of paper of entitlement over our landholdings.]

In these lines, the minimal expectation of a voter from her political representative is being expressed. This expectation that seems to be about a piece of land holding is actually about giving the opportunity to live a meaningful life. Land is a means, a resource to fulfilling that sort of meaningful life. Thus, the trust which is broken is the trust which every single voter has in her or his political representative with respect to ensuring the provision of at least those basic resources that help build a substantive foundation for living a decent life. She highlights the misuse of power by the hands of politicians who is withholding from giving the documents that would allow them to have their land back, but with power, comes responsibility and as a voter, she reminds the politician that in exchange of the power that is endowed upon you by the voters, he should fulfill the promises he made. In this context, Gopal Guru's observation of how elevation of people to the status of 'citizen', as legitimate voters of the country have not been able to convert the principle of one-person-one-vote into one-person-one-value, needs to be mentioned. Therefore, agreeing with him, it can be said that, "What is promised in the political realm is summarily denied in the social" (Guru, 2009, 223).

It is due to such a disjunction between the political and the social that although the marginalized sections are considered to be the major contributors to the 'vote bank' of political parties, they are not recognized as humans who have the right to a life of dignity like every other section of society. Such neglect gets reflected in cases like these where politicians do not fulfill their promises after winning elections and this treatment continues in the form of turning a blind eye towards the dismal plight of the marginalized.

The sheer apathy of the administrative system also gets reflected in the lines of Ms. Anamika when, while talking about the Forest Department, she says that,

jo gareeb log hai, jinne zameen par pattar ukhad ukhad ke kheti ki...aur kitni kheti woh log kar payenge, ek bigha, do bigha...jab woh pattar ukhad ukhad ke jab woh saaf karte hain, uss samay sarkar nhi dekhne jaati...par jab uss zameen par beej dalte hain, bacho ke palan poshad ke liye...tab uss samay babool ke beej ko fenk denge... (Anamika, 2018)

[The poor, in the forests, try to farm on small pieces of barren land by attempting to make it fertile through their hard work and effort. In the process of making the land fertile, none of the administrative representatives intrude but once the land becomes suitable for farming so that the poor can help his family survive, then, the administration interferes. The people from administration throw acacia seeds that destroy the entire crop just to show that it is government's land.]

This reminds one of the case where the government has been relying on private players to ‘restore’ the degraded land. The real picture behind such a decision gets clearer from the present narrative that depicts detachment of politics and administration from ethics, sympathy and empathy reflecting how moral values have been eviscerated from the idea of ‘political’.

3.3. FIGHT FOR DIGNITY: NARRATIVES OF DISSENT

As discussed in the preceding section, evisceration of moral values is visible in the present political system. This has led to a struggle for basic dignity that every human and community deserves. Therefore, not only apathy but humiliation by the hands of the administration is heart rending. A woman social worker belonging to Sahariya tribe was humiliated by the head constable of the police station when she tried to get her complaint registered against the Gujjar man who encroached on her late son’s land and threatened to kill her if she refused to pay heed to his conditions. She begins with telling what the head constable told her when she went to the police station,

Thanedaar: “thano isiliye bano hai, ki ya toh tum thane mein gujjar ke hath se marke aao ya uss gujjar ko maar ke aao”

Woman: “sahariya ko thane ka kehna yehi hai ki ya toh marke aao ya marr jao...Thane mein koi sahariya jati ko sunne ko tyar nhi hai”.... After a pause she says, “jab pait hi nhi bhar paa rahe, toh thane mein dene ko pesse kaise de sakein (Bai, 2018).

[Head Constable: Police station is in place so as to receive your dead body when killed by the hands of the Gujjar man or to convict you as a murderer of the same Gujjar man. She reiterates, the police station for the Sahariya tribe is just to see them dead or as murderers. Further ventilating her disgruntlement with the administrative system, she says that nobody is ready to listen to the grievances of the Sahariya tribe in the police station. After a pause, she expresses that when there is not enough to eat, how she can arrange money to get her work done.]

Narrating how government authorities cheated the tribe and took away their land, she told that the administrative authorities in Hathnapur village, birar tehsil bluffed the Sahariya. They caught hold of Ghadia adivasi and people from Guna and Sipri, took their thumb prints as a proof of selling the land that originally belonged to the Sahariya’s. They constructed buildings on the land. When the Sahariya people went to the police station, the Sahariya men were humiliated and the in charge of the station ripped off the moustaches of the Sahariya men. Later, when Sahariya used to go to their own land that had been sold wrongfully, the Brahamins living on their land, abused them. Being absolutely dissatisfied with this injustice, she remarks,

sahariya ko badnam karte hain ki sahariya ne zameen bech di.... koi sahariya zameen nhi bechte...zameen kahan mil rahi hai ab, ab aur zameen hai hi nahi hai (Bai, 2018).

[Sahariyas are just being given a bad name by saying that they have sold their land. Sahariyas never sell their ancestral land. As it is, there is scarcity of land, so why would Sahariyas sell their own land?]

This case clearly highlights how dignity remains at stake when it comes to understanding the plight of those communities that are placed at the lower rungs of the hierarchical social structure. The present narrative puts forth multiple layers of oppression that women of Sahariya have to bear on a daily basis. But, as the self-perception of Ekta Parishad states that it tries to realise the potential that people have within themselves, these women seemed to have enough power to struggle for their rights. This is further discussed in the section below.

Even though, in the previous section, it has been shown that dignity of those at the margins is put at the backburner, Ekta Parishad raises a constant struggle to achieve it. This section elucidates some such narratives that prove this. Even though the Madhya Pradesh Land Revenue Code enacted in 1959, repealed the Central Provinces and Berr Hindu Women's Rights to Property (Extension to Agricultural Land) Act of 1942 that had granted women only a partial share in the produce of land on the plea that land should remain within the male lineage and giving access to women to the land owned by a family would result in the land going out of their hands, there still was considerable bias against the holding of land by women. In specific instances of legal aspects of land ownership, in Madhya Pradesh Land Revenue Code 1959, women were still treated as mere proxy owners of land. It can be said that the Madhya Pradesh Land Revenue Code remains unsuccessful in eliminating the concept of 'Bhumiswami', referring to the owner, lord, master, keeper of land, itself. This concept is masculine and its appropriate feminine form which would have been 'Bhumiswamini' was disregarded by our lawmakers.

Looking at such a disregard and after observing the cases mentioned in the above sections one may think that where is 'people's power'? One may think that these people who are narrating how they are being suppressed by the State as well as society can be nothing but victims. Here lies the point to be noted. These people are narrating their stories, they have the power to raise their voice, to express the truth and to unveil the dark side of the mighty state structures. When I was hearing them, I encountered firm voices. Yes, there were tears in some of the eyes, but the words that came out after these tears were like, a woman from Sahariya tribe said,

marengi toh apni zameen pe.... Aur mein toh jeeteji zameen jotungi.... jab humko patto denge toh vote denge, jab patto nhi denge toh vote nhi denge (Bai, 2018).

[If I die, I will die on my own land, but till I am alive, I will keep farming on my land.]

Addressing the current government, she says that if this government gives the entitlement papers of their land only then will Sahariya vote for them, and if that does not happen, then no one from the tribe will be voting for them. One needs to be reminded that Madhya Pradesh has a long history of women rulers since the 16th century which include Rani Durgavati who ruled over the principality of Gondwana with its centre at present day Jabalpur. Rani Ahilya Bai Holkar ruled over the Maratha portion of Malwa with its center at Indore and the four Begums of Bhopal who ruled over the second largest princely state in the country for over a century. The history is riddled with stories of these brave women rulers. It is said that when Mughals decided to annex the kingdom of Durgavati, she chose resistance over submission. She fought till her last breath but on the second day when an arrow made her unconscious while riding her war elephant, she chose to kill herself instead of surrendering to the Mughals. That day is still remembered in the state of Madhya Pradesh as '*Balidan Diwas*' (sacrifice / martyrdom day).

Coming back to the narrative, it can be said that the first point that gets reflected from the sentences above is the moral courage that this movement instills in people and the second thing that is striking is the assertion of their rights as citizens. Implicit in her words is the connection of an individual to the universal. This individual woman seeks her right to a dignified life that is or should be guaranteed to every voter and every citizen in the entire world. According to Gopal Guru, it is because of moral courage which has the ability to shift from individual concerns to universal concerns. This movement from making world's issues as one's own, giving voice to those millions of suppressed sections by raising one's own voice displays the moral courage of the person. Gopal Guru borrows from Hegel and Hannah Arendt and defines moral courage "in terms of the ability to liberate oneself from the fear of death or the preservation of self that puts a premium on individual interest (Guru, 2009, 223). This definition corroborates that the above lines by the Sahariya women are not in a sacrificial tone informed by sheer helplessness but these lines depict the moral courage that her struggle has sparked in her.

Not only with respect to the state but also with respect to reclaiming the rightful place of women in the society, Mrs. Shraddha says,

ladkiyan sirf chaar diwari ke andar kiyu, ladke kiyu raat ko barah baje tak bahar jayenge, ladkiyan kiyu nhi? ladkiyan barabari kiyu nhi kar sakti hain, ladkiya kiyu nhi padh sakti hain, ladkiya kiyu nhi bahar jaa sakti hai? (Shraddha, 2018)

[Why should girls be confined to the four walls when boys are allowed to go out till late at night? Why cannot girls be treated at par with boys, why cannot they study and go out like boys do?]

It needs to be reiterated here that in Madhya Pradesh women actually ruled large principalities for many years. Even now, women are involved in cultivation, they work on land as laborers and yet they do not own the land, even after having a stake in agricultural, economic, social and also political decision-making.

Similarly, quoting a woman from the Sahariya tribe who has been fighting alone on behalf of 5000 Sahariya families in Mahrajpur Panchayat region for the past 20 years and also member of Ekta Parishad becomes pertinent. Claiming her right to dignity, she narrates a case of encroachment by a Gujjar man over her dead son's land. She tells that the man forces her to become his wife and only then, will she be given share in the encroached land, she says further,

humari zameen aur hum tumhari lugai banne...hum gareeb log lugai banne ki karan thodi hai...ki hum duniya ki lugai banne toh hum zameen joth payein aur nhi banne toh zameen nhi joth payein (Bai, 2018).

[This brave woman questions why she would be a wife to anyone just to be able to farm on a land that originally belonged to her.]

Such harsh reality and the sharp relationship between dignity and land ownership reflecting in each word of the above quote cannot go unnoticed. This case presents how the social and cultural setup is still patriarchal while the legal and political sphere reflected through progressive laws and policies in favor of women land ownership are trying to improve the situation. The need here is to understand the significance of holistic impact rather than just an isolated effect on one or two fronts for ensuring a constructive and sustainable change.

When the nuances of these cases are looked into, it is understood how these people are aware of not only the injustices being done to them but also the kind of power they hold against these injustices. They know that they have political rights as voters. They have liberty to choose a candidate and have the power to make him or her win or lose the elections. Similarly, they have the strength to question the patriarchal values discriminating against women in the society. Even in the economic sphere they are not behind anybody, many of the respondents were the only bread-earners in the family, many were a part of Ekta Vikas Pratishthan, a wing of Ekta Parishad

concentrating on creating self-dependence by offering employment to the members and local people. In fact, one of the demands put forth by Ekta Parishad is the declaration and execution of the Women's Agriculture Entitlement Act. Ekta Parishad acknowledges that in India, women are neither given land rights or the right to equal opportunities. They are not given the right to equal wages as men and also they are not given the status of farmers. Although, more than 80 per cent of agricultural work is being done by women.

It may seem that the cases are one sided as these are only about women. When observed closely it can be noticed that this defines the real strength of a Gandhian movement like Ekta Parishad. Women, a section of society that is considered to be below men, a dark truth that still prevails in the interiors, underdeveloped corners of the country, are breaking the chains of these bondages. These women have come out of the same context where the tentacles of patriarchy are spread in every sphere of life. Their fight against injustice is not limited to them but these women are fighting for their entire community. They represent the most underprivileged sections of society.

When I tried to understand the source of their strength, the most repeated message of Gandhi seemed to come out as a principle that they have internalized. This message, by Gandhi, says that,

Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? (Pyarelal, 1958, 65)

These lines were repeated every time meetings were held and this spirit of working for others got reflected also in the sentences of Mrs Anupama

Jab ek samajik karyakarta ke roop mein hum kaam karte hain, toh woh vichardhara humari gareebo ke prati rehti hai, ki hum uske liye hi samarpit hoke kaam karenge...samaaj sevi ko political line mein nhi jana chahiye unhe samaj ke beech mein reh kar hi kaam karna chahiye (Anupama, 2018).

[When an individual performs the role of a social worker, the ideology with which they work is in favor of working for the poor, they are dedicated to the poor. Instead of plunging into the political sphere, social workers should function within the realm of the society.]

It can be argued from observing this narrative that Ekta Parishad do not adhere to any one particular ideology. Like Gandhi, who did not want any kind of 'Gandhi-ism', this movement also focuses on the same lines. Further, it can be noticed that for the same reason, they criticize contemporary politics. As per this narrative, the present political sphere gets blinded by ideology that the political

parties follow. Such blindness manifests in the form of dehumanization in various forms like lack of empathy, sympathy, collective consciousness and so on, as also stated above.

So, these were the findings that I got from the first day of visiting the Bhopal center of Ekta Parishad. On the second day, everybody was ready to leave. From the observations in this centre it could be said that the movement aims at building a 'political' that ensures the right to live with dignity, gives relevance to a nonviolent way of life, offers room for the right to struggle nonviolently against injustice, makes way for a dialogue-based resolution, helps people understand that politics is for them and by them, in the process turn to the real sense of power that resides not in political parties but in people and also, focuses on constructing bridges among social, economic, environmental and political spheres. In the next part of the chapter, I present my findings from the Tilda centre of Ekta Parishad in the state of Chhattisgarh.

Although the first official proposal for the formation of Chhattisgarh came up in 1924 Raipur Congress Convention, foundation of this state lay in the long history of tribal resistances that had been continuing since the past 150 years. Post-independence, in 1954, a proposal in favor of the formation of Chhattisgarh was presented before the State Reorganization Council but it was rejected in 1955 in the then Nagpur Assembly. Since 1990, the demand for the formation of Chhattisgarh had been made on most of the political platforms as a result of which, on 18 March 1994, the Madhya Pradesh Assembly passed the resolution in favor of the organization of a separate Chhattisgarh. Following this resolution, in 1998, the Indian government had sent a bill for the formation of Chhattisgarh to the Madhya Pradesh Assembly, which then passed the bill. This bill was passed by the President of India on 25th August, 2000. Like this on 1st November 2000, an independent state of Chhattisgarh was formed with new political boundaries.

4. CHHATTISGARH: VISIT TO THE TILDA CENTRE

After spending two very intense days with Ekta Parishad in Bhopal, the earlier plan was to go back, but, on the last day, I got to know that Mr. P.V.Rajagopal is to conduct a similar meeting in Tilda, Chattisgarh. Without thinking twice, I canceled the reservation for Delhi and got a tatkal booking done for Tilda, Chattisgarh. I had no idea where this place was as I had never visited Chhattisgarh before. It was extremely sunny in the month of May, yet, I headed to Tilda in a second class sleeper, it was a sixteen hour journey. Around 7.30 am we reached Tilda station. It was not

crowded. We took an auto to reach the ashram. The place seemed deserted. There were large grounds with no trees. There was dust everywhere. It was gloomy all around. The only spot with trees was the ashram. We got down and stood at the main gate, two people approached and I told them about myself and that I was present in the Bhopal meeting for Jan Andolan as well. They opened the gates. Mr. Ramesh Sharma and Mr. Ransingh Parmar were their names. They are the national coordinators of Ekta Parishad. Ramesh Sharma sir was kind enough to give me ample time to present his views on different matters. Conversation with him proved to be very helpful as it allowed me to understand the movement in-depth.

Although I missed the first day of the meeting when Mr. P.V. Rajagopal was present, but having already spent two very busy days with Ekta Parishad in Bhopal, I faced less problems in talking to the members in the Tilda Centre. Moreover, the members of Ekta Parishad have always been welcoming. In the course of conversation with members here, I got to know a lot about the local issues, apart from matters like Ekta Parishad's stand on politics, constructive work and so on.

The observations highlighted in this particular part of the paper shows that Gandhian Social Movements instill such positive values among its members that transform them from being suppressed and complacent subjects into able (through enhanced understanding of public affairs) and willing (through the perceived moral obligation to transcend narrow and short-sighted interests) political citizens. In fact, not only political citizens but also individuals who can see beyond their self-interest and connect with the collective. These empowered citizens are vocal about the crises in liberal democratic framework, they are active in holding the concerned authorities and institutions accountable and are also leading the way towards building a self-dependent society on nonviolent lines. In fact, it can be said that the democratic make-up of the movement is a reflection of the larger vision of a society that they endeavor to establish. The succeeding few sections discuss those issues that the movement considers to be impediments in achieving such a society.

One of the most important issues that Ekta Parishad takes seriously is the Forest Rights Act. Talking about the Forest Rights Act, Mr. Ramesh Sharma discusses that although elections manifestos mostly mention about ensuring efficient implementation of Forest laws in tribal belts of Chhattisgarh. But the facts state that in Chhattisgarh more than two-thirds of the population are

still awaiting the correction of 'historical injustices' as guaranteed by the Forest Act. It is unfortunate that maximum people belonging to the specially backward tribes that include abhujmadia, kamar, korwa, bihor, baiga, pando and bhunjia and have a total population of around 89744 (Census,2011) are still far from getting their forest rights. The Chhattisgarh state administration has not taken any effective measures so far in order to change the dismal situation of forest rights of the especially backward tribes. It is because of all these reasons that till today the historical injustices have been continuing.

Mr. Arun, currently looking after the Tilda Centre lucidly explains the matter. He elucidates that Chhattisgarh has more than 30 percent tribal area. The main primitive tribes of this region are baiga, birhor, pahadi khorba, khamar and abujh maria. Ekta Parishad works with all except the last one. These tribes depend on jungle and jungle's land. So their livelihood is based on getting their rights back to the forest. In Kawardha, these people were removed in the name of conserving the forest, displaced to the lower areas, and promised rehabilitation there, but nothing happened. In the aftermath of which, andolan happened. During the andolan, a tribal by the name of Birju Baiga was tried to be displaced and when he did not budge he was killed with an axe. As a reaction to this unfortunate incident, the movement got larger, dharna happened but because the government was not paying heed, then, padyatra began. Then, the concerned government authority made a move to talk to people. After a dialogue session, a task force committee was formed and those baigas that were not having land were identified, they were given land.

He further describes that forest related laws are created by the Centre due to which the administration used to ask Ekta Parishad to talk to the Centre. Ekta Parishad did talk to and pressurize the Centre and also led a movement called Janadesh in 2007. This led to the implementation of the Forest Rights Act, 2006, which was earlier just on paper, but it got enforced in 2008 due to the andolan. This law accepts that historical injustice has been done to the tribals and people living in the forest. Implementation of this law is still inefficient and faulty as the claims to the land have been pending and many are rejected, only around 40 percent have been given the entitlement. How can the rest of the entire 60 per cent be wrong? Suppose, people already have five acre but you have given entitlement to just 2 per cent, so how to resolve this dispute? Those responsible for implementation have not been trained. This law gives rights to the community as well on school, road, charahgaha and so on. These kinds of rights have largely been granted but

the main rights for using scarce resources, the right to access grazing land have not been given. In short, half-hearted granting of rights do not bring any kind of change. It is just creating an illusion of change that is not long lasting and meaningful.

Mr. Ramesh Sharma adds to this by highlighting that Chhattisgarh is a new state and it is rich in resources. Both these facts have an impact on the state. Being a new state, the region has been given an entirely new administrative structure to maintain a new set of policies, rules and regulations. Being a resource rich state, it is a primary target for the development-centric capitalist regime. The vulnerable residents of this rich land were made to pay 'some cost' in exchange for development. It is true that with a change in the context in a democratic set up, development becomes an ethical as well as political need. But, every definition of development is democratic or not, the decision regarding this is not at all given to those who are often displaced or rehabilitated in the name of them being the primary beneficiaries. The entire description suggests that the present political system aims at eschewing those connections that certain sections of human society have had since time immemorial with nature and its resources. It further depicts the extermination of those deep spiritual values from politics that could understand the value of such a bond between human and nature. One can identify the reason behind such a disconnection, apart from many other factors, in the declining sense of the spirit of service that Gandhi emphasises upon. It is due to this reason that the modern development model is being questioned by the members of Ekta Parishad who understand the real motive behind clinging to such a model in the name of 'National Interest.' This is further focused upon in the next section.

It can be said that a significant issue that Ekta Parishad studied was the matter of 'national Interest.' This movement can be considered a part of those struggles, going on worldwide today, that challenges the repressive, violent, state-led, capitalist development. Interestingly, even when this kind of development is exploitative, anti-people and anti-nature, it is still legitimised as a step in the larger interest of the nation. 'National Development' as the Indian State puts it, forgets about those sections of the nation that are adversely affected by this kind of development. It is these people that are forced to sacrifice their culture, habitat, property, and sometimes even lives for the sake of 'National Development'. The project of legitimizing the plot of 'National Development' is not a recent one. Even before independence, makers of the nation displayed their inclination towards such an exploitative version of development by keeping aside the Gandhian model of

development which made villages to be the center. Disagreeing with the Gandhian idea of development, Jawaharlal Nehru mentions in his letter to Gandhi, “A village, normally speaking, is backward intellectually and culturally and no progress can be made from a backward environment” (*From Jawaharlal Nehru | Selected Letters | The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*).

The scheme of India’s reconstruction on the lines of the West was considered to be necessary by most Indian nationalists. They asserted that development of India can take place ‘intellectually through the infusion of modern science, and materially through the adoption of large-scale industrialisation’ (Cited in Baviskar, 2004, 22). After independence, this model of development, which can also be termed as capitalist development was pursued with full vigor and enthusiasm. Congress leadership endorsed it as the ‘Industrialize or Perish’ model of economic development in the Second Five Year Plan. This strategy supported application of ‘modern’ technologies on an indiscriminate basis without any regard for social or ecological consequences.

Today it can be witnessed that the assumed ‘trickle-down’ effect on the premises of which it was undertaken in the first place, has failed. The phenomena of ‘jobless growth’ by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reflect the truth of such a belied hope. Here, it is significant to quote the observation made by Amita Baviskar in the context of how the associated problems of urban air, water and noise pollution were belittled by different sections of society. She states “While planners shrugged their shoulders and said ‘one cannot make an omelet without breaking eggs’, economists simply called these problems ‘externalities’ and banished them outside the realm of the rational” (Baviskar, 2004, 24). From the field observations, one can argue that people in Chhattisgarh seem to be disgruntled with the kind of development which the state supports. They ventilated their view on various issues that were closely related to development. The sub-sections below present what they think of such matters.

Although a social issue, alcoholism has been considered an issue which has been worsened by the present model of development. In relation to this, Birohi ji, a women worker of Ekta Parishad while explicating how alcoholism has created a problem for women in Chattisgarh, throws light upon the topic of development. She says that, “violence has increased because alcohol has taken over the lives of the youth. Some of these youth are parents. Although, according to the rules, there is freedom to consume five bottles of *mahua* but because consumption of *mahua* has become a

habit, there is no tab on drinking. Extending the discussion to development, she argues that the Government has controlled both-poor by alcohol and rich by modern technologies like whatsapp, television and media. Modern development has made people insensitive and unable to think. It has diverted the attention of people from core issues, for instance:

sharab ka koi maapdand toh nhi hota, woh koi paanch bottle hi thodi rakhega....woh peeke so jayega aur tv dekhne walle raat barah baje tak tv dekh rahe hai, woh bhi so jayenge...toh desh mein kia ho raha hai, usse koi lena dena nhi hai (Birohi, 2018).

[There is no extent to which an alcoholic consumes alcohol, due to this reason even the rule of restricting the consumption to just five bottles is not followed. What ultimately happens is that the poor drunkard sleeps off because of excessive drinking and the rich dozes off because he or she is engrossed in watching television. Thus, making both, the poor as well as the rich, ignorant as well as insensitive towards what happens in the country.]

This single narrative highlights the depth of indifference that the present policies aim to develop in its citizens. The narrative seems to be a satire on how modern development has made people so unconscious of their surroundings, it has made them disconnected from the rest of the world to the extent that they are no more aware that they also have a stake in matters that affect the rest of humanity. From the narrative it could also be deciphered that she is talking about how the poor are being intoxicated in real sense due to a policy that does not pay heed to how restricting to just five bottles would not really be of use in reality. At the same time, she is also talking about metaphorical intoxication of the rich that have lost their senses by getting intoxicated by modern technologies introduced as a part and parcel of the modern developmental model. In the next section, another manifestation of modern development is explained through the narratives gathered from the field.

At this point, it needs to be noted that the term ‘development’ for tribal communities holds an expansive meaning. Unfortunately, today development is still measured in terms of a narrow definition of a concept that simply amounts to investment in monetary sense only. Tribals want fulfillment of such rights to development that are guaranteed by the constitution of the country meant for securing ‘autonomy’ of these communities. Disgruntlement with such a sad state of affairs has manifested in the form of pervasive organized violent retaliation spread in around one-third area of the country posing to be the biggest challenge today.

Related to a narrow developmental framework, another issue that was highlighted by many was that of industrialization in the name of development and associated problems of rising unemployment as well as landlessness. Mr. Prashant, a member of Ekta Parishad elucidates that

These industrialists give false promises to the innocent farmers and tribals who have land that if they will give their land for industrial development, they will be employed in those same industries. Believing those promises, people have given their landholdings to these industrialists but they have not been employed as promised. Even the state does not bother about their rights and rehabilitation. Due to these reasons, people have a lot of discontentment and anger. Nothing but migration is left for them. Policies that the government has made are not being implemented properly because of which they are unable to take advantage of these policies. Political representatives do not worry for the poor but for the rich (Prashant, 2018).

Mr. Gaukaran Verma, a part of Ekta Parishad and Ekta Kala Manch expressed himself in these words, he said:

pehle dhaan ka katora kaha jata tha chhattisgarh ko, ab lohe ka katora ho gya hai...hum ye keh sakta hai ki chhattisgarh mein jo sarkar hai woh kewal punji patiyo aur udhyog patiyo ke liye hi sarkar bni hai. (Verma, 2018)

[Mr. Gaukaran Verma a a part of Ekta Parishad and Ekta Kala Manch expressed himself in these words, he said: Earlier Chhattisgarh was considered to be a resource rich, mineral rich state but now because of massive exploitation this land is considered to be a barren, only iron rich state. We, people of Chhattisgarh, have witnessed that the government is only for catering the interests of the capitalists and industrialists.]

Adding to this, in his conversation, Mr. Ransingh Parmar, demands that “Either the government should accept that priority is being given to the industrialist and thus, should not ask for votes from the poor public or should explicitly say that it is pro-poor and thus, should implement favorable policies”(Parmar, 2018). These sentences show how the government is adhering to double standards in terms of fulfilling the interests of the rich at the cost of those sections that have voted for it.

Further, Mr. P.V. Rajagopal questions the support lent by the government to the powerful weapon selling companies. According to him, this nexus between government and companies is responsible for perpetuating the belief that violence is supreme. Mr. P.V. Rajagopal, in his speech, elucidates how arms trade is producing new arms every single day and in the process, dumping the old stocks of arms in the third world nations. This has been leading to the promotion of war-mentality everywhere. Youth is the main target of these arms industries. Markets today, argues Mr. P.V. Rajagopal, are infused with war-toys, entertainment industry and even literature too, have become agents of promoting violence. Such accentuating violence has manifested itself in the form of gun-violence in American schools. Even though Obama tried to bring forth the small arms control act, he failed to do so, because of a strong lobby formed by the arms industrialists, that have made the language of violence so deep-rooted in the society by equating masculinity with violence.

On the same lines, he, further, argues that even in the social sphere, there is a need to contest the view that espouses violence as the most potent and successful means. He points out that there is an unintentional makeup of the society on violent lines in systematic ways. In order to explain this, he reminds us of different narratives that are prevalent in the social realm which either undermine nonviolence or give boost to violent means. For instance, he highlights how a simple Hindi sentence like *'chudiyān pehn rakhi hain kīa?'* addressed to men who act non-violently in a situation where mostly they are expected to become aggressive, speaks volumes about the mindset of the larger society that has internalized this remark without any second thoughts. Thus, he argues for puncturing this entire narrative of violence present in the political, social and economic realm. He says that Gandhian social movements contain the potential of making nonviolence spread like a web that can result in a change in the social thinking. Gandhian Social Movements can challenge muscle power through nonviolent means, emphasizes Mr. Rajagopal.

The above narratives represent how in each sphere, be it social, economic or political, we are moving towards a dystopia. The kind of developmental model that focuses on industrialisation, violence and profits does not stop at making economic gains but seeps deep down into the social, spiritual and political realms. In order to rewire the entire framework, it is important to realise and put to practice Gandhi's idea of holistic 'political.' It is the responsibility of Gandhian movements like Ekta Parishad to really put forth a practical and an efficient blueprint of a Gandhian idea of 'political' that encapsulates Gandhi's canons and also encompassing the context and needs of the present times. The next section presents how through nonviolent means, Ekta Parishad is making efforts to make people aware of faulty government policies and also preparing them to raise a dissent against such an injustice in its journey to form such a blueprint.

Commenting on the narrow range of issues being discussed in the conventional political circles and in Parliament, Mr. Ramesh Sharma, says that "Delhi's discussion begins from PM to the President. Who has stopped you from discussing in the panchayats? It is a 'nonsense' discussion" (Sharma, 2018). These lines clarify the sad picture that the conventional political system has painted for those at the grassroots. According to him, Ekta Parishad challenges this mentality that emphasizes on building a centralized and undemocratic system. It rather asserts on constructing a mechanism that ensures that significance is given to substantive issues related to the grassroots, accountability, democracy as well as freedom to dissent.

Mr. Gaukaran Verma further discusses the unsuitable government policies imposed on poor tribals in the name of development. He states that government policies are making people dependent, after saying this, he raises a question that “*aap batao, logon ko viklang kaise banaya ja sakta hai?*” (Verma, 2018) [Tell me how to handicap a healthy person?] I stayed quiet and waited for him to answer. He answers that by giving people 1kg of rice for two rupees and simultaneously raising the prices of land. Adding another example to highlight how government in the name of developing tribal population, is actually making them more alienated and dependent, Mr. Prashant says that,

Even the policies are made as a part of government’s ploy of gaining votes and detaching tribals from forests and natural resources. One rupee for a kg of rice, gas, and house for free but no employment is one such example (Prashant, 2018).

In addition to this, he explains that,

Tribals do not know how to operate gas stoves, due to which there are many unfortunate acts... Even under PM Awas Yojana, tribals are given *pakka* houses out of forests. Moreover, how many times will these policies benefit tribals? These are policies, not laws (Prashant, 2018).

Mr. Arun extends discussion by unearthing that,

With respect to policies- when you give a primitive tribe, house, gas and other such facilities for free, then, in the next economic survey, they will be shown above the poverty line, though , he will stay poor at the ground or reality level and will also remain detached from forests totally (Arun, 2018).

Conceding that Ekta Parishad has started taking interest in politics, Ms.Sheetal asserts that, “Earlier Ekta Parishad stayed aloof from politics and politicians. But, looking at the circumstances, Ekta Parishad has decided to develop a dialogue with the government because the movement understands that the present regime is trying to lure the forest-dwellers. In her own words:

aaj sarkar logon ko lalach de de kar apni taraf kar rahi hain....jo jungle mein rehne walla hai usko gas chulha toh de diye par jab gaon se door, sheher mein gas bharane jana hoga toh woh ek hazar rupay kaha se lanyega?..jo focat mein jungle ki lakdi se kaam chalata hai uske paas ek hazar rupay kaha se ayega? cylinder sheher tak le jana hoga, Uska luggage kitna hoga?....dusri baat, woh toh kabhi gas jalay hi nhi hai, toh agar jalay chod diye gas toh sab jal jayega...to iss baat ko log samajh nhi rahe...keh rahe hai hi sarkar sab cheez humko bethe bithaye de rahe hain, iss type ki soch logo mein hai isiliye humko rajneeti ki taraf jana padd rha hai...jab sarkar logo ko sab chiz ghar mein hi de rahe hain toh logo ko jungle se door kar rhe hain...sarkar jungle apni taraf kar rhi hai, ab sarkar apna kabza karegi aur logo ko jungle ki taraf nhi jane degi... (Sheetal, 2018)

[The Government is trying to lure people by giving them different incentives... Those who have been dwelling in the forests are given gas stoves but without thinking, how would a poor, traditional, forest dweller pay for traveling long distances, when he or she would be needing gas cylinders to be refilled? The other issue is that the government has thought about the fact that these forest dwellers are ignorant of how the stoves work, due to which an unfortunate accident may happen anytime. The people are also not understanding these nuances, they are attracted by the bling of these modern

equipment as they are easily made available to them by the government. In order to make such people see the nuances of the real situation, we have to look towards the political realm. They are not able to realize that the government is actually taking them far away from their forests by giving those houses outside the same, the government is actually trying to encroach the forests for themselves and in the process, removing the forest-dwellers from there.]

Focusing on government policies, Mr. Ransingh Parmar unearths those aspects of society that policy makers and political leaders need to attend to. He explains that the main thrust of Ekta Parishad right now is on land. Demand for land rights, he asserts, is because Ekta Parishad believes that each and every human is entitled to own a piece of this earth, where he or she is born. Every human should have that amount of land which is enough for building a small residence, a small farm for growing crops in order to assure sustenance and well-being of the individual and his family. Here, it can be observed how the movement connects the right to land with the right to have a dignified life. He also highlights the absence of a National Land Improvement Policy. He seems to be right when he argues that there is a lot of land that is lying idle just because it is not worth using for different reasons. If the government makes a policy for improving such areas of land then it can be used for different purposes benefiting the poor and the marginalized as well. In the same discussion, he directs the attention towards faulty implementation of PESA, 1986. He explains that because of disinterest of the State Government, provisions under PESA have not been implemented in regions where it is required. He cites Chhattisgarh as an example of one such region where 36 per cent are tribal people. In short, according to him, pro-poor laws are not made while laws for the rich strata are implemented within days (Parmar, 2018). From the entire discussion on faulty policies, it could be deciphered how these people who are at the receiving end understand the nuances of each policy. Such policies that are being questioned are hailed as beneficial and progressive policies by the state as well as by those who are just the onlookers. But, the reality comes out in the sharp questions and observations that these tribal people have put forth as they are the ones getting impacted by them. It is because of such harsh reality that some have adhered to a violent path for achieving the same goal of justice that this Gandhian movement is struggling for. The next section deliberates upon this very important issue that Chhattisgarh has been facing for many years. This issue is that of naxalism that aims at targeting injustice just like Ekta Parishad but through violent means.

In a discussion with Mr. Ramesh Sharma, national coordinator of Ekta Parishad, he explained the impact of naxalism in Chhattisgarh. From his explanation it could be underlined that after India's

independence, Chhattisgarh witnessed violent movements which were led by the naxals who made their dominant presence in the southern areas of this state. The entire region had to pay a heavy cost for the violence created by this movement. In order to measure this movement's success or failure, answering a single yet important question becomes pertinent here. This question is that has this endless violence have come to fruition in the form of guaranteeing autonomy to the region? The vast expanse of naxalism in Bastar region covering an area of around thousand square km and rooted in around two-thirds of Chhattisgarh, has made it impossible to deny its presence. This has led to a bifurcation of the entire Chhattisgarh into two groups, one that supports this violent movement and the second group that supports a nonviolent path. The way to return from this violence is not an easy one as it demands not only dealing with the societal and cultural aspects of autonomy but also facing the political side of the issue. Around the same time, Mr. Ramesh Sharma elucidates that Chhattisgarh witnessed a nonviolent dimension to struggle with the rise of Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha, Ekta Parishad and Bonded Labour Liberation Rally (Badhua Mukti Morcha). These nonviolent movements offered, to the marginalized communities, a path for carrying on people's struggles through a 'democratic option.'

Describing the incompatibility between democracy and violence, Gandhi said that,

....Democracy and violence can ill go together. The States that are today nominally democratic have either to become frankly totalitarian or, if they are to become truly democratic, they must become courageously non-violent (*True Democracy | The Voice of Truth | The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*).

One can argue at this juncture that, still, violence has most often been used as a means of resistance and change. This kind of violence that is employed for constructive change is usually in the form of revolutionary violence. According to Manoranjan Mohanty, "Revolutionary violence, by definition, is a response to ruling class or state violence. It is a part of a wider strategy of people's democratic revolution that has many political, economic and cultural programs of action" (Mohanty, 2006, 3163). Just like nonviolent movements, this violent movement also fights for the rights of the marginalized, questions selfish capitalist inclination and brutality of the state and it also envisages a future of equality and justice. But, in recent times, the violent strategy that it uses has become a matter of debate. The use of revolutionary violence as a means of resistance is most reflected in the armed resistance led by the Naxal movement. Although this movement fights for the rights of the marginalised and the poor, immense costs involved have made scholars as well as activists to re-think about its strategy.

In line with such a re-thinking, finding a similar kind of discontentment with the development model as the violent movement of naxals present, I asked the members of Ekta Prishad why did they not join Naxals? Most of them tried to dodge the question, but one of the many responses that came was from Mr. Jaishankar Prasad, was as follows,

woh log goli se kaam karte hain, hum log boli se baat karte hain ...khood-kharabe se nhi, shanti se hi krati ayengi (Prasad, 2018).

[Those people (Naxals) work with arms, we believe in dialogue... Revolution cannot come through violence, it is only through nonviolence that revolution can come.]

Here, it needs to be noted that one of the most visible points in armed struggles is the vicious circle of violence that the party gets immersed into. Agreeing with Manoranjan Mohanty, it can be found that, “In earlier years the Naxalites used local weapons to target landlords, now they use sophisticated guns such as AK-47, rocket launchers, grenades and landmines to wage a full-scale battle with armed police, and para-military forces such as the CRPF and the IRB” (Mohanty, 2006, 3166). In this mad race to match up with the state army and in the present era of advancement being made every single day in the field of arms and ammunition, there is no running away from the corridors of violence once entered. But, it has to be taken into account that these paraphernalia of violence cannot solve core issues and contradictions. War of weapons, silence the words that need to be conveyed in order to reach a conclusion.

A nonviolent struggle too focuses on raising its resources. But, the only difference is that the resources that it employs further the constructive work rather than hampering it. They act as bricks in building a path that would ultimately lead to the goal. When nonviolence is used as a means of resistance multiple developments happen simultaneously. Constructive changes like empowerment of people, innovative ideas, strong alliances, and greater awareness of social, political and economic rights take place as the struggle moves. Therefore, the resources that are often employed have more to do with building positive infrastructure than destructive ones. Moreover, nonviolent resistance does not even aim to equate with the violent strategies and weapons that the violent oppressors possess. Nonviolence as a strategy comprises an element of surprise for the opponent. The opponent loses its balance when confronted with the nonviolent action. The only option left for the opponent is either to use his arms or have a deliberative and participatory approach towards the nonviolent resisters.

To this, Mr. Arun adds, by saying that,

People are gradually understanding and even history also proves that change in the regime through violence is not sustainable while through nonviolence when changes have come, they are stable in the long run. Gandhiji presented an example of how nonviolence can change the system/ regime in a sustainable manner, following the principles of Gandhi, our movements Janadesh and Jan Satyagraha have re-awakened the people and the government to realize the power of nonviolence (Arun, 2018).

Mr. Ramesh Sharma explains further that the big difference between Naxal movement and their Gandhian social movement is that of dialogue. Explaining this, he says that while the former do not believe in state, Ekta Parishad believes in state, democracy and nonviolence. This creates a difference in leadership. He asserts that naxalism has to be seen from two dimensions. First, it is to be noted that the government has left no stone unturned in hampering substantive democracy and that too intentionally. This has created a space for violence. Therefore, the state has to revisit the idea of real, substantive meaning of democracy. Often, the reason for taking up armed struggle is that the unjust party does not listen to the words of the oppressed. But, when the sound of weapons overtakes, then, even those on the sides of the oppressed become deaf. This is what is happening within the fragmented structure of the Naxal movement. The violent acts of activists justify oppression of the state further in the eyes of the audiences, even when actually it is absolutely unjustifiable and contrary to any law of the land. The observation made by Manoranjan Mohanty corroborates this last statement, he argues that, “the state agencies have given up all procedures under the rule of law on the pretext that forces of violence do not deserve it” (Mohanty, 2006, 3167).

Second, it has to be kept in mind that discussion on the government's failure is important but an open discussion should be done with respect to the naxal movement's contribution to the larger society. Such a discussion can help in bringing to the surface pertinent issues this movement is fighting for and will also place this movement in the position of accountability with respect to their methods and ideas. According to Mr. Rajagopal, the state is violent and also intolerant towards other actors in the society. Due to this reason, social movements often take up violent means of resistance as they find no other way of addressing their issues. At this juncture, when it is imperative to break the vicious circle of violence, those representing the conventional political sphere have to become sensitive towards the matter of overcoming violence. Violent strategy often restricts a better understanding of core issues and problems due to which armed resistance takes the shape of a protracted war. The then Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, called Naxal movement

as the biggest internal security threat, in the year 2006, but, in the same breath, he also reiterated the fact that socio-economic issues are responsible for such an uprising. It is time that both the State as well as the activists involved in the armed resistance focus on how to solve these socio-economic problems rather than on how to defeat or eliminate one another.

One of the related points, he states, in his discussion, is that 'fire cannot be stopped with fire'. He explains that just like fire cannot be extinguished with fire; similarly, violence cannot be curbed with violence. The failure of dealing violence with violence can be seen in cases of Syria, Afghanistan, Iran etc. where war has not led to any creative change, instead has resulted in destruction and more violence. Hence, it needs to be understood that nonviolence, which is like water, is the only resort that can be taken to stop pervasive violence that is spreading like fire at present. In the case of India, it can be seen how the state structure failed to acknowledge and practice this point. In order to confront naxals, the state employed army and other violent forces, troubled common tribal people, who, in turn, joined naxal forces against the state. Thus, a vicious circle of violence got formed that can now be broken only with nonviolence and not through violence. Nonviolent resistance when tried to be suppressed by violent reaction gains further legitimacy in the eyes of the audiences, it de-legitimises violence used by the opponent. This is because nonviolent strategies might go against a legal provision that is considered unjust but it does not cause physical destruction or disturbance that may shake the democratic structures and institutions leading to chaos and anarchy. Nonviolent resistance tries its best to maintain a certain degree of order so that all the parties remain unharmed.

In this context, Mr. P.V.Rajagopal, further tabled the view that the real test of nonviolent struggle is during the times of difficulties. It is during such times that nonviolent activists have to be the most resilient. Hence, it is important to put nonviolence into practice so that it becomes natural to the activists. Discussing Vinoba's teachings at this point, Mr. P.V.Rajagopal explains that the nonviolent path and the violent path are different. While, the former emphasizes on moving from namra (kind), namratar (more kind) to naratam (most kind), the latter leads from being ugra (aggressive), ugratar (more aggressive) to urgatam (most aggressive). It is clear from this explanation that the one following the path of violence rarely switches on to nonviolence. Once the violent path is adhered to, the degree of violence keeps on getting multiplied. The irony here is that, though, those who walk on the violent path do not aim to switch over to the nonviolent

way, but the one who chooses to adhere to the nonviolent path, in the beginning, often digress from this path, as they start losing patience in the course and become violent. To put it in other words, while the violent activists stick to the path of violence, the nonviolent activists, being challenged by the other, shift to the violent path just to equate themselves with the violent opponent. Such a practice defeats the purpose of nonviolent activism on one hand and on the other, pleases the violent opponent that becomes aware of the weak faith in nonviolence, which could be shaken through a few trials only. He emphatically suggests that such a tendency to shift towards violence needs to be treated from the roots by strengthening the power of ethics that a nonviolent path offers.

From the above explanation, one can understand that Ekta Parishad focuses on the nuances of nonviolence as a means of resistance. Interviews above also highlight that the members of the movement are aware of the reasons for pervasive violence that are restricted to not only political but also are deeply rooted in the social, psychological, cultural, lingual and economic realms. It is due to such an in-depth understanding of such reasons that instead of denying or neglecting the existence of other movements like Naxalism, it tries to analyse them from the perspective of how effectively they contribute to constructive change. In the process, this movement also observes the state and how it has been suppressing dissent. Thus, it can be said that as a Gandhian Social Movement, it not only highlights injustices in democracy but also puts forth a strong dissent against these injustices. It can be observed that today, in the name of stabilizing democracy and maintaining relative peace, the modern state forces people to submit silently without any dissent. Putting the matter more explicitly Prof. Anuradha Veeravalli argues that,

As a consequence of the necessary surrender of self-governance for security and peace, dissent is not merely a suspect but a criminal act under the law of the modern nation state. All pretensions of ‘deliberative democracy’ evaporate as soon as the state is challenged with the possibility of self-governance, whether individual or communitarian, economic, political or social (*Democracy, Rights, and Peace*).

The above lines present a dearth of tolerance to any kind of expression that does not fit in the scheme of the State. Such intolerance and implicit or explicit ways of violent suppression of different waves of ideas, thoughts and actions reinforce the monolithic concept of rationality, suiting only a few sections of the society. Dissent to such attempts that suffocate voices of different marginalized populations is necessary to save the real spirit of democracy and allow plurality to

flourish in the country. Highlighting centrality of dissent in a democracy, Soli J.Sorabjee states that,

The right to dissent is the hallmark of a democracy, indeed its very essence. In a real democracy the dissenter must feel at home and ought not to be nervously looking over his shoulder fearing captivity or bodily harm, or economic and social sanctions for his unconventional or critical views (Sorabjee, 85).

Contributing to realizing the real essence of democracy, Ekta Parishad walks on the path of nonviolent dissent. Instead of joining the trail of violent forms of resistance, this movement deliberately chose nonviolence for carrying out their struggle. It needs to be reiterated here that in the process of comprehending the present realities, applying nonviolent principles for struggle and as a way of living and also making sense of the other movements around the world, this movement has been working on scripting its own idea of 'political' which is on Gandhi's idea of holistic politics. The movement, as many of the narratives also suggest, does not adhere to the conventional idea of 'political' in the formulation of its own idea of the same. Related to this, the next section tries to put forth the responses when they were asked if Ekta Parishad could be a political party.

5. EKTA PARISHAD IN POLITICS: A QUEST FOR COLLABORATING 'SOCIAL' & 'POLITICAL'

As explained in the first chapter of this thesis, Gandhi's idea of 'political' focused on seeing all the realms pertaining to social, economic, political and spiritual in holism. The movement studied here is a Gandhian movement and the most important thing is that it is operating in contemporary times where the conventional political system based on political parties and electoral politics is dominant. This movement has been very thorough with the loopholes of such a political system and has been raising a sustained struggle with a large number of following. The question then arises that why cannot this movement transform itself to a political party and enter into conventional politics so as to treat the problem from its roots by being in the same system and thus, transforming it gradually from within? The next section puts forth some of the responses collected from the field interviews that highlight a possibility of an alternative understanding of the idea of 'political', being developed by this Gandhian movement. Mr. P.V.Rajagopal explains that co-existence of both, political parties and social movements, is necessary and the question of one becoming the other is a perplexing one. According to him, it is better to understand that the two are different, yet complementary to each other. He insists that social movements have a particular

style, a peculiar character and certain responsibilities that would get dissolved if they turn into political parties.

He argues that political parties have increased in number due to which they are able to easily capture the imagination of the society. Extending his argument, he is of the view that social movements need to expand and make themselves stronger. In this context, Mr. Anil explains how the challenge of capturing the attention of the entire society hampers social movements from contesting as a political party. He asserts that the day Ekta Parishad, which is a Gandhian social movement, merges with conventional politics as a political party, it will lose its purpose. Ekta Parishad as a movement purports to provide a platform for the marginalized and poor adivasis and dalits to raise their voice against injustice. Political parties, according to him, do not offer such a space. This happens because as a political party, different sections of society have to be appeased, while Ekta Parishad's focus is on the upliftment of the least privileged of the society: dalits and adivasi. Concentrating on just these two sections would not allow Ekta Parishad to transform into a sustainable political party.

He further claims that the monopoly of those that contribute to the exploitation of the marginalized sections, in the political corridors would not really leave their powerful lobby so as to give a democratic space to a force like Ekta Parishad that stands with the least privileged. Mr. Ransingh Parmar, adds to this, by saying that he accepts that political aspects are significant even in social movements, he remarks that politics is in everything. According to him, we need to have a deeper understanding of politics and what is political. Speaking on behalf of the entire Ekta Parishad, he explains that the politics of Ekta Parishad has to do more with working for the people by staying in the social. Further extending his argument he says that "We do not indulge in party politics. Underprivileged does not find a place in this."(Parmar, 2018) As these lines reflect he believes that the underprivileged, marginalized and poor have no substantive place in conventional party politics. Mr. Ransingh Parmar further opines that radical change in politics is time taking and is not possible in the near future. The reason that he gives for this is that he believes in a country like India, where there are numerous differentiations, experiments to create radical change in the conventional political system cannot sustain for long till the least, the weakest section is taken into consideration which takes time. Although, he accepts that politics has not always been so much in

need of a radical change as in the past it has representatives who belonged to different realms of society.

Like Mr. Ransingh Parmar, Mr. P.V.Rajagopal asserts that social movements do have a political aspect as well but it is different from the conventional politics that political parties display. He explains that, while, the political power that the social movements encapsulate aim at introducing substantive change in favor of those at the margins, the power that the political parties have is used to favor those that make themselves stronger. The political power of the Gandhian social movements believe in sacrificing self-interest for the interest of the people. Just because social movements do not focus on gaining political positions throughout, these movements have the energy, time and space for contributing to constructive changes. In his speech, Mr. P.V.Rajagopal advises not to toe the lines of politicians, working around the ‘enemy theory’ that paints everybody as an enemy. Such a negative political language preaches terms like ‘caste-enemy’, ‘community-enemy’ and spreads a false message that ‘justice is not given; it has to be forcibly taken.’ These ideas, when floated in society, create fissures. Unlike those in conventional politics, Gandhian social movements focus on making people strong enough to raise their voices against injustice and inequality. These movements make them independent to fight those that suppress them. Instead of focusing on their victimhood, the members of Gandhian Social movements are made aware of their rights and taught how they should exercise them in a democratic country like ours. He emphasizes, thus, that Gandhian social movements are different from political parties in their make-up, but it does not mean they both stand as enemies. According to him, neither Gandhian social movements should be reduced to being anti-political nor should the political parties along with those representing the conventional political realm be in the role of suppressing the significance of Gandhian social movements.

Taking the conversation further I asked them about their perception of the present political structure, about what kind of politics they envisage and why do not Ekta Parishad take a lead in the political realm as well? In view of Mr. Arun,

Direct intervention of social movements gives a negative message. We will not enter into direct politics, but we will practice people’s politics by bringing forth people’s issues in the purview of the conventional political system. We will be a part of the political process. By raising ‘people’s politics’ we want to make sure that the core issues that are so far being avoided or veiled come in the limelight and taken seriously. People- centric politics is more important than party politics for us. It is also political to sensitize politicians about the issues of the poor, tribals and dalits. Therefore, social movements should not intervene directly into the party politics.

Politicians should recognize issues of the poor and thus, understand that there is no one-way. If they come seeking votes from the public, then they should also understand people and resolve their issues when they come with their problems. We also recognize that it is the government that has to create policies and we want that these policies should be suitable for the poor and marginalized sections of society (Arun, 2018).

Instead of blaming everything on the political parties only, Mr. Ransingh Parmar, points out the weaknesses that are present in the social sphere as well. He highlights that people change their voting preferences suddenly during elections as well. No matter how much they claim to be fair but ‘because people vote with sentiments intact’ it is difficult to ascertain their choices sometimes. He thinks that this happens also because of the web of dependence in which the government has trapped people today in the name of welfare. He delineates how a social movement led by Ekta Parishad faces different kinds of challenges before and during elections. In this context, he says that before elections, the movement has an edge over political parties as political leaders also support the movement but as soon as elections begin, the movement has to deal with criticisms that the political parties put forth in order to delegitimize it and influence people to go against the movement.

Mr. Ramesh Sharma lucidly states that Ekta Parishad is not a non-political movement, it contains political vantage points but it is not going to enter into party politics. He further says that even Ekta Parishad’s work and awareness about political issues on the ground is recognized by political parties as well. When asked to throw light upon the political aspect of Ekta Parishad and if it is raising an alternative to conventional politics today, he said that the term ‘alternate’ is an illusion, it does not last, and it is not a separate entity. If the system has to be improved, direct influence is required. Ekta Parishad believes in people’s politics and not party politics. People’s politics want people themselves to harness their power, their mandate in order to change the political system. For instance, the subject of land was considered to be dead and redundant, but only through Ekta Parishad and other social movements this issue was brought to the forefront. Gandhian social movements have to understand that people’s politics has to be at the centre. Moreover, nonviolent Gandhian movements have transformative power that needs to be built, understood and shaped. This can happen through social education. Thus, apart from political actions by social movements, it is important that social action is given priority.

Focusing on understanding of ‘politics’ by Ekta Parishad, Mr. Aneesh, speaks about introducing people’s politics. He says that Ekta Parishad advocates people’s politics instead of following lines

of party politics. According to him, it helps in focusing on real issues of those that are at the margins, empowering them to lead his/her own struggle so that if they are all alone in their struggle, they can still act for getting justice and advocate substantive change that cannot take place in just one day but happens only when we move from one action to the other in the right direction. He believes that these people begin from scratch, no trace of self-interest or ego can be found in them. From this position, they are given training in order to become sensitive towards different issues, to become independent and struggle for getting justice with Gandhian methods. He views people's politics to be democratic as it allows people to voice their demands, present them as a resolution to the government with their signatures. Such a democratic process is hardly implemented in the spheres of party politics. He further points out that the public ultimately stands with those political candidates that support people's resolution presented through a democratic process.

The narratives above give a clear indication that Ekta Parishad wants to remain in the social realm. It has no intention of contesting as a political party so as to enter the conventional political sphere. It considers this sphere to be anti-poor and pro-capitalists. Although it is ready to negotiate, be in dialogue and persuade the government to make pro-poor policies. The movement, as the narratives suggest, understands that it also has a political aspect and it is focusing on constructing its own idea of 'political' based on people's power. It also accepts that its members follow the procedures of the conventional political system as voters. When observed closely, a conundrum arises at this point. On the one hand, Ekta Parishad wants to create a politics premised upon 'people's power', but on the other hand, the same movement's members are ready to be voters and elect from the same pool of parties that they consider to be anti-poor. They negotiate with the same regime that they consider to be self-interested. The question that can be asked here is that how would a long term, substantive, constructive idea of 'political' be raised when the members are caught up in both the Gandhian idea of 'political' that this movement seeks to propound and the conventional idea of 'political.' Would it not be better if the movement, as already mentioned, would contest as a political party and make waves of concrete changes from within. It is true that the movement believes that there are lobbies within the Parliament that would resist change but is it also not true that the movement can apply people's power in the form of their immense support to give a volte face to the power equations that exist now?

CONCLUSION

This phase of my fieldwork presents a lot of strong narratives that, in a way, validate self-perception of Ekta Parishad elucidated in the previous chapter, especially with respect to the idea of ‘political’ that it envisages. The chapter unfolds many layers of politics that the Gandhian Social Movement focuses upon. From the first section of this chapter it can be noticed that Ekta Parishad as a Gandhian Movement is well-aware of the bifurcation drawn between the social and political sphere just after independence. The movement considers establishment of conventional politics represented by political parties that have introduced a kind of exclusivity to the political sphere to be responsible for such a division. They implicitly pinpoint the elitism that politicians maintain and thus, consider themselves superior to the common masses, especially from those who belong to the grassroots. The leaders found that politicians, nowadays, were limited to lip-service as when it came down to delivering their promises, all their words were in vain. These leaders also highlight rising corruption, criminalization of conventional politics along with ngoization of social movements that make them an agent of the corrupt government. Thus, they know the reasons that hamper substantive political change in the present scenario.

Next, they explain that as a Gandhian Movement what all elements make their politics to be different from conventional politics. Their faith in people’s power is seen to be the linchpin on which Gandhian politics stands. Question of dignity, self-confidence, independence, respect, self-worth, gender equality, and social equality matter to them. Many instances during the fieldwork highlight these concerns. Even though all of these concerns did not seem to be fulfilling during the field work, still considering them, significantly explains their vision of Gandhian politics. This vision basically highlights that politics need to incorporate those aspects of society that are being overlooked for long. They tend to bring to surface those structural issues like marginalization of women, tribals, scheduled castes and poor which have been normalized or have been appropriated for such reasons, especially in economic vocabulary, that try to present their dismal conditions as their own fault. As a Gandhian movement, it takes up these socioeconomic and political issues and attempts to resolve them in a way that they consider to be meaningful, nonviolent and sustainable. Walking on the lines of Gandhi, they follow a nonviolent path but they also understand the need to innovate Gandhian methods so as to include vulnerable sections in the process of change making. For instance, they try to find a middle-path, if possible, rather than seeing the state, its

institutions and representatives as enemies. I think they do understand, like Gandhi, that both the state as well as people themselves are responsible for the miserable situation. That is why, this movement tries to inculcate moral values in its grassroots members, on the one hand and on the other, deal strategically, diplomatically or practically with the state as well. The movement does not seek to overthrow the state but wishes to walk with it as an equal partner. Therefore, like Gandhi, the leaders do not seem to be interested in giving a call for 'Quit India' to the government. Instead, the movement focuses on building a democratic space for a constructive change. This democratic avenue is built on the foundation of samvad, rachna and sanghrash. These three components, which Ekta Parishad believes to be the pillar of the idea of 'political' of this movement, speaks volume about its long-term vision. The movement seeks to create a politics that is based on substantive negotiation through democratic dialogue and a struggle which keeps constructive work as an important part of it.

The third section of the movement conceptualizes politics around the question of justice. It deliberately chooses to influence those sections of society and regions of the country that have been suffering from gross injustices for a long span of time. Madhya Pradesh, a landlocked state with a huge number of landless farmers and Chhattisgarh, a state where tribes still are jostling between state's schemes of mainstreaming them and saving their identity, knowledge, resources, even their forests. Apart from these two, the movement works in Bihar, North-eastern states like Manipur, southern states like Tamil Nadu and so on. Each of these regions have their own context of historical injustices due to which each region requires different strategies to grapple with their reality and also to walk on the Gandhian path. For instance, while Madhya Pradesh deals with chronic landlessness, the state of Manipur in the North-East is suffering from immense violence for political change. Although these contexts can be interpreted from many angles, one of the lenses could suggest that the former needs mobilization around an issue, while the latter demands for a change in mentality so as to realize the worth of nonviolent means of resistance over violent means. The movement deals with many such situations in its day-to-day proceedings. Therefore, its politics always remains flexible, accommodative and vulnerable to changes, short-term as well as long-term. It cannot function with well-settled laws, instructions, thinking, approach and a time-frame. Keeping nonviolence as its base, this movement seeks to draw the contours of a politics which is based on adjustments with the reality of the context that they are dealing with. Such an approach gives them the room to experiment, innovate with their Gandhian techniques. It also

instils a faith in people towards the movement as they notice that the leaders do not have any kind of power for themselves or any position of undemocratic authority. This movement trusts the power that comes from people, from below, just as Gandhi suggested. It is because of this reason they keep away from becoming a political party as presented in the last section. The ‘political’ of Ekta Parishad that the chapter thus lays down is very different from the political conceptualized by conventional political spheres dominated by political parties.

Although many questions arise after analyzing this chapter, but, I think that the next chapter which puts forth the last phase of my field work would be required to have a critical analysis of ‘political’ as conceptualized by this Gandhian Movement.

CHAPTER 5: PARTICIPATING WITH EKTA PARISHAD: BLUEPRINT OF 'A GANDHIAN POLITICAL'

1. INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, observations from my field visits and interviews taken during the same were discussed. The present chapter discusses the last phase of the field study which is primarily based on my participation in Jan Andolan, 2018. This Andolan is an endeavor by Ekta Parishad to assert the right to land for poor farmers and marginalized sections. The chapter is an in-depth study of the movement. It, thus, begins with introducing Jan Andolan, 2018, followed by elucidating the observations made as a participant, observer or researcher. The next few sections focus upon describing different means that the movement uses so as to put across its message and struggle on nonviolent lines. The last section put forth a critical analysis of the movement. The major objective of this chapter is to explicate how Ekta Parishad, a Gandhian Social Movement, has been able to raise substantive concerns, has attempted to unveil the tyranny of the capitalist forces in the country and has been moving forward with the aim of introducing political changes through nonviolent principles and strategies, also constructing its own politics along with it. In this context, P.V. Rajagopal in one of his address mentions that,

We live in a world where scientists have invented the most sophisticated weapons capable of destroying the planet and the entire human life. We laud ourselves for such advancements, and yet we need to be aware that we have ways of perpetrating violence that enables us to destroy what humankind has built for thousands of years in the course of one second. The challenge that many of us face is the belief that building a nonviolent and peaceful society is to create a tool powerful enough to tackle the threats presented by these destructive forces. In order to counter and contain these destructive planetary forces, nonviolence should be inculcated as a priority in the minds of all individuals the world over (Parishad, 2020, Forward by Rajagopal PV).

The above lines clearly represent how, even in the present times, science is being used to promote violence and has gained ascendancy over nature, culture and traditions. In order to counter this ascendancy, Rajagopal suggests that a powerful nonviolent tool is needed. How Ekta Parishad concentrates on making such nonviolent tools along with, simultaneously, drawing a blueprint of Gandhian politics in the contemporary times is the objective of this chapter.

2. DISSENT AND GANDHIAN POLITICS

As stated in the introduction, the chapter is trying to understand how this movement understands and also innovates Gandhi's idea of 'political'. In this section, I attempt to argue that such an understanding has its seeds in making sense of Gandhian dissent. Gandhian politics can be understood through the campaigns, struggles led by the Gandhian movements. These movements raise substantive dissent against injustices present in multiple forms and try breaking the status quo which basically is premised upon dominance. They question the monopoly of state institutions in defining what is right and what is wrong for them. Dissenters are mostly discouraged by the state and its institutions from becoming active. It can be said that it is true almost in all the countries all over the world. Various explanations are given for this kind of suppression by the hands of the state. In this context, Akeel Bilgrami argues that this trend of taking repressive measures against the dissenters had begun right from the early seventeenth century Europe where the members of the Royal Society critiqued the dissenters in name of maintaining stability and order. To quote him,

One of the clearest goals of the ideologues of the Royal Society was to use the new science in the preservation of order and stability in society. Here again they were joined in an alliance with the latitudinarian Anglican as well as commercial interests for whom the revolutionary unrest of the pre-Restoration period was a palpable danger ("Gandhi's Radicalism: An Interpretation," 2016, 222).

In this quote, Bilgrami clearly mentions the associated interest the Royal Society had with a few of the sections of the society. What was being done in this case was that the knowledge of God was made to be a monopoly of the so-called learned minds. The 'university-trained divines' were given the sole authority to deliver spiritual judgments and the common people were forced to be dependent on them. The Dissenters, on the other hand, very much like the present Gandhian Social Movements, refuted such an elitism and demanded democratization of polity instead of monopolization of the same. Such an anti-democratic tendency had far-reaching consequences. Bilgrami notices how it led to law being handed over to few lawyers and people being deprived of cheap and free medicines. All these ended up in forming a model of governance that restored the monarch and his court's dominance. The codification became more rigid by the ideals of civility around the monarch. These ideals laid down the decorum in the behavior of the defined privileged classes. It became the basis of discriminating against those that did not follow these codified norms or went against them. The idea of civility slowly was legitimized and the British colonial powers

disseminated it in the name of undertaking a mission of civilizing the uncivilized colonized countries. In the age of Enlightenment, the discrimination furthered in the name of rights and constitution. The vocabulary of rights and constitution embedded the idea of civility in the political sphere in a way that gave legitimacy to the cruelty of the colonizers in countries which lacked such vocabulary. In the words of Bilgrami,

...And, as is well known, a pedagogical framework was often set up as a justification for colonization, to bring civility and rights to the colonized lands (a perfectly familiar ploy, still masquerading under the label “liberal empire”). Gandhi was perfectly aware of this historical screening function of the notions of civility and rights and thought that it only came to pass because of a loss of the genuine democratization that lies in the availability to the visionary temperaments of all people proof the values to live by in a sacralized (Bhakti) conception of the ordinary perceptible world around one- and it explains to a considerable extent his studied indifference to the vocabulary and codifications of rights (“Gandhi’s Radicalism: An Interpretation,” 2016, 225).

Just as the above observe, Gandhians, like Gandhi, have been trying to question unjust codifications that have overpowered indigenous knowledge, culture, practices and resources. These sections of society have been considered as ‘cruel’ which have been used as an excuse to suppress them. But, opposing such a ‘cruelty’ by the state has not been put in the framework of impunity, unlike, the state’s suppression as the state and the associated institutions can be said to be the manifestations of colonial powers that were on a ‘civilizing mission’. Thus, here, it can be argued that when deprived sections, marginalized and weaker sections stand up to question the faulty regime, repressive laws and demand for an expansion of the rights framework, they are made to be the victims of state-violence.

Amidst such harsh realities, Gandhian Social Movements have not stopped raising dissent and have been focusing on drawing the contours of a political sphere that is truly democratic and is free from the colonial mindset. Before elucidating Jan Andolan, 2018, it is important to understand that Ekta Parishad views its dissent to be following a ladder approach which “means that every campaign is a step in the ladder, taking us further than where we were earlier” (Parishad, 2020, 20). The movement understands that each campaign or struggle compounds into a bigger struggle in terms of reach, participation, impact and even financial resources. Therefore, it can be said that Jan Andolan 2018 was not a spontaneous campaign but a well-planned endeavor. It is important to mention, in the this context, that,

Between 1995 and 2005, multiple statewide and district wide campaigns were undertaken. When the time came to address structural issues that is when the 2007 campaign was conceived as the national campaign. The 2007 campaign was a footmarch by 25000 people and an alliance of 500 organisations. When the 2012 campaign

was being planned, it was thought that there should be a bigger action, and should grow fourfold. So 1 lakh people would walk and 2000 organisations would be associated with the campaign (Parishad, 2020, 20).

From the above information one can decipher that Jan Andolan 2018 was a part of a larger campaign that would be led in the future. This larger campaign was Jai Jagat 2020 which was a march from Delhi to Geneva. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 pandemic the Jai Jagat march was withdrawn to Armenia. Still, Jan Andolan 2018 acts as a significant step of the ladder that led to this cross-borders, international Gandhian march. The next section elucidates the demands that Jan Andolan, 2018 had placed before the government.

2.2. JAN ANDOLAN (2018): A MARCH FOR JUSTICE

This part of the chapter introduces Jan Andolan by laying down the demands it encapsulated. Jan Andolan 2018 began with the Mahila Bhu Samvad Yatra, a 12000km long journey by four female members of Ekta Parishad. This journey was to take notice of the dismal conditions in which the marginalized sections have been living in the country. It became the precursor to Jan Andolan 2018. Jan Andolan 2018, roughly, included around 1000 participants from 25 different states of India. The six major demands raised by this Andolan were:-

1. National Homestead Act: This bill, drafted in 2102 by the then Congress Government, if passed in the Parliament would ensure that each rural homeless person would be given 10cents (1/10th of an acre) of land.
2. National Land Reforms Policy: This policy would bring concrete suggestions to address the issue of land distribution.
3. Women Farmer Entitlement Act: This bill ensures that women engaged in cultivation are recognized as farmers and receive the corresponding benefits.
4. Land Tribunals and Fast Track Courts: A land tribunal and fast-track courts for resolving land disputes and legal cases.
5. Execution and Monitoring Structures for Panchayat (Extension in Scheduled Areas Act (1996) (PESA) and Forest Rights Act (2006) (FRA): This would put in place execution and monitoring mechanisms for the PESA and FRA Acts.
6. National Land Reforms Council and Task Force on Land Reforms: This is to reinstitute the previously formed land reforms council and task force, which would be bodies where

independent experts would work with Government officials to ensure the effective implementation and monitoring of the other five demands.

These demands clearly highlight the indispensability of land that this movement considers. It presents how Ekta Parishad has not limited itself to the political demand of land reforms only but has gone beyond by focusing upon homestead rights, women land rights and also Forest rights. It thus encompasses the most vulnerable sections of society represented by homeless, landless women and tribals. Moreover, the demands also emphasise upon redressing injustices on immediate and speedy basis by calling for setting up of Fast Track Courts and Task Forces. The idea of 'political' that one can deduce from these demands is that this movement focuses on an overall frame of justice that begins from raising and struggling nonviolently against what is unjust, analysing the unjust issue thoroughly, charting out demands in a manner that encompasses all vulnerable sections involved and also making the state institutions accountable responsible for the injustices that these sections are facing. Although, it needs to be reminded that this is one part of Ekta Parishad's idea of 'Political.' Moreover, its politics also includes preparing its own members as well before holding the government accountable. Going with the same principle, Ekta Parishad, as already mentioned, began with 'Mahila Bhu Samvad Yatra' before launching Jan Andolan, 2018. The next section throws light on the former.

2.3. MAHILA BHU SAMVAD YATRA: DEMONSTRATING WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

As aforementioned, this section concentrates on giving information on the yatra that preceded Jan Andolan. Before the march, Ekta Parishad had organized Mahila Bhu Samvad Yatra (Women's Land Dialogue Tour). This long tour covered 11000 kms in 45 days across 10 states. It was led by four women workers of Ekta Parishad. The names of these women are as follows: Shraddha Kashiyap from Malwa near Indore, Madhya Pradesh, Kasturi Patel from Bundelkhand region, Madhya Pradesh; Shobha Tiwari from Mahakaushal, Madhya Pradesh, and Manju Dungdung from Bihar. Each of these women have been working for around 20-30 years. They have devoted themselves in building local leadership in their communities and have been an important part of the women's wing of Ekta Parishad known as Ekta Mahila Manch. It can be claimed that this march, forming the beginning of Jan Andolan, highlights Ekta Parishad's concern for women issues. The march was to identify and establish widespread women leadership across India among

rural and marginalized sections. As Ekta Parishad considers the issue of land to be central, this march focused on this issue. The leaders of the march met many rural farming families, contacted various NGOs in the vicinity working on similar issues, went to shelter homes and accessed these places.

During my field work in Gwalior, while narrating the stories of women from these regions, tears came out of their eyes. They confessed that for days, they could not sleep on the journey because they were so taken aback by the heart-rending conditions of the women section. They told about how inhumanly the owner of one of the shelter homes treated the inmates. The other said that the roof of the hut in which they stayed with a family, was so fragile that it could have dropped any time. They even expressed that it was so dangerous living there as on the top of the roof, they could see snakes crawling. They even narrated about the violence done to women in their household. With tears in their eyes, they told how even today young girls are sexually exploited by those at the upper rungs of the caste hierarchy in the name of tradition. It should be noted that these courageous women had to face various challenges on the way as the time period during which they began the yatra in the Southern region of the country, there were floods all over the state due to cyclonic rains. They, being from Hindi speaking regions, had to face language barriers as well. Even in such circumstances, they conducted several meetings, traveled large distances and also dealt with local media.

On the first day of my visit to the Gwalior office, I was told that these four women would be arriving from their long march and we were to welcome them. I did not know at that time who all were there. We were standing with garlands in our hands. When they came, I saw Shraddha mam. Finding a familiar face there was such a relief. I hugged her and told her that I had met her in the Bhopal Centre. She was really kind enough to hug me back. The meeting with these four began at that very instant, people from local media, leaders and other members of Ekta Parishad were all present there. They got emotional while telling about the dismal conditions that they had witnessed during their yatra. Everybody was feeling emotional at that point of time. All I could think is about the unconditional devotion these four women have shown towards their social work. In fact, the care with which they surrounded was also clearly visible when they told that Mrs. Jill Carr Harris, the founder of Ekta Mahila Manch was always in contact with these four. They appreciated the care of Mrs. Jill, who even went on tours abroad, did her best to keep a track of these four women.

One can observe that this yatra symbolises women empowerment that the movement aims at. It also puts forth that Ekta Parishad focuses on taking a ladder-approach that primarily begins with doing thorough groundwork. I noticed many members of the organisations joined Jan Andolan that this yatra communicated with. One of the points that I noticed was how Ekta Parishad impacts different organisations that are working with the marginalised. While discussing with many of the members, I got to know that the movement seeks to understand the language of those it interacts with. It tries to talk to them about how they see their issues and want to resolve it. Rather than imposing its own pathways to solutions, it first attempts to comprehend those options that the involved party has explored. After this step, the movement follows the directions the party is moving towards. Like this, any doubt of overtaking, capturing or gaining a control over the involved party gets dissolved. It is after building such a strong foundation of trust that the movement suggests new ways that can be taken and also offers its support in leading the involved parties. The discussed yatra is one of such attempts due to which many organisations joined Jan Andolan 2018. It can also be observed that Ekta Parishad emphasises on building relationships at different levels. It assures that connections are made on the basis of region, socio-political issues, tools and strategies that different organizations use, gender and socio-economic position in the society. The movement thus, focuses on intertwining the social, political and economic aspect of issues and parties it deals with. By participating in the next campaign of Ekta Parishad, called Jan Andolan, 2018, I observe if the movement brings all the three spheres in a cohesive framework or not. The next section, thus, discusses Jan Andolan, 2108.

2.4. PARTICIPATING IN JAN ANDOLAN (2018): GANDHIAN ‘POLITICAL’ IN THE MAKING

This section presents observations from my participation in Jan Andolan, 2018. This three day march based on the path of Gandhi suggests that Gandhi’s nonviolence and people’s power is alive today. In every nuance of this march the legacy of Gandhi was being reflected. The march began from Mela Maidan, Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh. Before taking to the roads, a two day people’s parliament was organized. In this people’s parliament, all 25000 people participated, along with renowned Gandhian leaders, social activists and ministers of the country. Media coverage was, for the first time, widespread and efficient.

Mela maidan (ground) was not closed altogether. There was no monopoly or exclusivity shown, as outsiders were allowed entry and even the local administration was not stopped from doing their daily routine checks. One of the noticeable observations right from the first day of the movement was the discipline of people. Even the late Gandhian, Mr. N.Subbarao, who was present in the meeting, complimented and felt proud of the strong self-discipline among the people, due to which, not even a single policeman was required to be present inside the tent, where people's parliament was going on. It is important to note that Ekta Parishad believes in self-correction rather than retributive methods to impose corrective measures. The movement upholds the view that the path of nonviolent struggle comes with a lot of challenges that can be met only when there is a behavioral transformation which requires looking inwards. The movement understands the path towards behavioral transformation to be complete when its nonviolent values affect an activist's '*Mansa, Vacha, Karmana*' (Mind, speech and action). Only when the transformation happens in all these three spheres, an activist and an organization should be considered incorporating nonviolence.

The other associated point that could be highlighted was the organized approach that every single person followed. People from all 25 states were so self-organized, that each state could be easily identified from far away. It may be questioned that how such groups, that are so different from each other, are fighting together? This brings us to the 'behind the scene' preparations of the movement. One of the binding forces that were applied was food. I saw how people from the northeastern states and from the southern state of Kerala prepared food together. They shared rice varieties of their respective states and served together. Many other states did the same. Building such a cohesive yet diverse group of members under one organization is commendable. Ekta Parishad could do it because of the movement's emphasis on prioritising democracy in the movement. This gets reflected in collective decision-making and steps taken to bring those decisions to fruition. By making democracy as the foundation stone of the organization, it eschews personal biases. The decision-making process takes place at four points forming a four-tier system. The first point is at the level of grassroots (district) actions which begins with participation of village units and expand upto the district level. The next level is that of state actions which follow up on the requests, feedback, suggestions and advice of groups of district units in a particular state. The State committee of Ekta Parishad, which consists of two nominated members from each district of the concerned state, acts on the requests, feedback, suggestions and advice of groups of

district units. The National level of actions are performed by the National Committee which is composed of all the State Committees of Ekta Parishad. In particular matters that call for urgent response, the National and State Committees together (called the General Assembly of Ekta Parishad) are consulted. The decisions made by the General Assembly are further communicated at the district level as well. Thus, through such a four-tier system of decision-making, the movement maintains a democratic ethos.

The other factor that joined them was the common green and white flag. This symbolism may seem frivolous at first instance, but the raising of flags together by 25000 people at small intervals spoke volumes of their togetherness. Apart from food and flags, were the words that made these 25000 people, one.

'Aadhi roti khayenge, phir bhi dilli jayenge', 'abhi toh ye angdai hai, aage aur ladai hai', 'hum apna adhikaar mangte, nahi kisi se bheek mangte', 'aadhi duniya naari hai, zameen pe davedaari hai', 'bandook nahi kudaal chahiye, har hath ko kaam chahiye', 'Nari ke sahyog bina, har sangharsh adhoora hai', 'sathi awaz do, hum ek hai', 'andhere mein teen prakash, Gandhi, Vinoba, JayPrakash' ... were some of the slogans that every single satyagrahi associated with and raised.

The common space where everybody stayed was also a spectacle of togetherness. On the first two days when the people's parliament took place, all 25000 people resided in tents that were numbered in order to accommodate different states. These states were given numbers from 1-25 and according to their numbers, they had to reside in those tents. For those two days, I stayed in a three room house, which was turned into an office, so as to contribute to the media team as much as I can. The schedule was to visit the mela maidan, meet people there for the entire day and in the evening come back and write reports on observations made. The ambience in mela maidan was festive. There was not a trace of negative silence simmering with negative emotions like hate, anger, revenge. This was the first instance that made me realize the beauty of a Gandhian movement. Even late nights were not filled with suppressing quietness.

Right from morning till evening people from different states performed dances of their different states in their respective tents. Everybody from all the states gathered around to see those performances peacefully. Colors, songs, slogans, and food of different varieties decorated the entire maidan. But this is what was visible to the naked eyes. When I went deeper into the layers, many heart-rending truths emerged. While encountering such harsh realities, all I could think is how these people have managed to muster all their strength for carrying out a struggle like this?

Their sharp awareness was commendable. They knew what was going wrong and also how to set it right. What channels to take, which authority to approach and what rights do they have. Fearlessness and self-confidence of these people, be it men or women, was striking. When asked about the course they would take, if their demands are not heard? Everybody replied that they will continue marching, till they do not get their demands fulfilled. Their faith in Gandhian technique of foot march was surprising, in the times when violent means of resistance are so pervasive. Smiles and peace on their faces were actually deceiving. Deep in their hearts were buried numerous stories of injustice, pain and oppression. As I went to tent number 23, 24 and 25 that accommodated people from Jharkhand and Chattisgarh, I was treated as a part of them. This was also a really touching aspect of the movement. I was being treated as normal, as a part of these people. Nobody looked at me with suspicion or with eyes that tagged me as a stranger. In fact, the most comforting thing was that I was not being noticed at all. I walked around as a part of the team, working and talking with people.

The irony was that I was being looked down upon, with a little suspicion, by those who formed a group of well -educated youth, some were pursuing graduation and some had already graduated. To my surprise, it was this place, amongst them, that made me feel alienated. The air of distrust got prominent when they started talking in whispers, turned the screens of their laptops away from my sight, and jokingly remarked that “don’t say anything in front of her, she is making a mental note.” Even my work as a research scholar was commented upon. One of the members of the media team questioned me in front of the other teammates and said on the very first day I had arrived, “So what is the use of your research work? As a researcher, what do you contribute?” I could see the sarcasm that he wanted to hide, while making it look like a very innocent question. This person, who was in his 30s and was himself leading a social campaign for the tribals, was not aware of the role of a research scholar, which seemed to be a little odd to me. But still, I played along and replied. The silence that filled the room when he asked this question was discomfoting and yet, my words were enough to feed sanity in that silent room. These people got convinced of my usefulness when I was allotted a task. This task was to send them instant notes in English from the Hindi speeches made during the two day sabha. I was appreciated by the same person who questioned my role as a researcher, later that night.

This movement, somewhere down line, also became a struggle for me, to test myself. Challenges that were not thought of, came from all the layers that the movement entailed. These small instances of distrust right at the beginning, right in the office where I was surrounded by well-educated and learned people made me determined to participate in the march. Being a part of a nonviolent movement really made me realize that it is not weapons but words that hurt you and even make you stronger sometimes.

Coming back to the point, instead of diverting myself, I focused on people that were there. I was wrong when I had assumed that I would be treated as their part after proving myself. On the very first day of the march right outside the tent when everybody was about to leave I was bombed with the following words by one of the members of Ekta Parishad, “It is the well- educated who have destroyed the country” and then when I had just begun to walk along with the marchers, I was called aside by one of the other members and was first remarked that, “ I do not think your topic is relevant, how are you contributing to our cause, it would have been better if you would have worked on an issue like land instead of the present topic... why should we share our resources with you?,” Well, it was absolutely surprising for me. Every word was something that I would not have expected to be coming out from the mouth of a member of a Gandhian movement, from a person who had thorough knowledge of the relevance of Gandhi and one who had been a part of this movement that called itself a Gandhian movement since its inception. But reality is always bitter than the thoughts. I did try to explain to him the significance of my work. Although, he seemed to be not too interested in my answer and marched forward while attending a call. So this is how the morning of the first day of my march began.

The march began on the third day. Day began with a gathering of all the participants in the mela maidan. Prayer session was led by Mr. N.Subbaro. Then, after breakfast, everybody gathered according to their respective numbers allotted to each state. The march proceeded with full vigor. Flags were waved and slogans were raised. People were organized into three lines. Jan nayak (people’s leaders) and Jatha nayak (group leaders) were holding banners of their respective areas. As mentioned many times in the thesis, it was observed that building leadership from the bottom is something that this movement considers to be sacred. The movement believes that every person possesses the potential of being a leader. It helps in realization of this potential by holding realization camps which involve three stages. In the first stage, efforts are made towards collective

realization by giving participants the opportunity to talk amongst each other. They discuss those social, political and economic issues that have been affecting them. Because the participants are from various regions and states, the outcomes of the discussion are as vibrant as the discussions. The next stage focuses on using dialogue as a means of expression. Participants are encouraged to reflect upon and answer those questions related to social, political and economic issues that arise during this stage of dialogue. The last or the third stage aims at exploring the possibilities of collective action. The collective expression during the second stage and collective discussion during the third stage equips enough strength in people to envisage an action based path that could be taken in the near future, say for six to twelve months. It is important to note here that the actions are not always equated with a struggle or a campaign, actions may mean constructive work or something else that may create a dent in the dismal conditions narrated during the discussions. Therefore, one can say that leaders are trained to move towards a constructive future by encouraging people to struggle or take constructive steps.

Coming back to the first day of one such campaign, Jan Andolan. The first day marked a march of around 18 km. One side of the road was blocked for satyagrahis to march while the other side was open for the traffic to move. Not even a single time did the marchers disturb the traffic. Onlookers kept inquiring about the march and many supported it. On the first day we passed a village. As we entered, people were ready with buckets of water, some had opened their verandah for the people to rest. At some intervals, the marchers were asked to sit. Everybody sat on the road in the scorching sun and burning concrete. This was an instance when I witnessed substantive and pure equality for the first time in my life. Every single person irrespective of their religion, caste, class, complexion, gender, education level and belonging to all those factors that could possibly create fault lines of discrimination among people were being demolished by this single gesture.

At every step, self-discipline was a factor that could be witnessed by the naked eye. None tried to break lines in which they were stationed, none argued with the leaders of their teams. I was in group 16 that was meant for guests. I had no line to follow and was allowed to walk in the gap that was there in between the lines. There was a moment when I had to go ahead of one of the groups. I was walking past the leaders of the group who tried to stop me and one of the other guests with his gestures. I tried telling him that I have to go forward in order to be with other guests. The person got agitated a bit and said why are you breaking the line? I could see the anger on the face

of the person, instead of arguing with him, I tried to understand that it is for the sake of following rules. But, yes, at that moment I was taken aback by the rude gesture which was meant to stop me by making the body of the person as a barrier and then, the sudden anger that was expressed through his voice. One of my teammates held my hand and took me ahead. There were many instances throughout my field work when I could observe that the positive values of peaceful and calm disposition, gender equality, eschewing of ego or false pride have not really percolated down to the grassroots to the extent that these Satyagrahis, as Akeel Bilgrami argues, could be called true exemplars (For more information, please read Bilgrami, 2011, 93-117).

During my visit to an ashram of Ekta Parishad, I witnessed one of the persons having an argument on phone in a loud voice. A strange thing was how the rest of the members were trying to cover up by forcing him to talk outside the centre. I think that there was no need of trying to veil such an instance, because ultimately that would not help in the long run. The two incidents narrated here made me understand why Gandhi emphasized on beginning the process of transformation from the self. Until and unless we improve ourselves, decide to understand moral values in-depth and put them to practice in our daily lives, we cannot expect to build a community that could inspire us to envision a truly peaceful and strong Gandhian movement.

Coming back to discussing the March, we stopped thrice on the first day and reached a highway, where at certain intervals placards of numbers 1-25 were hanging by the poles. The team responsible for preparing food had arrived earlier. As I reached I was met with tender words from Mr. Anil who gave me a smile and suggested that I fold my legs for a while, so that they could be stretched and pain reduced. As everybody reached, they were served food at their respective numbers. I was in the 16th. I washed my hands. It was around 5:00pm. There was a large ground where my teammates rested on a plastic gunny bag. I was also given a gunny bag, I went and rested with them under the sky, on this vast ground. Only after a few minutes, I went to take lunch.

I grabbed a paper plate on which images depicting throat cancer caused due to consumption of tobacco were printed all over. I do not know if it was unintentional, but I think that it was a subtle move to spread the message. For the rest of the two days, too, we were given the same kind of paper plates. Coming back to lunch on the first day, I was served by one of the teammates. There was rice, pulses, mashed potatoes and puris (fried chapattis). No bar on the amount of food to be

taken was placed. It was the first time in my life, when I could understand the value of each drop of water and food I got to eat that day. No spoons were to be used to have food. Sitting on a road, eating on a paper plate with images of throat cancer, without using a spoon was not something I often did. It was actually something that made me understand the grassroots. “*Aadhi roti khayenge, phir bhi dilli jayenge,*” was the slogan that continued in my ears at that time. The strength that I got from these words was immense. I had nothing to gain from this movement. I was not a part of them and yet, I felt that I have enough zeal within, to keep marching like every other 24999 people with me and have just one meal a day.

After lunch, everybody sat in their respective groups. I took a round and saw that there was no end to the enthusiasm among these marchers. Leaders of the respective groups reminded the rest of the rules that had to be followed. In some of the groups women were dancing on their regional songs. It was a truly peaceful environment all around. As it got dark, a temporary arrangement of light bulbs was made. Generators were placed to supply electricity. The day ended with sleeping on the side of the roads over the plastic sheet that was provided. It got a little chilly, so everybody covered themselves with something warm that they had brought with them. It was quite a tough night. Insects on the roads moving on the body plus the cold weather would really have been unbearable, if the sheer tiredness that my body was experiencing would not have made me fall to sleep.

The next morning began around 5:00am. It was still dark and chilly. While taking a walk, I saw many people clad in woolen clothes and covered with blankets talking about various social issues. I heard one of the conversations that were about how media and advertisements are creating an illusion among people. How the education system is not able to build character in people. I felt lucky to be amongst those people. They knew the difference between reality and sham, they knew how to differentiate right from wrong. The myth that those from the rural, village background are just uneducated, uncivilized masses was broken at that instance. Slowly and gradually as I kept observing the march, it was becoming clear how social, economic, political and ethical spheres were so closely connected to each other.

This side of the world seemed much better to me than where I am living. I think slavery to the illusions created by crony capitalism is more in the minds of those living in urban regions than

those from rural areas. There was a different kind of freedom in that morning. Along with these satyagrahis, I too was breaking many of the bondages. Gender inequality is one of the issues that need to be addressed substantively. During the entire march, I witnessed that most of the leaders (jan nayak, jatha nayak) were women. Women and girls belonging to all ages were present in the March, walking alongside men. I saw women who were as old as 80 and girls who were just six years old, marching as a satyagrahi. The only thing that I wanted to know was their driving force. Was it their helplessness that has made them stand and walk? Or was it the realization of their rights? I got a response in favor of the latter.

Although I did see many elderly women crying, while telling about how their land had been snatched away, they were still ready to fight for their rights. Some even said that P.V.Rajagopal (Rajaji) should enter politics. This was a noteworthy point for me. On the one hand, there were people in the upper echelons of Ekta Parishad who denied entering into politics, but, on the other hand, there were people from the grassroots who wanted the leader to enter into politics. This, what I think, needs to be discussed and debated in-depth. Such responses from the grassroots confirmed my assumption that the political realm, especially conventional politics, matter to the grassroots, as they form that section that gets impacted the most. Gandhi understood that social, political and economic are all inter-related as explicated in the first chapter. The present project of social movements to liberate grassroots from the chains of injustice will remain incomplete, till the voices of such grassroots that demand a change, not only, in social leadership, but also, in the political, go unheard.

Coming back to the march, during the entire march we sat on the road for just once. I appreciate youth, mostly from the Ansh society, that were so helpful and supportive throughout the march. It was the first time for most of them to have participated in such a long march. But their spirits were high, smiles on their faces and the feeling of care and support towards others was worth thanking. The credit goes to Ansh society, a youth organization, very close to Ekta Parishad. Values that they had put forth were clearly a gift of this Gandhian movement that always tried to involve them in their different endeavors. This movement gave me a chance to meet people that not only had strength, endurance, responsibility but also humanity.

On the second day, there was a long path that was covered with muddy water. I first thought that there must be another way to cross that path but actually there was not. I did not know what to do, although I had decided that I would not back out. When I saw everybody stepping into that puddle, without any hesitation, I marched ahead with them. This was a moment when I was actually moved by the power of numbers. The strength that numbers lend, automatically builds a sense of unity. It awakens the inner strength of every individual to cross any obstacle for pursuing the right path.

There were a lot of learning experiences in this movement. I was walking with a person who told me about how he decided to adhere to the path of contributing to the tribals. This person, who is in his early 30s, was a successful businessman and had every luxury at his disposal. He stayed away from home, but visited them regularly and contributed to the household finances as well. He thought that he was loved by all his family members. He assumed further that his family's love was the reason behind his family's agreement to all his decisions. But, one day, he was told that it was because of his anger that everybody agreed to all his decisions, without any arguments. He was let down in his own eyes and left the business to be handled by his elder brother. After this instance, he decided to withdraw from his luxurious life and visit a village in Madhya Pradesh, for some time. It was here that he realized his true calling. He mentioned that he found peace in working for the tribal communities there and so, decided to live there. It has been more than five years that he has been engaged in this work and with Ekta Parishad. Such similar stories were to be found at every second step of this movement. Perhaps this is what made this movement so vibrant. People from all walks of life, having different realities and stories marching together. The power to sacrifice, the realization, the intentional choice of helping others, the strength to walk with what they understood to be true, all such factors were present in every individual participating in this march.

On the second day, I was walking with camp no. 1. This camp comprised all the leaders, national conveners and important people of the movement. First horizontal line was for young girls from different regions to perform regional dance. Ambience was festive, as on the first day. I realized, on the second day, how dance, music and slogans were a tool to keep people motivated. They acted as a deviation from tiredness. Nobody was talking amongst each other, all were glued to sloganeering, singing, watching regional performances and listening to music. Slogans and songs, both kept the spirits of people high. They acted as constant reminders of the purpose of this march.

One of the songs had the following lyrics, “*Jal, jungle, zameen bina adivasi soona, beete nahi ekko dinna*”, every word had meaning, just like every step meant more than mere walking. The essence of the Gandhian movement that I could gather from the two days of marching was that ‘it was active.’ Every single step required you to be active, every word demanded thinking, and every gesture had to be sensitive towards others. I was able to understand that day, how an individual in a Gandhian movement had to look inwards, and then, merge the self with others as well.

It was a long day, we reached around 5pm again after marching around 12 km. The stay was besides a school. It was better than the first day, as there was at least a bathroom. The value of such things that often are taken for granted was getting clear to me. Food was served at every camp. I was with camp no. 16, so was Mr. P.V. Rajagopal who was lying on a mat laid on the ground. He got up at the time of lunch and decided to eat with some other camp, saying that “*ye guests walla khana acha nahi lagta*”. One thing that I could notice in Mr. P.V. Rajagopal is the compassion towards people belonging to any class, caste, gender and age group. He had no trace of false pride or pretentious exclusivity. Yes, food for guests was not the same as compared to the very simple food prepared by camps belonging to particular regions. Simplicity of this social leader was reflected through this very little decision. The day ended with sleeping on the plastic sheet, on one side of the road. Though I was too tired, the chilly weather did not really let me sleep. Here I was, one among 25000 people, whom I hardly knew a few days back, wide awake dealing with the cold night.

We had to get up early the next day. It was still dark when I got up. People had already started moving, so did my team. I saw the rising sun and was thankful for being able to stay strong till now. The day began with a lot of laughter. On the third day, something funny, yet serious, happened. We all were walking and one of my teammates who was wearing a red t-shirt was marching just ahead of us. Suddenly, we saw her running and cutting across the lines, and then, a big white bull appeared behind her. The marchers kept moving, except her, who was running all over the road. That bull, after making her run a few rounds of the same side of the road, left. Gradually, I realized that that day was the most difficult one for me. I had not slept properly, was absolutely tired and my body was aching a lot. Intense headache added to the troubles. I was walking with my team, two of my teammates held my hand and supported me. I am grateful that they were there.

One thing that I observed during this phase was the balanced approach they had towards treating other people's problems and towards continuing the movement. I had noticed it earlier too, but at that point of time I was not the one getting directly impacted by this approach. The spirit of 'the march has to go on' was maintained throughout. I am saying this because, after the three day march, I heard that an elderly woman died while marching, most probably a bike had hit her. Though she was taken to the hospital, yet, she did not survive. This news was not something that everybody knew. The incident must have been handled so carefully that the march was not affected at all.

It was an 8km march to a maidan in Morena. Many politicians were to address people that day on the ground. It seemed to be the longest walk of my life, honestly. I really wanted to give up, but something happened that really touched me and motivated me to continue. There was something that I noticed while marching for those three days. It was the technique of marching. So, the first day, everybody walked slowly, taking tiny steps, resting thrice. On the second day, the pace got a little faster and the resting points reduced to two. The third day, there were no resting points and the pace was quite fast.

Although, it needs to be mentioned here, that everybody was left free to rest as much as they wanted to, provided they catch up with the marchers. But, the frivolous competitive spirit that the city-life has internalized in me, could not be defeated. 'Always ahead of others' be it in traffic or in a Gandhian March, where nobody is actually a competitor, was ruling me. Even when I was sick, I did not want to give up on being with camp no. 1 and so were many of my teammates. I think they were also being dictated by the same rule. Human nature really gets affected by surroundings in which humans live for the most of their lives. Coming back to the march, I was walking very slowly, trying to catch up with the pace of others which was faster than the past two days.

As I was walking, I noticed an old woman in front of me. She was constantly trying to support her bag or jhola on her right shoulder, as it was slipping continuously. This had made her speed slow. I was getting irritated with it as the handling of the slipping bag continued for quite some time. All I could think is that why doesn't she take the bag on her left shoulder for a while, instead of struggling to put it on her right one only. My weakness had added to my irritation. I had decided

that if this continued for another minute, I would ask her to give the bag to me and take it back from me, once we reach our destination. In the next few minutes, I realized that I need to think beyond my own discomforts, be more patient and sensitive towards others. I noticed that she did not have her left arm. For a second, I was absolutely numb and really ashamed of myself for not being able to think that there may be a reason for her constantly trying to support her bag on the right arm. This was a moment that made me realize how weak I am, even when I have everything. I decided to finish the march thinking that when people with so many difficulties are continuing, then I have no reason to stop.

I continued and finally reached the ground where everybody had gathered for meeting the congress leaders. We were checked by the police administration and then allowed to go into the areas where we were supposed to sit. Satyagrahis sat in a disciplined, organized manner and everybody was told that the politicians would be arriving soon. Suddenly, a huge crowd of men just broke into the ground. The ground got densely crowded. The scene that was peaceful and organized turned into an utterly disorganized hustle bustle. Pandemonium was reigning at that point of time. People from Ekta Parishad vacated the places. Only a few were left under the tent, including me and my teammates. Men were standing on the chairs. On some of the chairs even three people were standing. It was absolute hooliganism. I could clearly see the difference between the 25000 satyagrahis and these people that had no shame in puncturing the peace and order that was maintained so far. What self-discipline, organization, respect for other people and gender equality could be understood by looking at the two groups of people, one I had walked with and the other I was sitting amongst. Somehow my teammates and I managed to get out of the ground. While going out, I was too scared as many people around said that a stampede was building up there. I just wanted to be alive at that point of time. I saw that all those from Ekta Parishad had come out of the tents and were sitting together in horizontal lines near the boundaries of the ground. The appreciation for their self-discipline multiplied looking at them. Finally, I was out of the crowd.

Somehow my teammates managed to leave for the place where everybody had to gather for the last time for lunch. It was again a huge ground where food was being served according to the numbers of each camp. I noticed that Ekta Parishad members had arranged buses and cars for the satyagrahis. The feeling of responsibility towards each fellow was really worthy of appreciation. I had food and met many people I had seen right from the first day of the people's parliament. Two

people who were from Assam called me aside to talk. They said they were brothers and suddenly got emotional. I held one of my brother's hands and asked the reason. They told me that they had been noticing me and were very happy to see me, because their younger sister looks just like me. Their sister was studying 'in the city' and only after finishing her studies will she be coming back. They said that now their sister would be studying just like I am doing. They said that looking at me relieved them, as if they met their sister through me. I could not utter a word at that point of time. I replied that I am also their sister. I thanked them for being so nice to me, like the rest of satyagrahis, who did not make me feel strange even once throughout the march. This, like many other memories, has got scripted in my mind and heart. I waved goodbye to Mr. P.V. Rajagopal came back with my teammates who were the only immediate support I had during the entire march.

This march was a living proof of how Gandhi's values are attempted to be resurrected in contemporary times. The way this march was conducted, dialogue and negotiation processes that kept happening at different levels, exchanges with the other parties were made, demands were put forth, interactions within the movement took place, all of them implicitly or explicitly seemed to have a moral and political undertone. Nevertheless, it is also to be noted that Gandhian values were not imbibed homogeneously by everyone. Therefore, as a group the Gandhian spirit could be seen but when focused upon individually there were a lot of loopholes in this respect. One of the reasons for such discrepancies at individual level could be the larger influence of the particularities from which these members come. Context, education, family values, personal orientation and motivation with which they join the movement, regional, social and political location, all of these factors influence an individual members disposition and the extent to which they subscribe and endorse Gandhian values of the movement. Hence, it can be said that on a group basis, Ekta Parishad has succeeded to a larger extent to concur with Gandhian values but at the level of the individual, a lot of work needs to be done. This is also because Ekta Parishad has a large coverage due to which it needs to be more active with respect to the matter discussed. I think that the 'political' that this movement is trying to create cannot be complete until an intense inner transformation of each member is ensured. It is true that it is a herculean task and requires years for doing so. It is also true that in order to work upon such a challenging task, the movement may have to make adjustments with respect to its greater focus on the issue. How Ekta Parishad forms its idea of 'political' would include how it makes linkages among social, political and political realms, which largely represent material domain. It also has to take care of how this 'political'

establishes an inextricable connection between the internal and external self of the individual at a spiritual and moral level.

This section, thus, presents firsthand encounters of the march so as to offer an analysis of how this movement is raising a nonviolent dissent, engaging with other parties and also how it engages with its own members. The next three sections focus on producing how through creative means like art, songs and movie, Ekta Parishad has been trying to make its space, spread its message and also keep innovating in the contemporary context.

3. USING CREATIVE MEANS: ART, SONGS AND MOVIE

The first section that is based on producing the salience of art in a Gandhian struggle, is based on the interview of Mr. Vikram Nayak, an artist who is closely associated with Ekta Parishad. This section pertains to understanding how art could be used to make sense of the struggle of the marginalised and how such struggle as well as movements make the artist view different political issues. Delhi-based artist, Mr. Vikram Nayak explains that his art gets influenced by the day to day activities of the tribes he witnesses while he is in the tribal regions. He further mentions that the paintings may not always represent a darker shade of tribal life. Having spent substantive time with Ekta Parishad, he has had a chance to understand the nuances of tribal life. He speaks of various bitter-sweet moments he had, while being with the tribes. Two of various experiences that he narrated are most striking. One of these is about how women of Baiga tribe, inscribe the body of every young woman with tattoos. They take these girls inside the forest far away from their home and with certain sharp tools create patterns on their bodies. The entire body is inscribed with these patterns and the body of the girl keeps bleeding for a few days. She is taken away from her mother and home, so that nobody from her family listens to her scream. The body is covered with ashes so that the wounds and gaps get filled. Mr. Vikram unveils the reason behind such a cruel practice. He states that “women of these tribes wear a minimal amount of clothing, they have dark complexion which shines” [In a telephonic interview at 6.30pm with Vikram Nayak, 2019]. Due to this reason, they easily get spotted by men in the forests, where they go to collect food and wood for fuel. Thus, in order to avoid the gaze of men that has caused a large number of rapes; such a custom has been made. The tattoos, all over the body, cover the skin of women. These tattoos get a greenish color from the mixture of ashes with the blood that comes from the wound. We often

get fascinated by the image of tribal women covered with tattoos, but the reality behind these tattoos, that artists like Vikram Nayak so lucidly captures, is rare to find. Another incident he narrates is that of the tribes in Chhattisgarh. He narrates that once he witnessed that no food was being cooked in one of the houses. On inquiring about it, he got to know that because a tree had dried down, food was not being cooked in the memory of that tree. He states that such sensitivity towards nature is hard to find in cities. According to him, it is very important to experience the tribal culture for an artist so as to produce them down on the canvas. His paintings are largely influenced by the culture that he experiences during his stay with the tribes. Not only through paintings but also through photographs, cartoons and video as well as audio clips, he has captured the tribal life.

Being closely associated with Ekta Parishad, he refutes the common perception that social movements or any agency that goes from the urban to the tribal or rural regions, are there to teach them something. Rejecting that social movements establish a bond with the marginalized to purge them, he asserts that it is important to consider the fact that those at the margins never ask for giving them something or purifying them. He believes that it is a modern, urban construct that makes us presume that the marginalized need something from us. In support of his argument, he gives an example of how almost all the forest related rules have been following a top-down approach. In his opinion, it is a wrong approach as it is based upon eschewing the idea of involving the population for which these laws, rules and regulations are made. Such an approach has veiled the truth that the root cause of maximum problems present in the tribal regions have been introduced by us, the modern, urban people, says Mr. Nayak.

He further explains that before these laws and rules that are alien to people at the margins, these people had their own ways of resolving their issues. He, thus, argues that while before, we, as modern outsiders intervened in the customs, lifestyles and habitats of the tribal people, the latter had their own solutions to their own problems. But now the tribals have to depend on 'Delhi' for resolving their problems. Such a trend has broken the close link between tribal people and nature, between ethics and villages. Self-sufficiency and self-sustainability of tribes that used to be strong pillars of their existence, has been demolished by the introduction of a modern definition of development. The kind of development that is being imposed on the tribal people has put morals on the backburner. What it has done is that it has invaded the forests with the aim of building

modern structures in the name of development, creating a gap between what these tribals need and what we are actually delivering them. Without taking heed of their lifestyles and thought processes, we have declared them as marginalized subjects to be mainstreamed by us. But do they really want to be city-dwellers? questions Mr. Vikram. Displacement has ruined sacred cultures of the tribal population. It has made them dependent on others. In addition to this, it has suppressed the element of sensitivity towards them and their cultures.

In order to revoke the sensitivity of those residing in modern, urban, developed regions, claims Mr. Nayak, he uses the medium of art that includes paintings, cartoons and movies. Through his art, he aims to educate youth about the reality of the tribal population. When asked if the reality that he is presuming to be of the tribal population, may actually be the reality that he chooses to perceive through his lens, then how justified would it be? Mr. Vikram Nayak replies and says that yes, there can be such a possibility. As an artist, he asserts that images are reactions from the artist's perception. These images flow from the artist's experiences gathered from reality. On being asked that even after being so closely related to Ekta Parishad, why has he not decided to become a member of Ekta Parishad? He answers by saying that it is not practically feasible for the artist to become a full-time member of a social movement. Moreover, he adds, that generally, social movements do not offer a stable platform for artists to be involved. While in this part of the chapter Mr. Nayak helps in understanding his perspective and also how art influences the struggle of marginalized sections, in the next section, a different medium of expression of dissent is discussed.

This second section focuses on the potential of songs on raising a dissent and also in unveiling the injustices pervasive in the present liberal capitalist framework. Songs have played a significant role in putting forth what Ekta Parishad stands for. The first noticeable point that one can identify is the Jai Jagat song. The lyrics of this song, written by Dukhayal, convey the spirit of this nonviolent movement.

प्रेम की पुकार हो, सबको सबसे प्यार हो,

जीत हो जहान की, क्यों किसी की हार हो। जय जगत...

न्याय का विधान हो, सबका हक सामान हो,

सबकी अपनी हो ज़मीन , सबका आसमान हो। जय जगत...

शांति की हवा चले, जग कहे वले – वले,

दिन उगे स्नेह का, रात रंज की ढले।। जय जगत...

The aforementioned lyrics reflect the aim of this Gandhian movement which is that of ensuring justice and equal rights over natural resources. It also emphatically asserts the message of nonviolence, peace and love. The spirit of universal victory instead of discrimination between a winner and a looser party reflects the true Gandhian value of creating a collective consciousness that believes in the significance of nonviolence in every realm.

Apart from putting forth their belief in nonviolence through songs, Ekta Parishad remarkably uses songs to draw a picture of how they perceive the current situation. Strong and sarcastic tone of the songs highlight the gross inequalities marking the world in different words.

जहाँ पता लग जाई ..धक् से।

बढ़े -बढ़े लोगन के महल -अटरिआ ,

और भाई ए. सी. अलग से। धक् से।

जहाँ पता लग जाई ..धक् से।

अपन गरीबन के टूटन -झोपड़िआ

फैन से पानी चुरे टप्प से। धक् से।

जहाँ पता लग जाई ..धक् से।

बढ़े -बढ़े लोगन के मोटर और गाड़ी

और भाई दारु अलग से। धक् से।

जहाँ पता लग जाई ..धक् से।

अपन गरीबन के टूटन एक साइकिल

टायर में काँटा गढ़े फँस के। धक् से..

The above lines clearly highlight the stark difference between rich and poor and the words ‘*dhak se*’ are a symbol of shock that this huge gap has led to the creation of two divisions within the same country. This division represents ‘India’ standing for the modern, rich and globalized citizens and ‘Bharat’ encapsulating the poor and the marginalized. The lyrics of the song depict how on the one hand, the rich are not content with just one of the luxuries but have always enjoyed more than required and the poor on the other hand, has been drowning in the abyss.

Through songs, Ekta Parishad has also been focusing on questioning democracy and putting forth the truth about the corrupt politicians, capitalists and faulty development.

किसी तरह पेट भरे, किसी तरह पेट भरे आदमी,

खेती की सारी ज़मीन सरकारों ने छीन ली,

बैंक और कम्पनी ज़मींदारों ने छीन ली।

धन-वन माफ़ियों का सरकारों पे राज है,

दुनिया समझती है, जनता का ये राज है

आसमान पे कब जाएं, देखो यहाँ नीति चलती है,

कुछ हैं खुशहाल, बाकी जनता हाथ मलती है

किसी तरह पेट भरे, किसी तरह पेट भरे आदमी।

नेताओं को फुर्सत नहीं हवालों - घोटालों से,

ज़िंदा हो या मुर्दा सभी पीड़ित इनकी चालों से,

किसी तरह पेट भरे, किसी तरह पेट भरे आदमी।

Even after seventy years of independence, the poor and marginalized are being exploited by those that hold a higher position in the hierarchy of power. The song above throws light upon such various sections that oppress the poor. The sheer apathy of capitalists and selfishness of the politicians have kept the poor and even those participating in social movements at bay from the

conventional political realm. The song also sets a sharp critique of the policies that cater to only a small proportion of the total population.

गाँवो -गाँवो से उठो, बस्ती -बस्ती से उठो,

जिसके हाथ में कुदाली है, कुदाली लिए उठो,

आदमी -औरत भी उठो, बूढ़े -बच्चे भी उठो।

इस देश की सूरत, किसानों की सूरत बदलने के लिए उठो

जिसके हाथ में बेलन लिए उठो,

गाँवों -गाँवों से उठो, बस्ती -बस्ती से उठो,

महिलाओं की सूरत बदलने के लिए उठो।

जिसके हाथ में झंडे हैं, झंडे लिए उठो,

गाँवों - गाँवों से उठो, बस्ती -बस्ती से उठो,

इस देश की सूरत बदलने के लिए उठो।

The above lines put forth immense hope for a change and reflect confidence that this change will come by struggling and standing up for our own rights. The song also highlights the inclusiveness of the movement. Ekta Parishad emphasizes participation of every section that is suffering due to the subversion of democracy today. The power of ordinary citizens, be male or female, be they from the most poverty-stricken section and be they are already on the path of bringing change gets highlighted in this song.

हर देश में तू हर देश में तू, तेरे नाम अनेक तू एक ही है।

तेरी रंगभूमि यह विश्व भरा, हर खेल में मेल में तू ही है।

सागर से उठा बादल बनकर, बादल से फूटा जल होकर के।

फिर नहर बना नदियाँ गहरी, तेरे भिन्न प्रकार तू एक ही है।

मिट्टी से भी अणु परमाणु बना, यह विश्व जगत का रूप लिया।

कहीं पर्वत, वृक्ष विशाल बना, सौंदर्य तेरा तू एक ही है।

The inclusivity that this movement aims at, is not only in terms of inclusion of humans from different sections of society but also the establishment of a sacred bond between humans and nature is a part of their scheme of inclusivity. The above song talks about such a unity between humans and nature by conveying a message that the Creator is present in different natural forms. Thus, we all have one spirit with nature that also encapsulates that same spirit which the Creator has instilled in us. While this section discusses how songs could be used to communicate the message of resistance nonviolently, the next section explores how, through visual medium, Ekta Parishad is spreading, trying to reach larger masses and make its own space.

This third section explains through a movie titled, ‘The October 6,’ (*The October 6*, Feb 20, 2021). Ekta Parishad has tried to communicate the demands that Jan Andolan, 2018 encapsulated and how through this medium it is trying to innovate itself to reach large masses. The movie ‘The October 6’ depicts the struggle for getting these demands fulfilled. It establishes the significance of October 6, 2018 in the history of nonviolent struggles in contemporary India. It is a depiction of how October 6, 2018 is not just any other day but a day that will be remembered whenever the indispensability of grassroots movements will be discussed. The movie puts across the message of 25000 landless farmers in 25 minutes with a remarkable choice of words, picture, songs and narratives. It is a result of constant and serious hard work of Varoun R and others in the team.

Varoun R has been a filmmaker who has traveled around all over India. In the past he has made documentaries related to land rights and has covered the successful story of the Forest Rights Act struggle by the Gond Adivasis. His association with Ekta Parishad is not new as he has been engaged with them in making films on Jai Jagat. Varun has been involved in filmmaking, especially in the social sector, with the aim of producing such work that has a huge impact on the masses and which proves to be path breaking in the future. Therefore, it can be said that this young filmmaker has been focusing on bringing forth fresh perspectives in the field of visual cinema by capturing social activism on screen. He is a filmmaker who is making his own mark in the filmmaking sector by choosing non-violent activism amidst the plethora of films that have been following the conventional path of projecting violence in today’s world. Encapsulating the journey of Jan Andolan, 2018, right from October 2, 2018 and even the pre-events in a few frames, required

multiple dialogues, discussions and numerous samples before finalizing the complete layout of the movie. The movie is made with precision so as to carefully stitch the details of the Andolan, culminating in October 6, within 25 minutes. This movie is as much a part of the nonviolent struggle itself as the march is. This section, thus, presents how technology, social media is being employed by a Gandhian movement like Ekta Parishad to communicate its message and also to reach people from different sections of society in the present times. The next section deals with critical analysis of the entire movement from varied angles.

3. MISSING LINKS: LIMITS OF A GANDHIAN SOCIAL MOVEMENT

From the previous chapter as well as from this chapter it could be noticed that understanding ‘political’ of Gandhian Social Movements like Ekta Parishad requires attention on multiple fronts. The conceptualization of ‘political’ by these movements is a dynamic process. It avoids following the set pattern of conventional ‘political’ symbolized by political parties, government and election process. Although these movements, like political parties, believe in the constitution of the country, the major difference is that the former emphasize on substantive following of the constitution rather than having a formal approach. Thus, there seems to be less dependence on laws and acts because these do not always do justice with the constitutional provisions. It can be said that their guide in laying the blueprints of ‘what is political’ is the constitution. In this context, a manual by Ekta Parishad (India) states that,

Nonviolent struggle is rooted in the constitutional beliefs and the respect towards the state and its laws. Even when one is challenging the implementation of certain laws or policies, at the basic level, it is essential for each citizen to adhere to the common values enshrined in the constitution. The struggle to bring a change in the policies and the legal and social framework of the time. Further, in some specific cases when the laws or policy or intentions of the State are against the constitutional values, Ekta Parishad follows the path of civil disobedience on many occasions (Parishad, 2020, 23).

Hence, they are moving with those goals that the freedom fighters in the Constituent Assembly had laid down in or via the constitution. It is a significant indicator that the independence that has been achieved, has not yet materialized for every section of the society in India, due to which a recourse to Civil disobedience is made necessary.

These movements focus on marginalized and suppressed sections. Their ‘political’ revolves around issues that affect the marginalized. With globalization, capitalism and neoliberalism, the issues have been burgeoning and becoming more diverse and lethal in their impact. One of the

most common basis for their dissent is that the state and its institutions have been supporting agents of neo-liberalization that have negatively impacted the development of the economically poor and socially marginalized population of the country. Following Gandhi's lines, they refute market-based logic of defining development, democracy and politics. While political parties and governments have been siding more with the capitalists, these movements have tried to give voices to those who have been at the receiving end of this spectrum. These movements have attempted to unveil exploitation that is being done in the name of welfare politics. Their 'political' is embedded in welfarism, no doubt, but the meaning they give to it is different. For them, welfare does not equate with dependence on the state. It is closely related to self-dependence and empowerment.

Just as Gandhi said that swaraj begins from self, Gandhian Social Movements like Ekta Parishad also believe that welfare politics asks for action towards swaraj by enabling the self to be empowered enough to ensure one's welfare. This argument may seem to have an inclination towards individualism and self-interest. But, what they mean by it becomes clear when we understand that welfare of one is inclusive of welfare of all. This means that these movements emphasize on seeing one- self as a part of the whole and then, take actions accordingly. Therefore, the 'political' of Gandhian Social Movements like Ekta Parishad gives significance to the collective, to those elements that are closely associated with the community values, like their culture, institutions, living space and spiritual beliefs. Looking from the lens of the collective, they aim to create room for their self-expression without the fear of being suppressed, discriminated against or simply, homogenized or mainstreamed. Thus, when these movements define 'political', concepts like equality, liberty and unity are understood in a way that is different from the mainstream connotations of these political terms.

Equality does not mean homogeneity for them. It means the freedom to express their community's uniqueness. Difference among communities needs to be celebrated, according to them. Concerns regarding questions of self-determination and self-expression as a community becomes significant. A substantive notion of equality not only calls for respecting the differences but also incorporates elimination of such marks of inequalities that are imposed on them socially. For instance, it has already been mentioned that asking about caste and education is not considered appropriate in Ekta Parishad. Thus, which inequalities have to be appreciated and taken into consideration and which are to be avoided is a decision that the movement has to make. Hence, unity for them is to be struck

on the basis of their differences and common injustices. These movements can be seen as movements for liberation. These movements realize that freedom has not been achieved for all. There are those who still have been enslaved by neo-imperialism. They also assert that the changes that need to be made for achieving substantive freedom can come only through nonviolence.

Nonviolence, for these movements, is not passivity but they believe in active nonviolence. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that they are building up a conception of ‘political nonviolence’ at the nucleus of which is the vision of a world that is premised upon the aforementioned definitions of equality, liberty and unity achieved through nonviolent struggle. ‘Political nonviolence’ has to do with achieving political goals not by directly participating in all the political processes, one example being that they do not want to fight elections as a political party, but by mobilizing people in the social sphere on the basis of their political identity and around political issues. For instance, one of the demands of Ekta Parishad is that women should be given the status of ‘farmer’ because like this they would not be eschewed from getting benefits of the policies framed particularly for farmers. The movement unveils that because mostly, a farmer is considered to be a male that is why benefits accrue to him rather than the actual tiller of land when these males migrate to cities in search of jobs. The policies are, thus, framed from a male –farmer point of view, which needs to change, according to Ekta Parishad. A few things that need to be noticed before theorizing about political nonviolence are as follows:- ‘Political’ that this ‘political nonviolence’ identifies with, is the ‘political’ which Gandhian Social Movements like Ekta Parishad coincide with, understanding of which is being developed in this research work. Rather than, looking at ‘political’ in the conventional terms that creates exclusivity from the social, economic and spiritual, the ‘political’ that Gandhian Social Movements like Ekta Parishad relate to is expansive as it attempts to include the other three mentioned spheres. Although, this does not mean that the movement overlooks, avoids or tries to fight against the conventional political institutions and processes.

It can be said that Gandhian Social Movements like Ekta Parishad do not seek to start a revolution to overthrow the state and its institutions so as to ultimately, capture the position and power of the state. According to P.V.Rajagopal, what Gandhian Social Movements want is to keep working towards achieving radical change by walking on the path of nonviolence. This is to be done either moving parallel to the state or if possible, with the state and its institutions. Therefore, ‘political

nonviolence' gives scope for considering negotiations, dialogues, adjustments (only to an extent) with the state or creating pressure over its institutions to make way for the movement's activities.

It is also to be noted that Ekta Parishad do not aim at keeping its members aloof from the political events, processes that form a part of the conventional political understanding. In fact, there have been many members from the movement that have become sarpanch, ministers and have gone into government services. Thus, 'political nonviolence' can be said to be accommodative of such interactions between the politics of the movement and the conventional politics. It lends a dynamic course to the shaping up of concepts like 'nonviolence', 'political' and 'political nonviolence' in the movement.

Similarly, 'nonviolence' which Gandhian Social Movements like Ekta Parishad signify is not the one based on limited vision of nonviolence as a mere strategy but also nonviolence as a principle. Borrowing the latter aspect from Gandhi, the movement seeks to establish a link between the two. Due to this reason, it needs to be noticed that 'political nonviolence' starts getting shaped even before the struggle gets visible in the public sphere. Before plunging into the public sphere, nonviolent ethics begin percolating down its members. It is done by this movement in the form of 'rachna' which is closer to constructive work, realizing people's power, educating its members in nonviolence as a way of life, empowering them to start creating ripples of change right from their domestic settings and so on. It is also to be understood that 'nonviolence' adopted by these movements aim at targeting the root cause of violence. In the manual by Ekta Parishad it explains that,

The physical violence that we see in our society is just the tip of the iceberg. In such cases, it becomes crucial to observe the underlying violence that is not apparent, but is the root cause of the structural violence. Often, the visible forms of violence are but a small fraction of the structural violence, which is mostly invisible. There needs to be deeper deliberation on this during the nonviolent movements (Parishad, 2020, 27).

It can be understood from the above explanation that Gandhian Social Movements like Ekta Parishad can contribute to shifting a democracy from being merely formal towards being substantive. One of the important ways in which Ekta Parishad strives for maintaining a meaningful democratic base is through dialogue. It ensures dialogue is given significance at multiple levels. The first level is that of having a dialogue with oneself. As already stated, the movement emphasizes a behavioral transformation. This kind of transformation is possible only when one is able to introspect and converse with oneself. Having an internal dialogue with one

self helps the member realize her or his own potential of becoming a nonviolent activist as well as a leader. Faith in nonviolence gets stronger as the process of dialogue with oneself is encouraged to happen often in continuity. After this, a dialogue with like-minded individuals and organizations helps in strengthening collective power to bargain with those who do not agree with the movement. For instance, Jan Andolan 2018 became an opportunity where national as well as regional organizations came together with Ekta Parishad to demand land reforms from the ruling government. All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), National Campaign on Dalit and Human Rights (NCDHR) were some such national organization that joined the movement's struggle for land rights. A parallel stage for dialogue that Ekta Parishad asserts is that along with establishing conversation with the organisations that support the movement's cause, it is important to have dialogue with the policymakers or government and its authorities. It believes that in order to talk to the government, it is important to choose representatives from within the movement who possess qualities of a good negotiator. Empathy, historical understanding of the movement, ability to remain calm in difficult situations and the capability to garner and maintain faith of people in the movement are some of the qualities that Ekta Parishad considers to be important in a negotiator to be good. The movement believes that dialogue with the government needs to be consistent so as to reach a certain solution. It further understands that the solution achieved by having a dialogue with the government may not always mean complete acceptance of the movement's demands. Dialogue, according to Ekta Parishad, is a 'win-some, lose-some' process. Therefore, instead of having a rigid attitude, the movement supports a more accommodative approach while having a dialogue with the government. Along with the government, Ekta Parishad considers dialogue with the general public to be important. With the help of local music, street plays and weekly markets, the movement tries to strike a conversation with the local masses and attempts to convey the message directly to them. The movement understands this step to be significant because it helps in building public pressure on the government.

But at the same time, it needs to be mentioned here that the very same movements could also subvert the democratic values if the members become misguided, selfish and compromise the basic ethics on which they stand upon. Such a discount on Gandhian values may indicate towards taking nonviolence as a mere strategy rather than as a principle. From the interviews and observation of the leaders of the movement, it was possible to understand how Gandhian Social Movements like

Ekta Parishad shape a 'political' of its own but it was also observed that it also had a few shortcomings. Some of the general limitations that were observed are explicated first, which is then followed by explanations of associated points.

The movement as an organization creates suspicion of its tendencies to institutionalize itself, which has its own drawbacks. Similarly, wide coverage of this movement as it has members not only at national level but also has international partners makes it doubtful if the principle of nonviolence is being percolated to all its members or not. If it is not the case, then, I think the movement is more of a nonviolent movement than a Gandhian Movement that the founder members of the movement claim it to be. Moreover, the spiritual, metaphysical link which Gandhi established with truth and nonviolence did not come out during the field visit and ethnography. Along with this, an issue that the movement needs to resolve is that of maintaining a seamless connection between its members as Gandhians and as members of marginalized sections. The issue has been raised here because I had seen during my visit, the difference in behavior of people from the grassroots when they switch from one role to the other. Thus, they would be all calm and ready to listen within the premise of the ashram and when they would be out of those boundaries, they would adhere to unequal patterns set by patriarchy, casteism and so on.

During the entire field work, it was also observed that the members of this movement, though aware of the dismal condition of the political realm today, had no interest in getting involved in the same. Though these movements claim to have their own kind of politics, the contours of it have not been so well-established so far. Gandhi had always emphasized on establishing a holistic relationship between social and political but today social movements try to maintain a distance between the two. Such a stance can stagnate the growth of democracy. Another issue that surfaced during the fieldwork was that the members from grassroots seemed to be more bothered about the salary than their role as social workers. So they would deliberately choose those areas where their work is being rewarded with more salary, neglecting regions that did not give them the opportunity to earn more. Such an attitude is very alarming because it may lead to the same kind of corrupt practices, negligence of duties and reinforcement of subtle injustices that they have been fighting against these many years. During the workshop when every single person had to stand and tell what they think about Jai Jagat and how can they contribute to the same, one of the members stood

up and said that he will try his best to be able to participate because all he wants is to go abroad, “*Mujhe toh bas bides jana hai*” (All I want is to go abroad).

The other major issue that cropped up during the fieldwork was about gender equality. Although participation of women increased in Jan Andolan and though women are empowered, aware individuals yet the relationship between men and women was unequal. The Ekta Mahila Manch was founded so as to bring improvements in such a situation but it was accepted by women there that a very little improvement has been achieved so far. Treating such inequalities is central to these movements if they wish to fulfill the vision of bringing about substantive and sustainable changes. There was an instance when Shraddha Kashyap, the only women national convenor in Ekta Parishad was narrating her experiences in the Mahila Bhu Samvad Yatra, she was interrupted by one of the male members, first, who stood on her right side, then, he was joined by another male members who came to her left side and there she was in the middle, she was given a chair and sat in the middle. The specter was absolutely disappointing as here was a brave woman who faced the odds just to complete her journey of 11000km, being subdued by two men. In addition to this, an observation that was perplexing but visible when looked into closely was that there seemed to be a dichotomy between the issue and the Gandhian principles.

The Gandhian path was used more for instrumental gains than as a way of life or with a vision of creating a society based on moral values shown by Gandhi. This finding was disconcerting one as this trend was not spread throughout. It made me realize that the movement can be seen through three different layers. The first layer was composed of the leader and the national convenors who had thorough knowledge of Gandhian principles in theory as well as in practice, the second was that of the intermediaries that included local convenors of different centers or ashrams, journalists and students. This section had a really mixed approach towards dealing with bringing Gandhian principles to life. There were some who were more bothered about getting done with the business they were assigned, some considered that it is the issue that is more important than anything else and while others were concerned if the theory related to Gandhi has been grasped thoroughly or not. The most worrying thing was that it was the level of the grassroots to which Gandhian values had not really percolated. It was as if they had divided their view into two. One of the lenses through which they saw the reality pertained to their placement in the Gandhian movement, in which lessons of nonviolent resistance were significant but there was another lens which was

embedded in the present world infested with structural inequalities in the form of discrimination on the basis of gender and economic status.

Moreover, it was observed that those at the grassroots treated the leader, P.V.Rajagopal as their God, when I asked a few of the women in march if they would like Ekta Parishad to become a political party, the reply was: *“Rajaji toh humare bhagwaan hain, woh jesssa kahenge wesse hi karenge hum.”* Such a blind following of the leader depicts the failure of the movement in instilling Gandhian values and principles in the lowest rungs of members. This shortcoming, if not redressed may destroy the entire structure of the movement as it is primarily these members from the grassroots who are ultimately supposed to take the Gandhian movement further, sustain it and transform it by making the foundations stronger. Apart from the aforementioned points, having a strong inclination towards education, I could not skip observing how academic learning has not been given much significance. I think the movement needs to be more open to academic and institutionalized education without, of course, forgoing the relevance for informal, non-institutionalised learning. Instead of bifurcating the two it is important that this movement can make its presence in both so as to begin a dialogue between the both.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, it can be said that the role of these movements in contributing to substantive change at their own levels cannot be denied. These movements have started understanding the rapidly changing nature of society and amidst complexities have attempted to bring about various kinds of innovations to keep the Gandhian legacy alive and transcend pervasive violence in the present context. This has been possible because these movements have been dynamic and active in giving shape to ‘political nonviolence’ which encapsulates how different the ‘political’ of Gandhian Social Movements is from conventional ‘political.’ Still, it needs to be mentioned here that Gandhian Social Movements have to go a long way before Gandhi’s legacy of nonviolence as a principle and as a strategy is understood and practiced meaningfully in the different realms that includes, spiritual, political, social and economic.

CONCLUSION

There are several Social Movements in India which claim to follow Gandhian philosophy. They are involved in raising a number of critical issues concerning common people and many of them have undertaken successful mobilisation for significant policy interventions. Their claim to be Gandhian is mainly based on the idea of adopting non-violent means like satyagraha, dharna and public demonstrations to fight against gross injustice. Of late, many of them have started thinking that their social mobilization, no matter how massive they are, does not have the desired impact on the policy makers. As a consequence, in the last few decades several efforts have been made to explore the possibility of some kind of dialogue with the political process. One can look at the Anti-Corruption Movement of Anna Hazare and the culmination of this into the making of a political party, which finally could form a government in Delhi with a sweeping majority, with this issue in mind. However, as it is widely known that many of the leaders of these social movements do not agree to the idea of forming a political party, they still think that dialogue with the political process is necessary. I think these movements are facing a severe dilemma of whether a social movement should be openly political or not; should they take a position in favor of one or the other kind of political formation during the elections or remain neutral on such occasions.

The aim of this research has been to explore the source and consequences of this dilemma faced by social movements. Primary questions that the research addresses are: why do the Gandhian social movements face the dilemma between political and social? Can we consider the de-totalisation of ontology separating social from political advocated by the Gandhians a source for this dilemma? In addition to these primary questions, the thesis has also focused upon a few secondary yet significant concerns like: Do the movements in the grassroots reflect this dilemma in their everyday practice? How do they try to resolve it? Does the resolution lead to any innovation in Gandhian philosophy and strategy of social change? It is through these primary and secondary sets of questions that an attempt is made to form an idea of 'political' as envisaged by Gandhi and Gandhians. This is done by employing methodological pluralism. The first two chapters of the thesis extensively explain an emergentist, experiential and holistic conception of Gandhi's 'political' which can be encapsulated under the idea of an 'embedded political.' The term 'embedded political' is one of the primary contributions of the thesis as it presents the totalized ontology that Gandhi advocated while framing his political philosophy. The idea of an 'embedded

political' imbibes a dialectical framework of understanding 'political.' Gandhi's 'political' is an 'embedded political' because it takes cognizance of this framework and thus, establishes an inextricable link between the social and the political. Gandhi's constant learning about self, truth and ahimsa during different phases of his life metamorphosed into an idea of an 'embedded political.' This idea got further refined as he started putting it in practice through his local and national struggles against British rule. Thus, Gandhi's 'political' which is actually an 'embedded political' is also a dynamic idea that kept evolving as Gandhi kept moving to different chapters of his life.

In the next three chapters, the thesis aims to explore how this idea of 'embedded political' is being practiced by the Gandhian Social Movements in post independent India. The chapters are based on a qualitative analysis of Ekta Parishad, an India-based Gandhian social movement. Through interpretive, and participatory research methods the three chapters unearth a kind of 'political' that seeks to be in the bounds of the constitutional framework of the country but also aims to make a space for substantive dissent so as to address injustices done to the downtrodden in independent India. It can be said that a sort of 'political nonviolence' has been taken as a foundation of such dissent. This kind of nonviolence has to do with achieving political goals not by directly participating in all the political processes, one example being that they do not want to fight elections as a political party, but by mobilizing people in the social sphere on the basis of their political identity and around political issues. Political nonviolence seeks to assimilate truth searching through nonviolent tools like dialogues, dharnas, satyagraha and so on for bringing the marginalized to justice and holding the unjust system accountable without the intention to topple the government. 'Political Nonviolence' is an indispensable element of the contemporary social movements as has been deciphered from the three chapters. Although these movements separate themselves from the conventional electoral politics, still it would be wrong to say that they do not have any conception of the idea of 'embedded political.' But, it is also to be noted that this idea can be realized substantively in practice only when the dilemma that arises with the repulsion of Gandhian social movements towards a direct intervention in the present political system based on party system or electoral politics is dealt with. It needs to be handled in a way which gradually brings the conventional political values closer to Gandhi's idea of 'political' that can be understood as an 'embedded political.'

I have been trying to explore if the source of this dilemma lies in the Gandhian stream of thinking, which emerged in the post-independence period articulated by two disciples of Gandhi: Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan. Gandhi, it seems, had a more complex idea of relation between social and political, therefore, his strategy of anticolonial struggle was constantly walking on two legs, supporting each-other. Whereas, after independence, some of the leaders following Gandhian philosophy joined Congress Party and followed the political path and others joined social movements. Particularly, Vinoba and JP decided to follow the social aspect of Gandhi's experiments of social intervention in the freedom struggle. I have attempted to analyse if this is what created this dilemma which continues even today. It is interesting to note that though JP and Bhave adopted the route of social movement after the independence, during the Emergency they had two different kinds of responses. Bhave considered India Gandhi as a great leader and the Emergency as a necessary correction for the future of democracy, whereas, JP led the political movement against the regime.

According to Thomas Weber, the contrasting elements -the spiritual and the political- integrated in Gandhi, were separated as reflected in movements led by Jayaprakash Narayan and Vinoba. . He asserts that, "while JP is the follower of Gandhi's techniques which proved politically successful, Vinoba is the follower of Gandhi's ideals" (Weber, 1994, 206). In early 1958, Vinoba laid down what he saw as the four principles of Satyagraha. These four principles were that Satyagraha is positive, not negative; it should proceed from gentle to gentler to gentlest; there should be happiness on the mere hearing of the word 'satyagraha'; and, finally, that there should be no insistence on the part of the satyagrahi as insistence should come from truth itself. Like Gandhi, Vinoba placed high importance on 'swaraj', or 'self-rule', a concept both of them defined in terms that encompassed far more than the mere political. For Vinoba, the term meant ruling the self, which, according to him, was impossible if one was under some other person's command. Vinoba explicates that in order to neutralize the violent forces and to arouse the world's conscience Gandhi's nonviolence had to take on 'more subtle and finer forms.' Satyagraha could no longer afford to 'create agitation or tension in the minds of the opponent', it had to avoid a 'collision of minds and seek harmony in thought.' Until change was brought about through understanding and acceptance, rather than through imposition, 'the seeds of violence, imperialism and world wars would not be rooted out' (Weber, 1994, 208). The explanation so far makes it clear that Vinoba

followed Gandhi in terms of his ideals representing a spiritual path. He condemned the party system which was incidental to his distrust of government in general.

Vinoba is convinced that the state is a synthetic artifice imposed on society. It is from here, that he rejects the whole apparatus of parties and elections so basic to parliamentary democracy. Vinoba perceives political parties as institutions that place loyalty to party interests above loyalty to truth or conscience, as institutions that maneuver for power at any cost, and, worst of all, as institutions that exacerbate differences between castes and creeds in such a way as to make it difficult for people to come together even for a good cause. As for elections, they amount, so to speak, to giving the sheep the right to choose their shepherd. This may be all right as far as it goes but does not, in Vinoba's phrase, "lead to any change in the condition of the sheep" (Vieg, 1962, 40).

In contrast to Vinoba, Jayaprakash Narayan had spent most of his life as a major actor on the political stage. At one point of time, Jayaprakash Narayan joined the Bhoodan Movement led by Vinoba but unlike Vinoba, he soon embraced the position of Gandhi, the politician over Gandhi, the saint. Being disillusioned with Vinoba's interpretation of Gandhian activism in terms confined to constructive work, JP began defining Satyagraha as something different from persuasion and conversion. It now became a 'powerful weapon' to be used when those methods failed (Weber, 1994, 120). His assessment of the progress of the bhoodan/ gramdan campaigns following his work at the grassroots saw him commenting that 'Conditions seem to be ripening in the context of our present programme that may necessitate larger-scale satyagrahas' (Weber, 1994, 120). Like Gandhi before him, he was now ready to place civil disobedience before constructive work. JP noted that although Vinoba seemed to hold that 'systematic change in the political order could be brought about without a struggle, even a peaceful struggle' has not succeeded. JP pointed out that although he had renounced power politics to join Vinoba, he 'did not rule out the possibility of a nonviolent, non-cooperation movement or satyagraha on the lines of civil disobedience, if Bhoodan movement did not attain its targets' (Weber, 1994, 212). While Vinoba strove for perfect nonviolence, JP spoke of social change through a mass movement of peaceful people's power (Weber, 1994, 212).

As their respective definitions of Satyagraha became so divergent, problems were bound to arise for the Gandhian movement that they dominated. The Gandhians did not have to confront problems inherent in the dichotomy between the spiritual and political while Gandhi was alive holding them together, and did not successfully grapple with them on his passing. Vinoba's gentle/gentler/gentlest form of nonviolent action is the only one that is completely consistent with Gandhi's spiritual ideal. This method did not satisfy those who wanted to act on a more political and immediate plane. They were of the view that Vinoba's approach in some respects did not apply to problems in the 'real' world. And it is possible that this approach is doomed to being seen as an objective failure, while subjectively being a complete success. The assertion that subjective success is the same as objective success, because of the underlying unity of all, is not satisfactory to many. For them it is either only partially true or is only true in a long time-frame and the world is moving so fast that perhaps ideals must undergo some subordination to the 'need of the hour.'

Gandhi, given his emphasis on means over ends, would not agree in principle but this is exactly what he did in practice time and again. And here, in this unresolved contradiction lies one of the main reasons for the still unhealed split in the Gandhian movement. It is possible to see Vinoba's gradualist approach as being ultimately correct in a deep Gandhian sense- while still maintaining a desire for tangible results. The path of ignoring the government, of working outside its structures and letting it wither away, can only be achieved if enough people follow it through, not merely the odd saint. The result-oriented confrontational approach has a far better chance of mobilizing the masses and seems to have a better chance of at least limited success, and also a greater chance of ultimate failure. Its success cannot make the government wither away or achieve the 'other worldly' ideals inherent in 'pure' Satyagraha, it can only replace the political structure with a less oppressive one.

Confronting the power structure directly, however, means that the government cannot ignore its antagonist and ensures that all the forces at its disposal will be directed at crushing any direct opposition. Some opted for the political approach of JP hoping that it could succeed, while maintaining the feeling that it could provide the ushering in of Gandhian ideal, in the long run. Since the failure of the Total Revolution the conundrum involved in the 'this-worldly' vs. the 'other-worldly' manifestations of Satyagraha is still being pondered over. It is important to explore this question now as in today's India there is a proliferating perceived notion among the leaders of

these social movements that political intervention is required. However, they are not sure if they should join a formal political movement. So, the dilemma persists. Throughout the thesis, it can be observed that Ekta Parishad has been facing such a dilemma too. Although it tries to integrate the social and political on many fronts, these aspects mostly remain within the sphere of being a social movement.

The integration breaks as soon the question of dealing with the present political system arrives by entering directly into this system. It is also true that the movement like many other Gandhian movements have been working constantly to build its own idea of 'political.' In the third, fourth and fifth chapters, it can be observed that this idea largely borrows from all three, Gandhi, Vinoba as well as Jayprakash Narayan. If one focuses on this idea of 'political' being framed by Gandhians in isolation, then, I think this idea brings a lot of hope for a future based on Gandhian values and an emergence of a kind of 'political nonviolence.' But, when it is seen along with the present reality, then, a lot of dissonance gets reflected. There are two parallel ideas of 'political' that are moving. The first is the conventional idea of 'political' based on party system, voting and elections and the second is the Gandhian idea of 'political.' These two are, as just mentioned, 'parallel' and the Gandhian idea of 'political' is still in the making, while the other one is a well-established notion. While on the one hand, Gandhians wish to stay outside the latter, but on the other hand, they strike a dialogue with the same.

The conundrum that gets created due to such an approach is not that simple to identify but it does present the possibility that there may be a trade-off of one for the other in the long run. What I mean by this is that there are greater chances of one getting engulfed by the other. The dominant idea that the present political system is adhering to, may suppress the Gandhian idea of 'political' if Gandhians remain in the trap of this dilemma. Although, the picture may not be so full of despair, if Gandhians understand how the integrative value of Gandhian politics that is embedded in moral or spiritual base could be spread to the larger masses. This task needs to be carried in a way that the conviction in Gandhian politics could be transferred from Gandhian leaders to the larger population. Indeed, it is a very challenging task. The first test that Gandhians may have to pass is how they spread their political ideas which may in the future manifest as 'political nonviolence' and 'embedded political' in the present political system. They need to enter this system to move forward in the direction of establishing the Gandhian idea of 'political.' It is not about pitching

one against the other. It is about reckoning with the need of the hour. Failures of the present idea of 'political' are not hidden from anybody. If not replaced by a Gandhian idea of 'political', it may happen that persistence of violence that has encompassed everyone in its vicious circle would never break and the marginalised would always remain at the receiving end. In order to transcend such a grim reality it is indispensable that social movements try resolving the dilemma. Probably a new kind of dialogue is necessary to resolve this dilemma, it need not be only abstract but on the concrete issues involving scholars and activists dealing with such matters.⁹

⁹ One such dialogue could be watched on [FCSR Dialogue on Nonviolence and Terrorism with Dr. Mark Juergensmeyer](#)

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Appendix 1

Mr.P.V.RAJAGOPAL

After independence two sets of people went into two directions. One set of people went to Delhi to govern the country. Another set of people went to the rural areas of the country to make the democracy vibrant by increasing people's participation, people's democracy and so on. Vinoba Bhave was the leader of the second set of people. He soon realized that in regions like Telangana violent armed struggle was emerging on the question of land. He realized that the problem is landless and poverty. He conveyed that the solution to this is not killing (katal) but it is a law (kanoon) or compassion (karuna). But then, the path of law would take a lot of years to offer a solution. So compassion is the most efficient way of resolving this issue from this perspective he footmarched in the entire country. This was one of the biggest social movements in this country after independence. It achieved around 62 lakh acre land. Vinoba Bhave realized that solving land problems is important, but, by resolving only individual land problems will not be substantive, so he suggested gramdan along with bhudan. Through this scheme, he thought of overcoming the selfishness that is associated with individual ownership of land. He was of the view that if land is held as a common property then everybody will protect it from any kind of injustice from outsiders. When I began my journey in Chambal, I encountered that the rebels adhered to a violent path only because of land problems like encroachment from outsiders, from the rich. Even in the 70s, land issues were still pervasive and sharp, so I thought that it needed to be addressed. Only when the problem of livelihood resources gets resolved, can poverty and inequality be removed. Gandhi supported a self-governed, self-sufficient model of development. He gave a model that was based on bottom-up development as against top-down development model. The problems of grassroots cannot be resolved until there is inequality in distribution of resources. Moreover, it needs to be realized that only 5% of the total population can be catered by the larger sectors including government as well as private sectors; the maximum 95% will still have to be dependent on natural resources for sustenance. There are three kinds of primary activities, first is farming on land, second is fishing and third is utilization of forest resources. You can call them three kinds of farming or agriculture (kheti). India is primarily an agriculture based country which means that a large number of its population rely on either one of these primary activities. Therefore, until we resolve the issues related to distribution of natural resources, a proper development cannot be

achieved. Ekta Parishad is determined to take up the question of land resources from where Vinoba Bhave has left. Land is extremely important. It needs to be observed here that the battle of Mahabharata was because of land. Krishna had asked on behalf of Pandavas that if Duryodhan could not share the political power to rule with the Pandavas, then he can just give five villages which Duryodhan denied harshly. This led to the famous battle of Mahabharata. It should be considered as a civil war. Even in the contemporary modern times, there are chances of a civil war if the land issues are not addressed meaningfully.

Ambedkar also identified that the right to vote is not equal to the right to life. If the right to life has to be insured in a substantive sense, then, the right to natural resources has to be guaranteed to all, because natural resources are the resources for sustaining and living a meaningful life. Migration, poverty, violence and conflicts have been escalating due to unaddressed land, water and forest issues. Therefore, Ekta Parishad decided to struggle for land and livelihood resources. For this, it took steps towards creating rural leaderships on ground, youth training programs began, and training for becoming activists was introduced. In this journey, it was realized that those knowing land laws are really less. Due to this reason, it is becoming problematic to amend the situation legally. Secondly, it was understood that land has become a marketing commodity, where investment seems lucrative, as a result of this many rich sections have got attracted to land acquisition. This is being done at the cost of rural land ownership. Thirdly, it was seen that various schemes by the government, like SEZs, were implemented to snatch away the land from the poor villagers in the name of development and national interest. So it can be observed that there have been a plethora of methods that allow removing the possession of poor from land, but hardly, have there been ways through which the poor can hold on to their possession, the landless can get their land ownership and those whose land has been taken away wrongfully, can take it back. Although there have been small, dispersed initiatives to address some of the land issues, an overall policy to seriously address the land reform program has not been placed yet.

In 1999-2000, Ekta Parishad led a footmarch from the border of Rajasthan to the border of Orissa. It was a six and a half month long march covering around 35000km. We began the program of 'Bhumi pujan.' Wherever there was empty, unowned land, we did the pujan and established our acquisition on that land. The major slogan that made the message of this march clear was, '*kala kanoon todenge, jungle, zameen jotenge*' (We will break the draconian law and will cultivate our land and use forest resources). The rationale behind this was to convey that the land and other

natural resources were originally a property of all including the rural, the marginalized. It was the forest department that took away the land and established its private ownership over the land, rendering the rural and the marginalized landless in an unjust manner. As a consequence of our endeavors, a task force was made that was responsible for implementing land reforms properly. From here, the journey of Ekta Parishad's foot march began. We covered Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar every year and thus, covered every corner to raise awareness about the land issue. After 2000, we have never sat silent. In 2006, we decided to directly warn the state. 500 people footmarched from Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh till Delhi (approximately, 350km) to warn the state that if it does not address the land reform issues, then, we will march again with a huge number of 25000 people next year. Because no concrete steps were taken within a year, we decided to again footmarch with 25000 people till Delhi. It became a successful movement in terms of pressurizing the government to act. Media, lawyers, activists supported the movement's cause. The, then, PM promised to take steps to address the issues raised by the movement. Following this, a new Task Force was made under the supervision of the Rural Development Minister and a National Council for Land Reforms under the leadership of the Prime Minister were set up. The Forest Rights Act was also amended. With this began a large-scale churning with respect to addressing the land issues like homelessness, illegal acquisition by the corporate sectors, landlessness and so on. This has been a great achievement of Ekta Parishad that came about because of the 2006-07 footmarch. Although, this did not prove to be enough.

We began with state level footmarches again. The demands basically were to implement the land reforms properly and efficiently. Still, when it was witnessed that the government is not working properly with respect to addressing the land issues, in 2012, Ekta Parishad led Jan Satyagraha, which was a footmarch with one lakh people, from Gwalior to Delhi. Jairam Ramesh, the then Rural Development Minister, requested not to march till Delhi. We still continued marching. It was at Agra that an agreement was made between the government and the movement. A ten-point agreement was signed. It mentioned resolving land disputes, granting land ownership rights to women, focusing on homestead land rights, guaranteeing efficient implementation of land reforms and so on. On the basis of these agreed upon points, letters were written to the concerned states' chief ministers to start implementing the points of the agreement. Hence, it can be said that the 2012 Jan Satyagraha led by Ekta Parishad was also a success in a substantive sense. In 2013, changes were introduced in the Land Acquisition Act. The Land Acquisition Act that had been

enacted during the colonial times was changed into the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act. This amendment stated that the land will be acquired only if at least 70% people agree to it, only dry land will be acquired, multiple cropping land will not be acquired, compensation in exchange of land acquired will not be given only to the farmer but also the land dependent community and other such progressive provisions were introduced that could have a meaningful impact on the people.

With the change of the ruling party government into BJP, the earlier progress made with respect to the Land Acquisition Act was attempted to be diluted. In 2014, a long march from Palwal, Haryana was organized in collaboration with other social movements. As a consequence, the ordinance for diluting the Act was quashed. In 2018, 25000 people under the leadership of Ekta Parishad marched on foot from Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh towards Delhi. An agreement was reached between Ekta Parishad and the opposition party at Morena, Madhya Pradesh, that if the opposition party gets the ruling power in the next elections then it will address the demands put forth by the movement. As a result, three states witnessed change in ruling power from BJP to Congress. These three were Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. After so much struggle, the results still have not been up to the mark. On-ground changes are being made at a very slow pace. Three points need to be noted here,

First is retrieval of lost land. Resolving this matter does not require enactment of any new law or making of any new policy. It is an illegal act that can be set right by adhering to already made laws suitable for punishing illegal acts. Failure to do so till now simply highlights the inefficiency, passivity of the government. Ekta Parishad has been successful in addressing the retrieval of lost land.

Second is regularization of land. It basically suggests that that land on which the poor, landless have been living should be given the entitlement right to that very land in the resident's name. There have been cases of regularization of slums and this can be done with respect to land as well.

Third is redistribution of surplus land.

All these three points are ways of resolving land issues. If, even, these measures are not paid heed to then the land issues can never be resolved. Ekta Parishad tries to use these methods wherever necessary and where the context allows.

Ekta Parishad believes that only land redistribution will not suffice in addressing the land issues, making the land useful is also very important. It is due to Ekta Parishad that land development has

come into perspective. Thus, Ekta Parishad is working on two dimensions, and one is on land redistribution and second is followed when land is acquired then developing it. It has three pillars on which its working is based. They are: Struggle, Dialogue and Constructive work. It also needs to be mentioned that Ekta Parishad does not work in isolation, it co-operates with other social movements as well, (be it in Brazil, Philippines, Thailand and so on), that are pursuing similar goals and similar paths. Ekta Parishad has a large network under the name International Land Coalition (ILC) and Asia NGO Coalition. Thus, it can be said that it is a historical journey continuing from Vinobha. Ekta Parishad has been consistently working on the issue of land and livelihood for the last 40 years.

Post-Independence, the Ceiling Act was made which was criticized a lot. People took land illegally on a false basis, forged names. People did not appreciate the land reform implementation process, they manipulated these measures. In addition to this, those who came in power were mostly from landlord classes due to which they were reluctant in implementing the reforms. One of the reasons is also the social attitude that considers that only a certain section of society is suitable for having land ownership rights, the rest should remain as laborers, dependents, and tenants for the former. This kind of discrimination has also hampered proper implementation of reforms. Even the exemption given for plantation, industrialisation and mining has proved to be fatal for the efficient implementation of land reforms. Forest department evicted tribals in the name of protecting the forests for wildlife, protected reserves and so on. Tribals had been living on the forest land since ages and surviving on forest produce, they were not even aware of the names like wildlife sanctuary, protected forests and so on that were the basis for removing them from their land. These are some of the reasons due to which implementation of land reforms have not been taken seriously so far. But the situation can be different if there are people who are sensitive enough to approach development from bottom-up. As of now, struggle is the only means through which the land issues can be addressed and the poor and landless could be brought to justice. The government needs to have political will to be determined that we want to solve the problem of land in India. For this they should take the support of social organizations, social movements so as to resolve the land issues.

We need to use compassion taught by Vinoba and also the rule of law so as to build a nonviolent world. Because I believe that a nonviolent society is the foundation of a just society. Following this belief, we organized the Jai Jagat march from Delhi to Geneva. We traveled to different places

all over the world to spread a message of nonviolence. When Covid-19 was spreading we were in Armenia. We undertook this march to convey to the international organizations like the World Bank, IMF, UN that we need change from the roots. The UN has put forth a list of 17 goals for Sustainable Development. But these goals cannot be achieved if substantive changes are not made. For instance, till the day the World Bank keeps on funding large projects, innocent villagers, tribals, poor people will keep getting displaced from their land. The problems are embedded in the policies itself, so we need to change them and consider change from the level of the grassroots and then move towards the global. It needs to be understood that in order to correct the wrong, we have to strengthen rural economies first and foremost.

The success of Ekta Parishad is its influence on a wider scale and becoming a pan-Indian movement. So this movement made its presence felt nationally. Secondly, it focuses on macro and micro levels of change. Thirdly, it has trained many youth committed to land reform and nonviolent struggle. Fourthly, and we have been involved in mass movement building and acted on local and national level. Fifthly, we have provided a very different perspective through our 'magic of one', one handful of rice, one rupee per house, one person from one family marching for one month. So we have established a new vision, a new perspective, and a new philosophical dimension by encouraging contribution of one, from one. Like Gandhi, who made revolutionary changes through satyagraha as simple as salt-making, who gave a different dimension to a normal charkha, Ekta Parishad has tried to put forth the vision of a nonviolent struggle through simple yet very powerful principles. We have involved both middle-class and global people and organizations in our struggle.

Failure is that, so far, ekta parishad is in 180 districts, while the total districts in India are 762, our presence is not even 25 %, and this limited coverage cannot build national pressure. We do not have the resources to move beyond because of the limitedness of our resources. Secondly, we do not have a strong presence on the legal front, because of the costly legal fees. Right now we cannot afford the high fee for paying very good lawyers. Thirdly, right now we do not have a strong lobby of political leaders in parliament who would take a radical stand like resignation from parliamentary politics to create more pressure. There are around 80 percent representatives from tribal and marginal communities in the parliament, but because they are tied to party lines they are not able to take a radical step to support the movement.

But then, instead of getting restricted by our failure, we choose to find creative solutions to further our struggle with Shramdaan for constructive work, labour bank and so on. We keep motivating everyone in our movement so as to take it forward.

If the sphere of negotiation is not strong then by merely struggling the movement cannot reach a meaningful conclusion. I am arguing this because struggle just for the sake of struggling will soon frustrate the people, which will lead to a fizzling out of the movement. What is needed is that struggle is accompanied by dialogue. Like this we balance out the energy of the movement. Here it also needs to be realized that by focusing more on dialogue and keeping the struggle aspect on the backseat would again result in a negative growth of the movement. We need to have our presence felt by struggling, so that the government is pressurized enough to have a dialogue with us. The other thing that needs to be pointed out here is that there is a very rare chance that the government understands how to strike a dialogue. Mediation is an art and it needs to be learned. Modern governance is dominated by the need to dialogue instead of remaining stuck to coercive methods. The Indian government still gives primacy of using coercive, retributive methods employing muscle power rather than dialogue-process. It has to be kept in mind that ultimately, all problems do not get resolved in the battlefield but on the dialogue or discussion table. So the government needs to offer more space for dialogue, train its people in the art of mediation, create a department responsible for resolving issues through dialogue and thus, establish a dialogue-culture.

The precondition of having a dialogue is to have an unbiased approach towards the other parties involved. A rigid, stubborn and biased attitude before the dialogue process will always be an obstacle in reaching a fair conclusion through the negotiation process. Dialogue should be done in a spirit that leads to a win-win situation by finding a middle-path. The other associated point is that we do not have to take the other parties by understanding them as enemies. There should be a decency in relationships amongst all the parties. Respect the others instead of rejecting them as stupid and ignorant is very necessary for a dialogue process. Animosity, violence is a by-product of a faulty or absent dialogue process. Moreover, for a successful dialogue process we need to understand there are multiple aspects discovering which we can find certain common solutions. For a dialogue process, we need to train people for becoming experts in the mediation process. Ekat Parishad, right from the first stage of its training process, places dialogue as a part of learning. This method of dialogue is employed not only for the external parties but also for

addressing internal matters. It needs to be noted that sometimes we may have to choose a legal path instead of depending on dialogue-process as the situation demands. But legal remedies should be the second option. Written culture has created a conflict with oral culture. The tribals believe in oral culture. Words are important forms of commitment in the tribal community. But today, we see a diminishing value of spoken words over written words. Even when the tribals claim to be living on a particular forest land for ages, the forest department asks for papers to prove it. So, the written culture has overtaken the oral culture as a form of commitment. The written culture dictates that 'You can say whatever you want to say but you do not have to follow until it is presented as a written agreement.' So yes there may be a problem of dialogue leading to conclusions that may not be implemented later on. There is this risk of unfaithfulness. It is because of this unfaithfulness that we need to keep on struggling. It also leads to frustration from nonviolent struggle that may lead to switching to violent methods. Ekta Parishad, thus, largely attempts to create a new culture where dialogue, words, sensitivity towards the marginalized and poor. We are very concerned about the entire canvas which is governing us. We need to control people's power through moral power and political power through people's power. Otherwise political power may ascend all of us. Therefore, in order to become a mature, substantive, responsible movement Ekta Parishad keeps people's power in control by moral power that lends patience to the people who are struggling.

The land crisis still persists because Land Reforms have not been taken seriously. If you look at the slogan based on the history of India, Vinoba Bhave said 'if sky is for everyone, land is also for everyone'. He said that land is not a man-made, manufactured product. It is like Sky, water, air and all other natural resources. So this God-made, nature-made product should be available to everybody. But this just remained as a slogan.

Then, people like Lohiya started saying 'Dhan aur Dharti but ke Rahegi, Bhookhi janta ab na sahegi', there was a hope for redistribution of money and land at that time, but that also did not happen. Although the slogan still remains alive, the real distribution of land did not happen.

Then, Mayawati and other groups claimed that 'Jo Zameen Sarkari hai, woh Zameen Hamari hai.' Basically, she emphasized that common property belongs to the poor. But even the common property has been given to the private companies and other such rich parties.

Recently, our movement raised the slogan 'Jal Jungle Jameen Ho Janata Ke adhin'. By this we want to convey that it is not only about land, but also, about water and forest resources. We believe

that this should go to the poor, instead of big companies and governments. So if you look at the slogan based history of India, you will observe how, at different junctures, movements have been raised just because Land Reforms have not been taken seriously.

The government got interested in giving land to the rich instead of the poor. So I believe that instead of making the land less land owners or bhumiswami, the government began the process of making the land owners land less.

In order to resolve the land issue, the following needs to be done: first, retrieval of land -those who lost their land due to encroachment by the rich and other such reasons, should be given back their land. This has taken years, as such cases remain pending in the court for long. Out of the total cases pending in the court, around 60% of the cases are related to land issues. If the 60% cases have to be resolved, then, it will take around 250 years!!! So this won't happen in our lifetime. We suggest that there should be fast track courts that help in speedy resolution of these cases. It needs to be noted that tribals are not asking for new pieces of land, they are asking for the land that was theirs, on which their past generations lived but which has now been taken away by the forest. They are asking for their own land. This can be done by retrieval of lost land.

Second, regularization of land- wherever the tribals, the poor, the marginalized, who are landless have been residing or occupying land, that very piece of land should be regularized in their name. If the rich have occupied additional pieces of land, then, the land should be vacated. But the poor who are occupying only a small piece of land should be regularized, so that the poor can go to the bank, apply for a loan and begin doing something for their livelihood.

Third, resolution of conflict- the land related conflicts should be resolved as soon as possible. Fourth, redistribution of land- land should be redistributed honestly. The ceiling act should be implemented. The additional amount of land occupied by the rich should be given back to the poor. For instance, in Kerala there is a Malayalam Harrison company that has more than 1 lakh acre land, while there are people who have been struggling for just half an acre of land. The lease of this lack of acre of land is over. If the government wants, then, it can redistribute this land to the poor, but it is not doing so. Such is the unhealthy situation where the government is favoring the rich instead of helping the poor. There are many such reasons due to which land reforms in this country are not being implemented honestly.

2. It needs to be understood that the land crisis and the agrarian crisis can be resolved by the state only and by nobody else. If a community wants to utilize water resources, then, it can collectively

construct a small Canal to stop water and utilize it. But if land is occupied by a community or an individual, then, the very next day, a person from the administration would ask to vacate in the name of encroaching government land. So the resolution of land issues is in the hands of the state. We have been protesting since 2007, in 2012 and in 2018 to make the government realize that it needs to come forward and resolve the land crisis. We understand that land is a state subject and should be tackled by the state, but then, we argue that even education and health are also state subjects, but, the interference of the central government is seen in both these matters, then why is it aloof from the land issues. In fact, as a result of the 2012 protest, Jairam Ramesh has sent advisory to the states to resolve the pending land issues. But no concrete action was taken, following the advisory in any state.

There are two major problems: the first is that the state is aiming to make a 'land bank' through which it can help big companies invest in land and give land to rich owners and the second is the lack of sensitivity among those who are in the government due to which they are deaf towards the poor's voices. Moreover there is an acute shortage of lawyers handling the revenue matters. Most of the lawyers take interest in criminal cases as it is lucrative. This has led to an absence of a legal system that can help in resolving land issues legally. This is the duty of the state to make the curriculum of law universities inclined towards learning land laws, motivating youth to work in rural areas, recording the issues of rural regions. Thus, it is important that the government takes proactive steps to resolve the land issues, instead of making the poor go from pillar to pillar so as to seek land rights. In fact, I have been asking the Chhattisgarh government to not to begin a new project till rehabilitation of those displaced communities is done that have been removed from their land in the name of mining and other such development projects. It is important to hold the government accountable, otherwise there will be conflicts and escalating violence from the side of those who have been frustrated with the unresolved issues. Therefore it is the government that has to take active actions to resolve issues and social movements can support or help the government. For example, Nehru got the support of Vinoba in forming a Budan or gramdan act. It is significant to also understand and recognise the role of social movements as well, but ultimately, it is the state that has to take steps.

3. Ekta Parishad believes in a nonviolent economy. It is against the violent economy which is characterized by top-down approach, discrimination between the rich and the poor, exclusively beneficial to the rich and powerful sections of the society. While the characteristics of a non-

violent economy encapsulates guaranteeing means of livelihood to everyone including the poor and the marginalized, decentralization of control over natural resources which will allow people to stand such economic structures which suits them, otherwise, as also has been happening, people will have to migrate, facing hardships and leaving behind their families, cutting off themselves from their roots that ultimately leads to loss of their self-worth and dignity by being a mere labourer. Gandhi suggested that working in your own place, not only helps you remain close to your family, but also helps in your growth from multiple dimensions, as you learn to work on the field, take care of your family, look after cattle, cook food and clean your surroundings. Therefore such a growth from many angles helps you be a social being rather than just getting limited to an individual working with machines away from your home. The present economic model is an obstacle to the real development of people that could guarantee self-worth and self-development. Moreover, the fast-paced development, the hurry involved in finishing a project is unwanted. Even if mining projects have to be implemented in rural tribal regions then it should be worked upon by the villagers themselves by forming Co-operatives. Due to all these reasons we need to move towards an economic model that was suggested by JC Kumarappa who supported a slow pace of development and viewed technological development moving at the pace of Human Development. Today nobody can match the speed at which technological development is happening.

In the name of forest conservation, Tribals have been evicted from their land and made homeless. This is all done to create an exclusive 'Timber economy.' If a nonviolent economic model was followed then forest conservation would have been done by including tribals in the entire process that would have saved both tribals as well as timber. In Bihar which has a lot of land and still the people of the state have to migrate to other states and work there, but if a nonviolent economic model was followed, then the people of Bihar would have stayed in their home state and worked in harmony with nature. So we want an inclusive, non-violent economy that works in harmony with nature and binds people together instead of creating divisions among them.

Appendix 2

Mr.RAMESH SHARMA

I. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

1. Ekta Parishad is on the path of rediscovering and radicalizing Gandhi. We are offering a new imagination to understand and put in practice Gandhi's ideas and Gandhi's actions in a new context. We have also realized that in every context and with every group that we are working with, we need not have first-hand knowledge or direct involvement of Gandhi's thought and it is not necessary to always symbolize Gandhi in every context. So we're trying to redefine Gandhian action. Although initially the beginning was with Gandhi's ideas, then, we made Gandhian actions as our reference point, but then, gradually, in the third phase of our evolution, when we worked with various political challenges, we realized that it is not always important to limit to the reference of Gandhi. From here, Ekta Parishad began to redefine and redesign the entire philosophy of nonviolence and made its own parameters of nonviolence, manifesting in the form of Grass root actions and constructive work along with dialogue. In the fourth Phase, I would like to understand Ekta Parishad as a school of thought. Rather than an organization. It is better to understand the larger Canvas of Ekta Parishad's interventions, when looked from this lens of Ekta Parishad's actions, we will see how Ekta Parishad has given a new meaning to social movement and non violent actions. During the seventies we experimented with bigger challenges where the non-violent transformation of the Chambal region stands out as an example. During the 80s, we plunged into actual grassroots action, we passed through an intense space of strong leadership building. The 90s was the phase of demonstration of real action. This included padyatra, dharan, rallies and legal interventions. Post 2010-2015, the actions have been of national or state level. This has been continuing.

2. In India most of the structural violence have land issues at their core. Ekta Parishad therefore has been largely working with the landless since the eighties. The landless, who have been the poorest of the poor, the worst hit victims of eviction and displacement and the subjects of forced migration. Due to these reasons Ekta Parishad believes that peace can come only when justice is delivered to the landless. Till now Ekta Parishad has placed the land questions as Central to all its actions and campaigns. So we need to look at the visible issues of poverty, migration, displacement, from the lens of land questions.

Historically too, land issues have been important. During the freedom movement, the Congress party was able to attract large participation on the basis of the promise that it made with respect to guaranteeing land ownership through Land Reforms post-independence. Gandhi also supported that political independence is just the first step, so as to ensure economic freedom, land questions need to be resolved. So land issues comes from two reference points: - the first from Gandhi and second from the real, practical issues of discrimination, poverty and other such structural problems. Moreover, we also need to think over the fact that the largest number of landless population is found in India, then, other than land issues, which other issue could be more significant?

3. The first reason for why the state has failed is that it has failed in framing proper legislation. The land related legislations are largely colonial legislations which converted land and forests in the form of revenue earning commodities. The post independent legislations also reflect the same character as the colonial land related laws.

The second reason relates to the state structure. It can be seen that the state structure is hierarchical and at the top of this hierarchy, we see that there is the presence of privileged class and caste. This privileged section will never let it happen that land ownership gets transferred from them to the poor landless people.

The third significant reason is society-state relationship, where those at the privileged levels in the society collaborate with the state to hamper distribution of land to the landless.

The 4th factor is the commodification of land, especially post-liberalization. Land has been snatched away from those sections that considered it as their only means of livelihood. This has been done so as to bring it to the market for trade and profit earning. The marketization of land brought forth various new difficult questions which compounded over the unanswered and untouched land questions that have been continuously rising since independence.

4. We can understand Ekta Parishad's efforts for resolving land issues through different frameworks. First is the civil disobedience framework that conveys that because, historically I have been deprived of land ownership rights and to deliver these rights was the responsibility of the state. But the state did not fulfill its responsibility, because of known and unknown reasons, then, in such a scenario, I consider this to be my right to disobey the set of legislations and occupy the so-called government land which was supposed to belong to the common people like me. I

consider this my right to live on this land and farm on it and also be ready for facing the consequences of my actions. In simple words Ekta Parishad calls it the Land occupation movement. This component gives a strong identity to Ekta Parishad. During the 80s and 90s this entire movement took a concrete shape due to land occupation which actually paved the way for further actions, as in FRA also it is mentioned that the benefits of land rights will be given to those who have been living on the same piece of land before 2005. From this, it can be observed that how the entire disobedience action has been transformed into a central argument for negotiation in 2007, janadesh campaign, of Ekta Parishad, where, with the government this provision with respect to land entitlement rights to those living before 2005 on the same piece of land was pitched in. It is also to be noticed that from the negotiating table the argument got its place in the larger policy and legislation.

Second is the joint redressal mechanism which simply means that there should be equal participation of both the state as well as the people. This basically refers to change in the mechanism of the dialogue process where people do not join with the victim mindset but as equal partners and where the states do not participate to dictate but to discuss the matter with people as equal stakeholders. For Ekta Parishad this was a problem solving mechanism which led to the establishment of a task force in Madhya Pradesh in 2000 and around three lakh people got land. In Odisha and Chhattisgarh also, task forces were formed and other such Institutions were introduced due to which a large number of landless people got justice. So this framework shows how, along with the campaign, the dialogue process is also significant.

The third framework relates to the concern of how to make land productive to ensure a dignified life after the land entitlement rights have been given and recognised by the state. Ekta Parishad made many cooperatives including women and small producers to encourage different land based livelihood options.

Fourth, expansion of Ekta Parishad's horizontal base by including more organizations working on the same or similar issues at National as well as international level. It was decided so as to generate the larger momentum for the land rights struggle. Post 2005, Ekta Parishad took up the action based alliance building process at a phenomenal level. In 2007 janadesh, 500 organizations joined our campaign, in 2012, Jansatyagraha, 2000 organizations joined our struggle. So these are two examples that present how Ekta Parishad placed land questions at centre by aligning with other organizations.

5. We can understand the future of Ekta Parishad through two references. First with respect to how landlessness is still a visible and a harsh reality. The large landless population still forms a major political challenge. Second, Gandhi argued for making the landless into farmers in post independence. Today the state is doing just the opposite. It is making the farmers landless. So it can be considered as a reversal of Land Reforms. Already landless and those small and marginal farmers that have been rendered to be landless by the hands of the state present a major problem in contemporary times. Today and in the coming future, land will remain an important issue due to this reason Ekta Parishad's relevance in future also remains intact.

II. NEGOTIATION

Negotiation simply means to bring the active or passive opponent to your side. Usually negotiation is used as a political reference. I want to go beyond this reference. It is very important to understand the larger potential of negotiation. By this I mean to understand its power to influence the behavior of various sets of parties, be it students, the Dalits and marginalized sections, state and its representatives, middle class or simply the onlookers as well as the passerby. The process of negotiation follows the mathematical approach. If in a process of negotiation there are two parties, me and my campaign on the one side and state on the other side. If I am coming on the negotiating table with an attitude of not compromising at all and with a mindset of achieving all the demands, thus, leaving out no angle and focusing on my 360 degree and suppose the state also joins the negotiating process with the same rigid mind set and focusing on its own 360 degree. The consequence of such a negotiation would be nothing but absurd, because 360 plus 360 degrees means 720 degrees, which actually is nothing. Thus, to achieve something, we need to be first real enough, so as to target 360 degree jointly, which means that both the parties have to have an open, flexible mindset so that through compromise, the negotiation process could be given a feasible, productive end.

Negotiation is basically to create a Win-Win situation through trust building. So we need to have the skill of looking at the negotiation process from the perspective of a trust building process. This is why Ekta Parishad believes in joint redressal mechanism. While negotiating, Ekta Parishad keeps in mind the following parameters:

First, thorough knowledge of the subject to be negotiated.

Second, alternate versions with experience and examples of such visions.

Third, to observe how much space the opponent can give you. We should be aware of the green, orange and red areas to be offered by the opponent. Maybe for certain issues, permission is granted right in the first round of negotiation making them to be green areas, but the orange areas may take a few more rounds so that the opponent party allows entry in them while the red ones may require multiple rounds of negotiation and also some compromises.

We also need to visualize the life of negotiation. The life of negotiation can be prolonged only when we follow the above-mentioned parameters and also understand negotiation as a Win-Win process standing on trust building mechanisms.

In addition to this the most significant point about negotiation that needs to be looked at is that negotiation is not to be considered as an endnote rather it should be taken as a comma because we have to understand campaign and negotiation both as following the ladder approach. Every single negotiation process would take you to only a certain level of the ladder. We need to understand the complementary relationship between campaign and negotiations. After a certain round of negotiations we need to make the opponent aware that if the decisions are not implemented, then, we will carry out a campaign and the campaign should also make way for negotiations.

2. It is because of the ad hoc political system that the negotiations fail. In 2007, we achieved good results under the UPA 1 regime while as soon as the Government of UPA 2 came in power, their own ministers started undermining the result guaranteed by a different minister in the former UPA 1 regime. So the ad hoc nature of the entire political system is the biggest challenge for the negotiation process. The mind-set in political systems keeps on changing which results in either dissolution of the negotiation process or else the results are reversed or undermined. But it needs to be observed that the negotiation is with the state and not with a particular individual Minister or a party.

The second reason for the failure of the negotiation relates to the patience level of the campaign. By this I mean that for how long is a campaign patient enough to keep the gate open for the negotiation with the opponents. For instance, the 2018 Jan Andolan ended with the assurance of the Congress government which was not ruling in Madhya Pradesh at that time. But still I consider it to be a Win-Win situation for two reasons. First, we fulfilled our basic challenge given to the central government which was that we will campaign, if you will not pay heed to our demands. Second, we wanted to use the opposition as well, so that in those States where Ekta Parishad has

a strong hold, a better government could be formed in the next elections. Congress party's eminent leaders came on stage and assured that in the term of their ruling, they will work on land issues. Like this, both the parties gave at least 40 to 60% results in their period of ruling.

Two things need to be kept in mind, here, first, is that it is important to understand our own maximum strength and accordingly negotiate in the best way with the opponent and secondly, that negotiation is not to be limited to the party in power but also needs to be extended to the opposition party as well as. Understanding the significance of the opposition party apart from the governing party helps in two ways: first, it strengthens democracy and second, it saves movements' time in order to make the opposition aware of the issues and demands freshly once the opposition party comes in power.

3. We think that an efficient state is one that has its own land Reform policy. The state must know which land can be put to its best use, how it is being used now and how it can be used in the future so as to be the best result. For instance, the fertile land should be used for agriculture, the degraded forest land should be reforested and the Barren land should be used to set up Industries. Till now, not even a single state of India has its own land Reform policy. The absence of land reform on land use policy is the biggest challenge posed before the negotiation process. Because until the state accepts that the fertile land should not be given for industrial use, but should be given to the farmers instead, till that time the state will keep giving the fertile land to the Industrialists.

Secondly, it is very difficult to make this state understand that granting land rights to those whose identity and livelihood have always been attached to land because they cannot be trapped in the entire promise made with respect to giving jobs.

Thirdly we need to notice that International pressure in India's land market plays a major role in hampering land reforms. In the land sector, permission for hundred percent FDI has been given through an indirect route. 100% FDI was granted in the mining sector, then, in the real estate sector, with respect to forest land also there is a huge foreign investment, coastal zone amendments have been implemented. Land has already been fully objectified, commodified and marketised. This shows that for the state, land is not an issue of Social Justice, it is just a market commodity. This clearly highlights the shift in the entire political and economic thinking with respect to understanding the land issues. This also has made negotiation with the state difficult.

4. Non-state actors can play a major role in negotiations in two ways. Firstly, there is a set of opinion makers like journalists, academicians, retired bureaucrats linked with the larger decision-making processes, International Institutions like FAO and so on. They may not be all non-state actors but their opinion matters for Ekta Parishad. So, it tries to mobilize and incorporate their opinion as well.

Secondly, there are those invisible state actors or state apparatuses which can help the movement. In 2012 when I was in police headquarters during the negotiation process in Delhi I got introduced to a person at a higher position who asked me a lot of questions about the movement and our demands with respect to land reforms. He started taking interest in the land issues. It was later that I got to know that this person was the nodal person to the central government who was supposed to give feedback about us. His coming on board has proved to be very beneficial for our movement.

5. There are certain limitations to the negotiation process can be listed out as follows:-

First, negotiation becomes challenging and also limitations arise in the way when the subject of negotiation's results are heterogeneous. Suppose, along with landless people, I ask the trade unionists and farmers also to join the table of negotiation. Then, one or the other party would remain dissatisfied with the results. So it is very important to have a sharp focus on a campaign and a negotiation. The party other than those who are outside the sharp focus can be allies, sympathizers, supporters or part of the solidarity circle, but the core issue should be well- defined, instead of being ambiguous or open.

Secondly, it is very important to know the basic thrust of any campaign. For instance, the entire campaign of 2007 was for a law. If I am negotiating over anything which is less than a new law then I may put many of the demands at risk which would render the entire negotiation process as simply illogical. So you need to understand the highest peak of your campaign's demands during negotiations.

6. Negotiations can reduce the risk of violence only when basic non-violent discipline with respect to conducting oneself, accepting the leadership and respecting the larger implications of the negotiation process are maintained. Thus, it is important for the members to go beyond and see the entire negotiation process apart from fulfilling self goals.

IV. FOREST RIGHTS ACT

1. FRA is important for Ekta Parishad because of the following reasons:

Firstly, the larger operations area of Ekta Parishad is a tribal area which makes a FRA central. Secondly, on the Social Justice scale also, it is well established that the tribals are standing on the margin, who if not given their forest rights, will not be able to live their lives with dignity. Thus, forest rights are a question of life and death for them.

Thirdly, if we observe the conflict zone map of India, then it will be noticed that largely these zones are found in tribal dominated regions.

Fourthly, there is a need to re-establish forest rights of the tribal as these rights had been demolished by the colonial legislation that reduced forest to a revenue earning commodity. The fifth and sixth schedule of the constitution talks about the autonomy of tribals over forest produce, so such constitutional references also make FRA important to us. These together make one frame. In the second frame, we need to understand that the cultural identity of tribals is intimately attached with the forest. In fact, right from the beginning when Ekta Parishad began its land occupation movement, FRA has been a significant component. It can be said that the vision of FRA has emerged from the larger campaigns for FRA. In the eighties only, Ekta Parishad had visualized FRA.

In the near future, Ekta Parishad thinks that the major challenge would be grabbing of forest resources or land, because land and forest has been made commodities. If FRA is not implemented efficiently today, then tomorrow, nobody can save forest land from grabbing. So FRA is a constitutional legal safeguards for protecting tribals.

2. We can understand the future of FRA from its basic Preamble which talks about FRA to be a new way to undo historical injustices. In the larger framework, we need to have a realistic review of the one sided legal setup giving power to the state Institutions and Forest Department. This situation can be improved so as to have a stake in tribals including the special powers given to gram sabhas of tribals in the fifth and sixth schedule.

Secondly, change in the vision and approach of forest bureaucracy in order to counter the colonial approach is also important.

Thirdly, Proactiveness is also to be given significance. By this, I mean to convey that it was the tribal communities that came first, therefore, suo moto action for the allotment of land rather than setting an eligibility criteria reducing the tribals to mere applicants should be done.

Fourthly, Forest conservation and management should re-establish the pre-existing traditional rights of the tribal communities.

V. SMALL & MARGINAL FARMERS

1. The gray areas for the crisis of small and marginal farmers can be encapsulated in one line by understanding that farmers have been made landless in post independence going against Gandhi's expectation of making the landless into farmers. It needs to be noted that larger agrarian reforms have not begun even after crossing 70 years of independence. Reforms lack in both perspectives, from the perspective of farmers rights as well as from the perspective of farmer welfare.

Secondly, public investment has been reducing proportionately in agriculture.

Thirdly, larger agrarian policy is absent for redressal of farmer issues. We need separate authorities and tribunals to redress farmer issues.

There is also a failure of the government to transfer water to farms. Around two third areas are still unirrigated in India.

Moreover, the Identity of women as farmers need to be given significance in policy making.

2. Agricultural policies should include small and marginal farmers as agriculture is the only means for life sustenance for them.

Agricultural marketing structures should be in favor of small and marginal farmers.

Input facilities should be facilitating small and marginal farmers in their day-to-day agricultural practices.

There should be a reduction of dependence on government institutions with respect to meeting basic needs of the small and marginal farmers.

3. International safeguards with respect to those set up by the United Nations Declaration of Peasant Rights should be given significance. This would mean that there should be security of land tenure, then, women rights as farmers, as equal wage earners should be placed for ensuring gender justice and also responsible investment should be focused upon by ensuring that investment by the state is done in a manner that suits the context, region and resources available. Till today it can be

observed that in dry regions the government is still encouraging cotton and sugarcane cropping, while it is a water deficit region, such a misguided approach should be corrected.

4. The MS Swaminathan Committee report 2006 should be enforced effectively, efficiently and immediately. Similarly, the United Nations Declaration on Peasant rights, voluntary guidelines on land tenure, women farmers act, restructuring the market structure for small and marginal farmers, returning to organic farming or traditional seeds and offering best approach for stopping farmer's suicide should be given significance.

Appendix 3

Mr. RANSINGH PARMAR

TRIBAL LAND

1. Traditionally, tribals have been nature-dependent communities, their livelihood is also closely dependent on nature. Initially, these communities could survive with forest resources, but with the depletion of these resources, they have started depending on land. They used to migrate only a few kilometers within their home state. But, now, when they are rendered helpless with respect to finding a dignified means of livelihood as the skills that they have are still basic skills of farming using primitive tools only. They are experts only in traditional forms of farming that allow them to sustain their families. If they are given land rights, then, they will not have to keep searching for alternative means of livelihood. For them, land for farming is enough for sustenance and for a dignified life. It is because of this reason that Ekta Parishad is arguing for giving land ownership rights to those tribal communities that have been farming on occupied land for many years so that they can live a life of dignity.

2. In Tribal Land Rights struggle, the challenges come from both sides, from the side of the state and also from the side of the society. Although, the state had promised to make landless farmers as land owners and they also gave land entitlement deeds to the landless but these people have not yet been given possession of land on the basis of the land deeds. In fact, the state has been evicting those also who have the possession of land. The state needs to first give the land entitlement deeds, then, on this basis ensure physical possession of land and after this step, they should guarantee land improvement as well. Ekta Parishad is working towards making the issue of land improvement a pertinent matter. From the side of the society, the major challenge arises from the powerful, rich sections of the society. These sections have been encroaching the land of the poor, tribal communities. Tribals have not been given justice. Even if they try to seek justice, they have to face a long chain of institutions beginning from Tehsil District, Division, High Court, Revenue Court, and Supreme Court. Ekta Parishad wants the government to form a National Land Improvement Policy which should lay down the priorities that the state keeps while distributing land. By this, I mean that the state should clarify if the poor landless tribals are its priority or the big, powerful, rich corporations are its priority. Although, on the basis of Ekta Parishad's demand, a draft of the National Improvement Policy has been made but it has not been implemented yet.

Ekta Parishad also demands for establishing Fast Track Courts. As I have already mentioned that the legal process is tedious, cumbersome and a very lengthy process, so as to overcome this long chain, Fast Track Court is needed. The third point is to form a District Level Task Force Committee that could be accessible to the local people who can ventilate their grievances there and do not have to face the difficulties of going to far off regions for doing the same. If such a committee functions at particular intervals, then, many land related issues can be put forth and also their resolution can be done swiftly. Till now, there is no such institution or facility at the district level, due to which it can be observed that hardly any solution to land related issues have been placed. Moreover, people still have to cover long distances just to convey their issues and concerns related to land. In 2003-04, Madhya Pradesh government did form a Task Force that helped in resolving many of the land related issues and even the Madhya Pradesh High Court ordered that such a Task Force should be continued but the government did not continue it. When this step was contested as condemnation of the court, then, the government did form a Task Force but only on paper and not in practice as not a single meeting happened. So the challenge is to keep struggling till these formal steps taken by the government are turned into substantive measures that could grant actual land rights, land ownership to the landless. In addition, the state still does not have proper records of the numbers of land Related cases registered and pending in the courts under different categories. We face limitations in finding interested, efficient lawyers who would want to work on land rights issues. It is true that the Madhya Pradesh Government did establish a land Commission or Bhumi Aayog but that Commission remained limited to Collection of data or information but at the deeper level it did nothing to resolve the land issues. So the biggest challenge is how to reach at that substantive level with the government their actual solution of land issues could happen. The same piece of land is being demanded by the politicians, the corporate and also the poor for power, for profit and for a dignified livelihood respectively.

3. The first strategy to make non violence central to the movement, is to follow and practice the experiments that Gandhi performed. Ekta Parishad adopted this strategy of foot march to go to the interiors of the villagers, sit and talk to the villagers and understand their issues at length. We take footmarches seriously, as it helps to grab the attention of the state and allows us to present our grievances and the injustices that are being received by the people.

The second strategy has been in continuation with the non-violent foot marches. We marched to government institutions and gave a memorandum to them directly.

3rd strategy is to mobilize large numbers of landless people, organize them to carry out long term struggles, train them to have non violent discipline and stay strong even after sacrificing food and comfort of staying back home. We ensure that through our struggle all the hardships are faced by us and no harm is done to any other party. I think it is all because of our nonviolent Satyagraha that encapsulates long distance foot marches, fasts, dharnas, rallies that we are in a dialogue process at the state and at the Central level.

4. If we talk in general terms, it can be said that land issues have long been forgotten and put to the back burner in our country. It is only as a consequence of movements and struggles that this issue resurfaced at the national level, many rounds of discussion have taken place and a 200 page draft of land improvement policy has already been placed before the nation. In Madhya Pradesh, the task force and the land Commission, that has been established, is due to Ekta Parishad. I can say that if today the land issues are in the public eye, a big role in bringing the issue to the public realm is played by Ekta Parishad. I consider it to be a big achievement that due to Ekta Parishad's struggle, today, when the government is freely giving land to the corporates, it is being questioned that if it has land to give to the corporates, then why can't it give land to the landless poor. Such questions, discussions and dialogues have become possible only because of Ekta Parishad's struggle among other land rights based movements. I think that our movement, our struggle, will keep continuing even in the future till the time the land based issues remain unresolved. It has already been observed that the government will not give land rights simply by asking, so it is important that we make the landless empowered and aware enough to raise their voice, struggle and dialogue with the government so that land rights are secured. For instance, in Madhya Pradesh around 700000 proposals for land ownership have been submitted under forest rights act but only 325000 cases have been accepted, therefore, till the time such cases are pending the movement will remain, even in the future.

SMALL & MARGINAL FARMERS

1. Marginal farmers are those who have less than five acre land. Tribals and dalit community mostly comes under marginal farmers. This 12% population has always remained dependent on

land. It has always lived in harmony with nature but it has never kept any documents claiming land ownership. These communities have received some land due to redistribution of Land by the state, due to land ownership of that land on which they used to be tenants for big land owners before Land Reforms or due to the Bhudan scheme. These do not have very large pieces of land, hardly an acre or two. Till now only a very few have become the actual owner of such small land. In order to identify marginal farmers, we walked from village to village and held meetings with people. While talking to them, we got to know who all marginal farmers are. In addition, we have data of around three and a half lakh farmers, which helps us in identifying who are marginal farmers. Then, during the foot marches, when people from all the states come together, when people from different organizations come together, in those marches we get to know who all are marginal farmers while having a dialogue with them.

2. The marginal farmers who have land entitlement deeds on them, who have all the documents of the land, but they do not have actual ownership of land, as the land has been forcefully encroached or illegally occupied by some powerful sections of the society. This section may belong to a higher caste or somebody economically well. The other issue that the marginal farmers face, is that of irrigation facilities. Either there would be a complete absence of irrigation facilities or else the canal water would be so diverted or used that it benefits only the rich farmers and not the marginal farmers. This leads to the marginal farmers depending on the mercy of nature. If there is rainfall, only then would the marginal farmers be able to get some production from the land, otherwise, nothing much would come to them.

The third issue is related to fulfillment of practical needs. It can be observed that the banks easily approve loans for tractors and other such big modern machines required for farming on large land but at the same time it is not paid heed to the needs of marginal farmers who require financial support to manage traditional farming requirements like a pair of bullocks. The sad situation is that none of the banks grant loans for buying such traditional farming needs. The government has overlooked the rights of marginal farmers. These days we are discussing the minimum support price. The marginal farmer does not really know much about minimum support price. They do not even know that, for availing minimum support price, they need to register online. All that such marginal farmers are concerned about is to harvest produce and take it to the nearest market for selling, before it perishes, at any price it can get. Therefore, from all angles, marginal farmers

remain excluded. Ekta Parishad has been actively involved in mobilizing and organizing marginal farmers, raising their issues, creating awareness about their issues and also empowering these farmers by giving them a voice. It needs to be highlighted that so far most of the agrarian policies have been framed keeping in mind the interest of big farmers. We demand decentralization of the agrarian market at the district and block level so that small and marginal farmers can easily access the market and sell their produce at lesser transportation cost. Right now, the government has opened the agrarian market for corporations who can comfortably exploit the small and marginal farmers for their products as now they will be bound to sell their produce at much lesser prices. We want that priority should be given to the needs of the marginal and small farmers and then big farmers should come in the priority list of the government. The government also should decide how much land should be given to the small and marginal farmers so that they can have a dignified life and this policy should be exclusively for these farmers instead of bringing it up with the policies of the big farmers as their interest, needs and demands are different from the former. The government needs to decide a quota for the farmers so that their issues are given priority.

Appendix 4

Ms. SHRADDHA

Talking about the role of women in the long struggle for land rights she states that women have been deprived of due recognition that they command from the rest of the society because of their primary role in building up the entire agrarian and rural economy. Instead of claiming exclusive ownership over the natural resources women made use of these resources in the common interest. Be it land, water or forests, women, always, have been working very closely with these resources without any exclusive ownership rights. It is only after marketization of these natural resources that the concept of control over them became important. As the decision for marketization of these resources went in the hands of males, women lost their chance of getting financial independence and associated authority over the resources they work with. This entire scheme led to Invisibility of women from the decision making process as well. It is because of these historical reasons that today women's participation has gone unrecognized as there is nobody to highlight their significant role in creating the entire agrarian, forest and rural economy.

It is only recently that women have been given the opportunity to voice their rights after being part of various social movements. Although the patriarchal structure contributed in hampering the rights of women to a large extent, progressive legal reforms have introduced positive changes in their situation. Women have been permitted entry in religious places like temples, they have been allowed to enter forests and collect those resources which were earlier denied to them, they also have been ensured freedom to move, educate themselves and gain independence. With respect to property rights women have been struggling for long. Being considered as 'paraya dhan' Women have been made to rely on the male members to get access to any kind of property. It is only through steps taken by social movements that women's ownership rights and their leadership in raising the struggle for these rights have been given a space.

Even after such forward looking steps we see that women are still infested by patriarchal thinking. This often gets reflected in how even after performing all the background work they mostly rely on men in representing them or their work before the higher authorities or at the decision making forums. Therefore, empowerment of women cannot be guaranteed only by making them aware of their rights, but also, it is equally important and necessary to make them realize their duties. They need to be made aware that it is their duty to struggle for their ownership rights and also represent themselves and their struggle on important platforms.

Along with this, men have to be made sensitive towards inequalities that the patriarchal structure has established between men and women. Men today have to realize that women have played a very significant role in building up the entire society and without their contribution the agrarian forest and rural structures would not have been strengthened. Thus both men and women have to perform their respective roles so as to bring equality in land ownership rights.

As a woman activist I realize that when men support women's cause then women are more empowered although this does not mean that women are powerless without men's support. As a woman activist it is difficult for women to make space for themselves in this patriarchal society they are looked down upon and questioned when they go out of their homes. Various derogatory comments and assumptions are made about women when they start getting involved in social activism. *Why is she coming so late? Why does she work with males?* And such similar comments are common for women activists initially but once women are determined to understand that the work that they are doing is not wrong and they are working for the society and they will keep working for it, then slowly and gradually, that determination helps them make room for themselves in the society.

EP has been involved in the land ownership struggle since the 1990s. In 1990s, while working in the Malwa region as a part of the EP team, alongside Medha Patkar, it was witnessed how tribal people of the region were being suppressed by the government in the name of development. It was realized that building big dams was not required, as small sustainable solutions were already present. Those were the initial days of EP. As a team we had come from the Chhattisgarh region to help the tribals that were being oppressed and evicted from their forest lands on which they have been cultivating since generations. Oppression of forest Department could be clearly seen as the local tribal population was being thrown out violently from their own lands. The EP activists were also targeted as belonging to naxal areas. But the local population supported the activists as it was recognised that they were there to participate in their struggle for their right to forest land. At that point of time, there were really less organized social movements that could have made the governments of MP, Maharashtra and Gujarat realize that the livelihoods of tribals are dependent on forest resources. Forest and its resources are the basis of tribal peoples' existence. Because of the lack of organized social movements adequate pressure on the governments and related institutions could not be made due to which the verdict did not favor the tribal population. Till 1994-96, the government tried its best to suppress social movements, social activists and social

leaders by targeting them under false acquisitions and even killing them. It was during this period that Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha's leader Niyogi was killed. This entire period of suppression by the state, strengthened me as a social activist and also the organization. We learned to face challenges as a social movement during the same period, we saw that local people support us at the time of difficulties as they understand that we are there to struggle for their own cause. It thus helped to build legitimacy in the eyes of the people.

The important thing is that, both, in the eyes of law as well as in the eyes of society, women need to be recognised as equal to men when it comes to the question of family property ownership. It may take some time but eventually this will be achieved. Ekta Parishad brought women from different regions and communities together. It provided a common platform to women for sharing their issues related to land rights. Because often women in the tribal communities and in villages are the one who are continuously engaged in gathering wood from forest, taking water from rivers, working on the fields, they can be considered to be closely attached to nature and hence, aware of many minute issues that could be overlooked by others. Ekta Parishad motivates women to express such issues. It helps to make them aware and empower them to raise their voices and demand land rights. As a consequence, gradually women were made to participate in campaigns against those issues, like alcohol consumption, domestic violence and so on, that have an impact on their day-to-day life. During the 2007 Janadesh march, women actively participated in promoting the culture of contribution, by contributing one rupee on their own first in the collection pots made for this purpose. Ekta Parishad is a Gandhian movement that promotes working nonviolently. Women were given the training for educating themselves about how to strike a dialogue, how to present our issue, what are the laws that impact them. Youth is also made a part of this entire training process that goes on continuously; it is a dynamic process. The structure of Ekta Parishad is spread at all levels; at Panchayat, district, state and at National level. Both women and men are given equal representation at all these levels. It focuses seriously on every campaign and movement, for instance, before the foot march for FRA in 2007, a lot of planning, a lot of training and dialogue processes went into making the movement. In fact, I believe that in the 2007 march, women were very active in organizing the movement. The other point is that women who are directly impacted by the issues related to forest land and water are included, but along with this, different stakeholders like women, youth from urban regions, intellectuals, media persons, those political

personalities that support our cause are also given a space for participation. Ekta Parishad is based on three pillars: struggle (Sangarsh) dialogue (samvad) and constructive work (rachna).

Ekta Parishad began its struggle from the grassroots. It included the lowermost level of hierarchy and then moved upward. Thus, it adopted a bottom-up approach. Ekta Parishad gave significance to the matter of women's economic Independence. It encouraged them to contribute to the common collection of resources, whatever they could. This was used in future for the welfare of all. Then they are encouraged to save and utilize it for investing in whatever they are good at, for instance, honey collection, weaving and so on. Ekta Parishad also helps these women to sell their products. This is how, through constructive work, Ekta Parishad ensures that women's income sources are available and this also helps women to develop a connection with markets as well. This adds to confidence to get out of their homes and decide about the prices of their products that they want to sell in the market. Thus, Ekta Parishad helps women to be self reliant. Moreover, it understands that prior to getting ready for struggle, women first need to be made economically self dependent.

Appendix 5

JILL C. HARRIS

1. In rural India, having an asset gives a woman status in her family. Normally in an arranged marriage, when a woman moves to her husband's home, she is without assets because the tradition is that she shares those assets with her husband's family and they look after her. What happens, however, is that the woman who moves to her husband's family, always feels insecure because if she does not act well or please her in-laws or if her husband is not happy with her, she is afraid that the family may consider her to be less capable of being their son's wife and could think about a re-marriage. Where she, then, will have to face the humiliation of going back to her parental family. Now, under the law, that was revised in 2006, in the woman's parental home, she gets equal rights as her brother's right to the land but effectively when she moves to her husband's family, which mostly is in a different location, often far way, her land is not utilized by her self but by members of her own parental home. Suddenly, when she has children, she may wish her children to have right to the property or access to land ownership, but she does not have any decision-making power because she is not in-charge of the asset and she can influence her husband but that does not give her a sense of decision making power. Due to this reason it is very important that gender equality is given a central place. How does she express her decision-making power, if she does not have control over the asset and furthermore, she is often charged with doing many of the agricultural activities on the farm, from sowing to transplanting, to threshing. Men, mostly, tend to use tractors to sow, to turn soil and cut crops but women use their physical labour. So suppose if she wants to grow a particular seed, but she does not have a right to decision-making, her opinion will not be taken seriously. Very often, women do not want to do full mono-cropping on the land, they want to grow different crops, sometimes, they want to grow vegetables that would enrich their family's food intake but they cannot do so because they have very small land and they want to extract as much income from this small piece of land as possible. So her opinion is not taken seriously as the male of her family wants to use crops for commercial purposes, so there is no reason for a kitchen garden and other such activities.

Women generally do not have an identity in the family that she could have had, if she was an asset holder. Women really suffer from having a very low status. In Ekta Parishad, we have primarily made a women's group by the name Ekta Mahila Manch. Through this platform we attempted to have women's names on the title deeds of the property, either as joint owners along with their male counterpart or as an independent owner. It is important because as Ekta Parishadis working on the

issue of land distribution, any new land that will be distributed gives us an opportunity to put down a woman's name on the title. On the existing land, it is more difficult but in the past, we have organized camps for both men and women, where we have successful cases of men adding women's name on the title deeds. If Ekta Mahila Manch and Ekta Parishad, was not behind this, women would not have a stronger case in the family as she would have thought to be taking too much power in the family. But, if Ekta Parishad comes along and tells the community that all women need to have a greater access to land, it gives her a stronger case, a voice to go to her elders and to her husband to speak about why this is so important, and how it is good for the children because the decision-making will be more all inclusive as she is clearly one of the important parents in case of taking decisions for her children.

2. There is a distinction that has been made between making laws and cultural habits that have been existing over centuries. So, if culture is very strong then any number of laws can be put into place but it is not necessarily going to be followed. For instance, Child Marriage Law where woman need to be at least 18 years old so as to register her marriage. But in many parts of India, women are much younger during their marriage because of dowry, how the rural community works, sometimes marriages are fixed when the child is very young and then later they live with each other. So along with laws, you have to take care of the culture, but I think the law on Women Succession is quite different because when this clause of women getting an equal right to property is put in, in this Succession Act, then, that is going to be a question of law. There is no cultural aspect that can influence or change this legal clause, except, that the woman may not be able to take advantage of it because she lives in another village but the actual inheritance that she would receive from her family would not change. There are laws that are very effective and there are some laws that still face difficulty due to strong cultural influence on people. The Hindu Succession Act is for Hindus, we do have different laws for different minorities in India but those laws are not in line with the Hindu Succession Act. Although the efforts have been made to form a Uniform Civil Code. The reason I am mentioning this is because inheritance has such an important role to play in women's life in India for her integrity and dignity. Women across India get jewelry from their parental home basically to have something as an asset, and land is a similar asset that offers security to the daughter in her husband's home. So even if her land in her parental home is far away, it still gives them confidence. Thus, the right to inheritance of property to women

needs to be protected as it gives confidence to them that she has something to lean against, in case of any tragedy. For instance, COVID-19 has been a crisis. In rural India, land is wealth, it is a prime asset, if women in rural regions have assets, such women are better off during the present pandemic times when compared to those who do not have any assets to fall back on. Around 30 percent of women do not have any assets, the worst is that even the male members related to them do not own any assets either due to which they both are extremely vulnerable. In order to combat such situations, Ekta Parishad has been focusing on how such men and women can rely on their labour. Ekta Parishad has been involved in creating 'labour banks' for this, so that labour can be used as an asset after land. We can assume that poverty is not just about eating three meals a day, it is also the mental trauma of not knowing how you are going to secure your future, especially when you have a family. This is important especially for women because according to traditions in India, she is judged on how well her family is thriving, it is based on her capacity to feed her children, to be able to send her children to school, are they marrying good people and so on. If all of status is related to that then you can see how important land and labour is and this message is not communicated to land investors or government departments, who just deal in money and numbers and do not understand that behind these numbers and money are people who are suffering due to asset deficits. So land is not just about to set up industries to grow crops to feed millions of people but it is also about dignity, integrity and identity and women are central to that. This is why laws are very important in ascertaining that those women who do not have assets can get assets. Our founding fathers in India were aware that the two major issues that rural India would face would be related to agriculture and land. In the first five year plan and also in the subsequent plans, these were seen as important means to eradicate poverty, as the absence of proper agricultural facilities and land ownership were the root of poverty. But, because most of the parliamentarians were land holders, they did not give enough emphasis to giving enough teeth to laws related to land. Although in the period from 1950s to 1990s, many laws in the directions of land reforms were made, the implementation of these laws have been really ineffective. They did not take it as a priority, only in West Bengal and in Kerala, in the 1970s, land distribution was implemented but only in terms of lease offerings and not in terms of full ownership. Still, India's record has been so poor compared to Singapore, Taiwan, China, South Korea, as these countries were able to implement the land reform policies at the time of independence and monitor that landless people

got land, but India was able to achieve only 2 percent of such reform implementation up until the 1990s.

From 1990s, new land reform policies and laws were framed that came with its own set of challenges as now even the private investors were competing for the same land that the landless poor were supposed to get, so this conflict, of course, was decided in the favour of the investors who had money and could buy the patronage of government. Thus, these investors managed to get more land from the government. So, through all of these problems of land not getting re-distributed properly in the early years and then in the post-liberalisation period, a high degree of landless people. The question here is who is going to suffer the most? Of course, the mother of children who has to move long distances to get wages in exchange for her labour.

It is very important to understand that without a piece of land, you do not have an identity. How do you admit your children to school as you do not have an address, you cannot get a voting card or a ration card because you do not have a place to mention in the address column of the form. All these problems have adversely impacted women.

The other thing that is to be noted is change in the agricultural sectors. In the last 20 years, men have moved out as migratory labour and women back home had to look after the farms. Because women had to work on the farm, it was her responsibility to make it more productive, but she did not have the basic means, she did not have the land ownership. So how do you take the grains to the mandi, when you are not the owner of the land. All of this presents a huge set of problems for the woman who has to be responsible for the farming activities. It is the case for about 30 to 40 per cent women, across India and probably many more as not all the cases are documented. So here is an example of people who do have a small piece of land and women do work on that land but they do not have a legal backing and therefore, the rights to own land. This is why laws need to change for giving rights to women who are controlling farming efficiently. Certain legal measures including the right to own land need to be given to women.

3. In 2018, we supported four women leaders from Ekta Mahila Manch to move in a caravan from Kerala, covering 10000km, all the way to Delhi. The reason for 10000km was that they were following a zig-zag route across various states so as to know the condition of women in these states. They met women from each state, from various communities and talked to them, made them aware that they were the real farmers and they needed land rights. They tried to give these women

confidence that they should be given land as they are the farmers and central to agricultural activities like mentioned in Swaminathan report. This caravan continued for six weeks (from 15th August to 2nd October), which was then merged into the Jan Andolan March 2018.

I think the best strategy is to encourage women to occupy leadership positions, having the confidence to take big actions as we all know how difficult it is for a woman in this country to drive around from state to state and talk to hundreds of women. It does not happen often, because women are considered to be needing protection and thus, not seen to be leading on their own, but these four women did it on their own. These women arranged the finances, had networks with various women organizations in the states, they were going. This is the kind of action that we are looking for. Ekta Parishad has a women vice-president and also has a committee of six women and four men. But, like most organizations in India, it is very hard not to have a male influence in the organization because men are used to enjoying that power and it is not easy to make that transition. We can see that in the Parliament of India, where there are only some 12 per cent women. Even in the local panchayats where 30 per cent reservation of seats is for women, we see that there are less than 30 per cent women there. So as much as we have the desire and aim, it is very hard to put it into reality. So when we see women standing on their own, leading on their own, like women of Ekta Mahila Manch, we feel proud that these women are not only taking charge of their own but also inspiring other women to act independently and lead.

Even those women who do not have their own land should be given the right to lease land and to decide which crops to grow on the leased land so that their families and communities get benefitted.

4. It is to be noted that it is women from the marginalized communities that have brought real change. It is in these women that we have to invest because they are the real change makers. These women are the real change agents who make change from the bottom which affects the entire triangle. Every woman who is making a change in her village is having an impact, maybe in a small way, but having a substantive impact. We need to highlight the contributions of such change agents. In 2016, in Jalgaon, Maharashtra, we brought together 60 women from across the country with 50 internationally well-known peace-builders from Palestine, Kenya, Columbia and they came to discuss with the women grassroots activists about how they did it. So not only our grassroot activists are able to make change at village or local level but also are able to pass on

some strategies, some teachings even at international level. We often equate poverty with ignorance among these grassroots women but what I learned from this meeting of grassroots women activists and international peacekeepers is that how empowered these women are, when they are given a platform, respect and means to communicate their own strategies and we need to open our ears and hear their voices and promote them instead of thinking that we know it all and we have the solution. Such women need to be at the forefront of our struggle.