Struggle-dialogue: tools for land movements in India

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Section One: Introduction

Struggle-dialogue and dialogue-struggle

The tools used by non-violent land movements in India today are for the most part derived from Gandhi's methods of non-cooperation during India's struggle for freedom from British colonisation. The situation is different today in the sense that land problems involve social, economic and political inequity between groups within the same society. Groups fighting to defend land rights distinguish themselves in their use of non-cooperation, as opposed to violence, targeted against the state rather than a class of landlords.

This paper is written for individuals and organisations interested in social change geared towards redistributing land and enhancing rural livelihoods for poor people. In this paper we profile the tools used by people who are struggling for their rights for livelihood resources such as land, forest and water. They are doing so because there is an increasing genuine scarcity of land, and they have been left without means. This is partly because land was not redistributed as planned after independence in spite of the fact that laws and policies were put into place; and has been exacerbated by the current economic trends.

Basically all the tools described and analysed in this paper are used to advocate for people's rights at local, state and national levels. The case study of Ekta Parishad (translated as 'United Network') was chosen because there is continuity between the local, state and national level tools. They are used in a deliberate continuum rather than being diverse and random.

To explain further, one end of the continuum is *dialogue* and the other end is *struggle*. These are interlinked: there is a 'struggle-dialogue' direction or a 'dialogue-struggle' direction. This framework captures the dynamic quality of a rights movement in which people are *struggling* at the 'bottom level' and their struggle is shaped into a formation by outside catalysts so that they can express dissent (using their democratic right) at the 'top level' through *dialogue* or vice versa, there are catalysts or supporters *dialoguing* at the top-level to give space for political action or *struggle* at the bottom level.

These are self-reinforcing strategies geared to pressuring government decision-makers and other powerful groups to work out strategies to redress grievances and provide land rights to poor less powerful communities. The dialogue-struggle component is rather common among NGOs but the struggle-dialogue tools are more unique to Ekta Parishad, an umbrella organisation that links several million people over eight large states in India. Moving from the local to the state and national in a bottom-up manner is a long-term process which takes many years of organisational struggle. The dialogue-struggle tools can be used by anyone who has power in the elite structures politically or administratively, using that power to give space in which to operate. If one puts both of them together, it is a combination that the state cannot ignore. One can see this in the two charts below.

Chart 1 'Struggle to dialogue' direction in the continuum

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 non-violent 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 the leadership development.	Train youth so that they can act as catalysts at the village level helping to shape the formation giving it a non-violent quality.	Provide them with some supports 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 struggle or dialogue.	Create state level fora for dialogue.	**Dialogue**
To pressure 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 there actions are transparent.	**Dialogue**

Chart 2 'Dialogue to struggle' direction in the continuum

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 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 legitimisation.
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.

Gandhian non-violent action

Since the kind of action and their tools largely come from a Gandhian base, it helps to review the non-violent action of Gandhi and some of his successors to understand the tradition from which this arises. Gandhi developed many tools for carrying out non-violent action as a result of his experience in South Africa against the *apartheid* regime. He brought these tools and techniques into play during the freedom movement in India. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to analyse the tools used by Gandhi and his successors, it is important to draw attention to the history. As seen above the role of the leadership is "to slightly shape" the movement of people from below by adding the non-violent elements of political action. It is important to know that non-violence as defined by Gandhi himself is a *force*, not an attribute. It is a means of transforming negative

emotions into positive ones and through this emotive force channeling people to do service to the society, particularly the poor. For Gandhi, non-violence was the means of achieving truth.

Tools used to strengthen non-violence as attitudes in people and in the society were: to increase respect for all persons (whether they were friend or foe) and to see the enemy as a system and not people; to use persuasion rather than coercion in social change; to use sacrifice and voluntary action for undertaking constructive programmes for rural reconstruction; to honour both the means and the ends of any action to ensure one was avoiding sheer pragmatism. To end injustice, both people and institutions must evolve new values and behaviour. Moreover, social changes are more likely to persist if people make them voluntarily.

Vinoba Bhave worked tirelessly throughout his life for *Bhoodhan*, the Land Gift Movement (*Bhoo*=land; *dhan*=gift), walking for 14 years collecting more than four million acres of land. His technique was to have *zamindars* (landlords) voluntarily gift land to the landless and then the villagers would contribute their labour to village reconstruction programmes. Vinoba Bhave used tools of non-violence such as civil disobedience and civil resistance, strikes, *satyagraha* and peaceful mobilisation. It was a movement not only for *Bhoodan* or *Gramdan* (village community land) but for *Swaraj* (self-reliant local development) in a realistic sense ensuring all-round development of the villages, where the village was the primary unit of governance and provided inspiration and direction to the national policies.

Prem Bhai at the Banwasi Seva Ashram was another prominent Gandhian leader of the land movement. His life and engagement with the tribals (Indian people who do not belong to the main religious groups) from 1954 to 1994 is a history of the various experiments and experiences, working in with one of the remotest parts of India to develop and bring a level of self-sufficiency. The ashram found that no land surveys or recording of land titles had ever been conducted in the 433 project villages. As a result there were enormous plot overlaps and incorrect entries in the land records. As the forest department was evicting the tribals on the ground of not having proper records, the ashram conducted a survey to identify cases of undeserving eviction by forest officials. Villagers were asked to check whether their names and entries on their documents were correct; and whether their land boundaries were accurate and had been registered.

Tools included a series of processions and walks. *Bhoomi Haqdari Morcha*, or Land Entitlement Fronts, were organised in every village and these made representations to the State Government to take urgent action to stop the harassment. Public meetings were held at various places to make people aware of the situation. Members wrote to the government and said that if no action was taken they would commence with peaceful direct action. The tribals were chased away and in some cases, the police broke into their houses and damaged their possessions but in spite of this, the people became confident and courageous. Many villagers became familiar with aspects of criminal law. The Banwasi Sewa Ashram moved the Supreme Court with a petition, complaining of the repression of the tribals. The ashram also filed a public interest petition in the Supreme Court in 1982 contending that tribals are being mercilessly ousted to make way for the thermal power plant.

Rajagopal was the most recent Gandhian working on the principles of non-violent struggle on the land issues. He made the unique contribution of bringing rural middle-class youth under training and having them work with the poor communities mainly tribal and other landless communities. His concentration on women as activists was also significant because they are a significant force in rural areas. Through mobilisation and advocacy (using the struggle-dialogue method as cited above), he illuminated the notion of rights and control over livelihood resources.

The Ekta Parishad whose tools are elaborated in subsequent sections of this paper, was founded in 1990, as a people's organisation to fight for the causes of the downtrodden. The idea of a mass movement developed over time. Beginning in the early 1970s, in the violence prone ravines of Chambal, under the tutelage of the well-known Gandhian Subba Rao, Rajagopal worked for the surrender of bandits, bringing them away from violence to non-violence through rehabilitation, and through this experience began the long history of addressing people's struggles, creating the base for what later became Ekta Parishad.

Rajagopal understood that the root cause of rural indebtedness and poverty lay in the issue of land. He concluded that unless the question of land is addressed and measures are taken to rectify the imbalances, rural poverty cannot be eliminated. This however is impossible unless large scale mobilisation at the grassroots is ensured. Through Ekta Parishad, Rajagopal could redefine and re-establish Gandhian values against those who considered Gandhi and his principles as irrelevant in modern times. Purification of the mind and simple living were as important as the struggle against external forces.

The tools that were developed by Ekta Parishad are many but one of the most historical act of struggle taken up Rajagopal was the six month long *padayatra* through the length and breadth of Madhya Pradesh. This was undertaken in December 1999, from Ektapura in the Chambal to Raigarh, in eastern Chhattisgarh by end of June 2000. Walking on foot for more than 3500 kilometres, Rajagopal realised that mass mobilisation along with the sensitisation of the political elites and other social leaders as to the kind of plight endured by poor people was essential. Throughout he gathered 24,000 grievances which were later given to local administrators of government and used as a base for policy advocacy. It was on the strength of this in-depth work that the state government set up a Task Force to review claims. The achievement was the allocation of 350,000 land plots to needy families and dropping of cases of 500,000 violations against mostly tribal communities.

Ekta Parishad drew from the traditions laid by Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave, and Prem Bhai. The work on land rights campaign developed tremendously particularly in light of the consequent recognition of the state that land rights are necessary for the poorer sections of society, particularly the scheduled castes (low castes) and scheduled tribes.

<u>**Section Two: The range of tools used in non-violent action**</u>

This section gives a kind of anatomy of a social movement given by looking at the tools used both structurally and historically. This is aimed at informing other social action groups and support organisations of approaches and techniques to apply in their different contexts.

Defining types of tools for carrying out non-violent action

In working out the tools for carrying out non-violent action, there was some confusion as to what tools mean, as distinct from the meaning of strategies and methodologies. For purposes of clearly delineating what we mean by tools in this, tools are referred to as "the use of some tactic/method to reach a particular end result". Those tools are given which may have larger import than that which exists in a particular and given situation and may be used in another situation elsewhere.

For purposes of clarification, it is useful to cite an example. In May 2000 Ekta Parishad staged a *dharna* (sit-in) against the state government pointing out that land grievances were not being adjudicated by the state administration. This sit-in was called while the longer foot-march and campaign was going on in the remote rural areas. Since the campaign had not got sufficient media coverage in the state capital, a tool was needed to bring the issue to the attention of the political decision-makers. On a searing hot day at 43 degrees centigrade in mid-summer, 500 hundred people came together in a sit-in with black umbrellas on which they wrote their slogans in white ink and then proceeded to block the main thoroughfare of the city throughout the day. This was very captivating and as a result a lot of attention was given to it in the print and the electronic media. So in spite of a *yatra* traveling four months across the state with almost no media coverage, this one day sit-in caught the imagination of the political leaders directly. This tool of using the 'umbrella *dharna*' meant that the issues 'were seen and therefore were heard' and this was instrumental for the government later to set up a Task Force to review all the land claims six months later. (This incident is further elaborated below.)

Four types of tools are presented in this paper:
- Tools for building social organisations
- Resistance or struggle tools
- Tools for scaling-up campaigns
- Dialogue or advocacy tools

Tools for building social organisations

The first set of tools is related to building a social organisation through leadership training, and then strengthening collective decision-making. (Please note that every tool has a variety of sub-tools and sub-sub-tools!)

The tools can be divided into:
- Youth camp training
- Cadre-building training camp

- Women's leadership and formation of Mutual Help Groups
- Strengthening women's roles through *Ekta Mahila Manch*
- Formation of community grain bank to fight rural indebtedness
- Formation of traditional *Panchayat* (village government)
- Formation of larger organisation at the cluster level (i.e.10 villages)

Youth camp training: Collective training enables young people to understand the elements required for leadership development, and the reason that this is important both in the context of Gandhian (or non-violent political) action and bottom-up democratic processes. The camps are organised well in advance for men and women in the 15-30 age group. They are sensitised on the importance of the land rights, the nature of exploitation by the landlords (*zamindars*), and that tribal rights being guaranteed by the state. They are then given the tools for taking up mass struggle for the protection of people's land rights. Youth are equipped with the tools of having a social analysis (i.e. to articulate how non-violence is a form of political action which addresses the root cause of rural poverty, and simultaneously creates collective efforts to eliminate poverty and injustice) and an appropriate disposition or attitude for carrying it out (moral/self-regulating/self-disciplined), appropriate leadership qualities, and mobilisation skills that can develop local capabilities through direct voluntary action as well ensure there is an attitude of voluntary service. They are taught techniques for carrying this out in the village. In this process they get a feeling of solidarity.

Case study: Youth camps in Bihar

Youth camps were conceived as a way of intervening in the conflict in Bihar by bringing hope and constructive direction to the youth. The basic reason for the violence was a lack of faith in the state itself. The image of Bihar had been badly damaged by the incessant violence over the years, and the way it was highlighted in the media added to insult to injury. The idea was to create respect among the youth towards the history and culture of the state. The youth training has been part of the 'Rebuilding Bihar' campaign, which was and is aimed at bringing different caste groups together in a community scheme, restoration of traditional water systems, linked indirectly to land issues. Apart from constructive work on the water tanks, the youth were effectively bringing local farmers water free of cost. This enabled dialogue to take place on the land and wage issues between landowners and the landless poor.

The experience from Bihar illustrates that not only is a youth camp is for mobilising youth, it can be used as a critical development intervention to bring different caste groups together (which is not generally done in Bihar) and to bring the farmers into dialogue with landless agricultural labourers. They are in a caste war situation, so this is a conflict-management and peace-building exercise. The government of Bihar was so impressed by this method that they sanctioned many similar programmes.

In summation then, the camps focus on two broad agendas: firstly, to engage in leading communities in activities such as the construction of new village roads, repair of the existing ones, cleaning up the village tank and building canals; and secondly, to devote their efforts to assisting the poor in the community to help them to stand on their on their

own without fear. There are many tools that are required to carry this out, and these are given in the following sub-sections: cadre-building, strengthening women's organising, traditional leadership development, and so on.

Cadre-building training camps: These are the same as youth camps, but tend to be with youth or women who have had some experience in the field and they are coming back for 'refresher' inputs. In that sense the training is a little more sophisticated capacity development. However it uses the constructive work and the skills development approach similar to the youth camps. These are usually provided to activists that have an ongoing relationship with Ekta Parishad. Often they are geared to women's groups. In these camps they learn more completely the tools related to struggle-dialogue. These are given in the next section.

Women's leadership and formation of Mutual Help Groups: Giving women the power over resources is essential for any development to take place. This is lieu of the fact that women are the mainstay in farming and yet they have no decision-making power. Through Mutual Help Groups, grassroots women can organise their energy, contributions and activeness around activities such as developing a grain bank or a tree planting programme. Two short case studies are given below. These tools give the women a level of self-sufficiency in which they can come together and participate in the larger struggle for rights. Otherwise they do not have the facility to do this.

Case study: Cooperative tree planting

In Bhalapur, a village in the Rajanandgaon district of Chattisgarh, there is unique community participation is forest preservation. It began with modest resources and aims. On a 12 hectare land plot once barren with felled trees is now dense green cover. The turnaround has been achieved by the determination and organisation of village women. A women's collective was formed at village level, to help women engage in economic activities that would make them financially independent. Constituted as a group with a maximum membership of 20 and a minimum of 10, the group aims at leadership development, health awareness, family land and other concerns. A small sum has been deposited from the profit from the sale of forest produce, which the women add a small amount to weekly. These savings are given as loans to members of the group to meet their contingencies. No bank account is needed for the members, as this is an independent initiative of Ekta Parishad. These women are learning how to connect this economic activity to the overall advocacy for land rights.

Strengthening women's roles by setting up Ekta Mahila Manche (Women's Wing): An exclusively women's formation within Ekta Parishad was started in mid-2001 as a way to bring more women leaders and decision-makers into the senior echelons of the organisation. Their main focus is gender-related land issues, particularly to make sure that *pattas* (documents stating joint land rights between men and women), are issued in the names of both husband and wife. The tool used here is to motivate women to get into the land rights movement by starting with seeing their own life change and realising that change is possible within the home, community and society.

Formation of community grain bank: One of the building blocks of a social organisation is that people work together and build consensus at the village and local level. Based onan action started such as the development of a grain bank, a community gradually builds itself into a campaign mode. This is also a method devised by Ekta Parishad to fight indebtedness and the existence of bonded labourers in villages. At any time of shortfall, an agricultural labourer is forced to borrow grains from the money lender or landlord with an interest rate often not less than 50%. As the labourer fails to return the loan back, they are charged interest until the only way repayment can be made is through his labour being bonded. The idea of the grain bank was conceived to release labourers from this bondage. Villagers deposit a share of their produce with the grain bank, from where grain was given to the needy villagers at 20% interest. This helped them to repay the loan taken from the landlord. This collective endeavour is a tool for freeing the labourer and the family from debt, but also a method of social mobilisation.

Formation of traditional panchayat leadership: Unlike the local village governments (panchayats), the traditional decision making committee (also known as a panchayat) has existed in villages over centuries and commands considerable influence over the life of the tribal population. The decisions taken by the village headmen at the village meetings are considered binding on the tribals, with spatial and moral force. Ekta Parishad has encouraged one modification by proposing female leaders as well.

Formation of cluster level formation: It is very important for many villages to begin to link together into a formation for purposes of strengthening the group against opposing forces at an economical, political and social level. If one does not do that then the vested interests undermine the people's strength through divide and rule tactics.

Resistance or struggle tools

The second set of tools relate to resistance and struggle. In the context of Gandhian struggle, they are a referenced to the concept of *satyagraha* which means 'holding on to truth'. The rationale here is that people that are being oppressed are free from immoral acts and they can do so without any justification, a kind of 'self-evident' act similar to say, a 'self-evident' truth. The immoral act rather falls on the oppressor. This is similar to Kant's notion of universal moral law.

The reason for resistance however is also to try to press the government to implement pro-poor policies. Although these policies are on the books, the government because of a variety of vested interests finds it hard to implement them. Without an interest group reminding them of their responsibility and their duty to the public interest, the government can be easily moved by other interests.

The kind of struggle tools that Ekta Parishad uses are:
- Developing a mini-campaign (*morcha*)
- Using cultural activism to get a group(s) to rally behind a campaign
- Occupying land
- Blockades, sit-ins, surrounding people as a way to show people's force
- *Jan sanwie* (people's hearing)

Developing a mini-campaign (morcha): A mini-campaign is a tool of mobilisation that gets people at the grassroots level to come together and develop their own campaigns in a spontaneous manner. A mini-campaign is also an opportunity to standardise information related to the actions on the ground, which are normally invisible. Therefore a mini-campaign has the dual purpose of being a tool for organising and for generating knowledge.

In terms of mobilisation, it usually involves building a campaign systematically in one locality on one issue. Each region or larger area may have as many as two dozen mini-campaigns. Some may be fighting against alcohol liquor shops, some against dam construction, some for the rights of unorganised labour, and so on. Within these mini-campaigns, there are many tools developed. One example is given in the case below.

__Case study: Using extreme means to keep out encroachers from reoccupying land in Gura village in Damoh district, Madhya Pradesh__

Some 35 years ago, a few poor landless families of Gura Village shifted to a wasteland and began to cultivate. Settling themselves on the raised mountainous platform they began to develop a sixty-acre land plot. Converting the rocky terrain into cultivable land was not an easy task. Over time however they built it up and today there are eighteen families depending substantially on this stretch of land. However, the entire stretch is dry and rain fed, and at most it yields about one crop a year, which is insufficient for people's existence. In the dry season men go to cities in search of wage labour. Taking advantage of the men's absence, the rich landlords tried to grab their land. The officials in the revenue department, in spite of full knowledge about the occupancy,

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sold off the land to some urban land dealers. About two years later some men came with tractors to forcefully occupy this land. Women had no choice but to set up a mini-campaign and face this opposition. One of the tactics that they used was to pick up the faeces of their children and threaten to plaster the encroacher's faces with it. Alarmed, the encroachers fled, never to return back. Buoyed by their initial success, the group sought the support of Bharatlal, an activist with Ekta Parishad who welded these eighteen families into a determined organisation so that the land would not slip out of their hands. They are determined to see that, irrespective of the ownership, actual cultivators would be the eighteen families of Gura.

Using cultural activism to get a people to support a land campaign: Within Ekta Parishad there is a group of highly enthusiastic and energetic artists who are folk singers and veterans of street theatre that work in a group called Ekta Kala Lok Manch (One Artists' Group Front). As they approach villages, they raise slogans like 'Zameen apne aap ki, nahin kisi sarkar ki' ('The land belongs to us, not to any government') and 'Kala kanoon toregen, jungal, zameen jotegen' ('We shall break the black laws, shall plough the land and forest'). At all rallies, public meetings, it was they who provide high voltage transmission of messages through their plays that mirror the forced land alienation and exploitation of *adivasi* communities by influential and moneyed villagers, while their songs are enchanting and inspiring to villagers to take up collective action. These are very important tools.

Occupying land: One of the tools of resistance is to forcibly (re)occupy land. In many places throughout the Ekta Parishad area, this is being done. Reoccupation means that *adivasi* people are staying on their own land (but without title); or people are claiming rights on surplus land. In some cases Ekta Parishad is doing a *bhumi puja* (traditional land claim ceremony) as a way to legitimise ownership. An example is provided of a case in point.

Case study: Reoccupation of 700 acres of forestland in Chilghat, Madhya Pradesh

Chilghat was a denuded tract of land that was taken over by people who had no land. Now not only are they tilling the land for crop cultivation but they are also going in for plantation, which is enriching the forest. Vimla, a woman with a history of marital discord and a mother with growing children, joined Ekta Parishad. Some years ago she was sent to Chilghat to organise its people. Those who tilled the land faced multi-pronged harassment at the hands of authorities. People tilling the land had no land rights on paper. In legal terminology, they were transgressors and hence liable to punishment. Forest guards and police would destroy their crops. But the legal system went against the natural rights of the people. Vimla's role was to organise people so that they could fight the state repression in a united fashion. As a first measure towards the building of a people's organisation, community cultivation was begun. The villagers gave Vimla a house to live in. About two years ago, the police made an afternoon swoop on men working in the field. With promise to free them soon, the police took the men to a police station far from the village. On hearing of the mass arrest, the womenfolk, who had brought lunch for their men, undertook a spontaneous march to the nearby police station. They sat down at the station, refusing to budge unless their men returned to the village. After hectic parleys on the wireless, the perplexed police released the villagers.

Acts of civil disobedience: blockades, sit-ins, surrounding people: In running mini-campaigns, many acts of civil disobedience are used such as the case study above in which the women sat in front of the police station until the police released their husbands. Other examples are blockades (of roads or railway lines), surrounding politicians (known as 'gheroing') until they agree to do something, or sit-ins (*dharnas*) in front of senior government people's offices or residences. In fact there is a whole history of these tactics in India's freedom struggle which is why there is a set of well-known terms - a lexicon of civil disobedience.

These tools are to be used carefully and not excessively. It is always important not to let the tool determine the strategy rather the strategy determining the tool. In the case of Ekta Parishad it is common that when an action is launched then the government is given a warning to act. Using the threat of civil disobedience provides a time-bound framework in which the government should correct the situation otherwise the people will act.

Jan sanwai (people's hearing): This is a people's court which listens to people's grievances and collects documentation to provide to the state administration, to the media and to courts. Many people have sent their grievances to the government, sometimes as many as a dozen times with no action. Moreover the courts do not handle these grievances because powerful interests subvert the law by continuous stay orders. Therefore this tool of people's hearings is very important because these collected written grievances (like an affidavit), which are recorded (steno, audio and visual), are the *locus standi* by which to file a complaint and use as the basis of the land campaign.

Public hearings have also been organised by the District Task Force in a 31 districts (out of 45) in Madhya Pradesh. This gives the villagers the opportunity to air the grievances before the administration. It is also a means towards ensuring that the authorities becomes accountable to the people and adjudicates their grievances.

Tools for scaling up campaigns

In any small campaign, land or otherwise, the powerful interests can eclipse any result. This is the reason why a movement has to continuously enlarge its scale of action. The tools that that are required are: large mobilising actions such as a foot-march (*padyatra*). Rajagopal was able to use a long march successfully because of his many years work at the community level linking small mini-campaigns into large state-level actions. His continual work enables him to work at the state and national level.

Since every large action uses a large number of tools, it is necessary to do a cross-sectional analysis of a long march in order to understand the kind of succession of tools. The Orissa long-march carried out in February 2004 provides a good example of the range of interlinked tactics and activities involved. The Orissa *yatra* was organised from a village in Kalahandi district to Bhubaneshwar, the state capital, to build pressure on the Government towards the requirements for land by the poorer groups of tribals and landless communities.

Various tools were employed in different stages of this *yatra*, summarised in the eight points below. All of these were geared to wide social mobilisation and participation of villagers in the *yatra*, to bringing various issues into focus to attain maximum media attention, and to galvanising the people into a movement in its successive stages over a month.

The yatra itself: The route of the *yatra* was planned and pre-decided. A reception was arranged en-route in each village by the village committee. A small amount was raised

by the villagers to meet the boarding and lodging expenses of the people on the yatra. (Normally there were about 100 at any given time.) A lot of discussions, preparations and planning went into the successful completion of the reception program in each village. This was also a means of local level mobilisation. This provided an opportunity for the village committee and its leaders to place their views of the issue and discuss the various dimensions of the problems with other members of the village, so that greater understanding and solidarity was made possible among them.

During the *yatra*, meetings were arranged at each village to provide villagers with the opportunity of sharing their concerns on land and other issues with their fellow villagers and the Ekta Parishad activists. Though their concerns were largely related to the three issues of drought, regularisation of tribal lands, and maintaining the rights of the small fisherfolk at Chilka, they spoke about wide-ranging issues that pertained to both individual and community level problems of their respective villages.

Every evening, the members of the *yatra* team sat together and analysed the progress of the movement, major weaknesses and possible measures to rectify them, and worked out the agenda for the next day.

Collecting grievances in writing: In case of an illiterate villager, a member of the Ekta Parishad team prepared the application on his or her behalf, after hearing about the problems. A dedicated team in the *yatra* did the work of analysing the grievances of the people and prioritising them according to the issues that required immediate concern. After the successful completion of the *yatra*, all those persons whose grievances had been collected in writing were informed by post about the follow up action taken by the Ekta Parishad in their respective cases.

Cultural group: Artistes who performed short plays, music and folk songs accompanied the *yatra*. This helped in reaching out to the villagers and to identify with their problems in a more intimate manner.

Working with the media: Efforts were made to get maximum media attention across the state. A press release was issued everyday from the village where the *yatra* halted and electronic and print media were invited to collect information on the activities of each day. In Bhubaneshwar there was a state coordinating office which contacted the head offices of each media house. The editor or the head of the institution was appraised of the situation so as to ensure that the matter was reported with due importance at the local level during the *yatra*.

International networking: A summary of the movement and the day-to-day successes were reported to international solidarity partners. Some 15-20 persons from abroad, mainly from Europe and the U.S., took part in the *yatra*. They wrote to their friends back home about the issues and requested them to write to the political and bureaucratic authorities telling them about the problems and requesting feasible solutions. A letter-writing campaign was launched so that people could express violation of rights to politicians, civil servants and other decision makers, as a way to pressurise the government into solving the issues.

Marching into the state capital: One of the most interesting parts of the Orissa campaign was the march into the state capital. The Chief Minister had not responded to the many letters written on behalf of the *yatra*, so it was decided to march into the capital and see if the Chief Minister would meet them and "save face". This was timed with the forthcoming election.

Final public rally: Teams were set up to coordinate the programme in February 2004. A day after the march kicked off the Chief Minister invited the delegates for negotiation. On the penultimate day, an agreement was reached at on the setting up of a task force to solve the problems of land rights in Orissa. The video footage of the meeting of the delegates with the Chief Minister was taken and presented on a big screen to the people in order to apprise them of the details of the meeting. In response to the invitation rendered by the delegates, the Chief Minister declared the formation of the Task Force at a public meeting at Bhubaneshwar, which was preceded by a huge victory procession across the city.

Follow-up strategy: On 12 February 2004 at a press conference held at Bhubaneshwar, Ekta Parishad declared, 'If the government does not respond well to the issues highlighted in the *yatra*, we will launch a fresh agitation in the form of a blockade of the national highway.'

Dialogue or advocacy tools

There is a generic difference between mobilisation- and advocacy-related tools. For this reason we have dealt with them separately. Some of the advocacy tools are dialogue tools but others back up the mobilisation making it more credible, like the aforementioned 'umbrella sit-in' during the Madhya Pradesh *yatra* in 2000.

Advocating that the state should distribute or regularise land for the poor is done through identification of cases. In the meantime public opinion is built up as a pressure point. What one is advocating is that the livelihood rights which are constitutionally guaranteed must be carried out. If they are not being carried out, there is a legitimate role for people to advocate either through the political or administrative structures or through the courts and if there is no response after due process, then civil disobedience is the acceptable alternative.

Some of the tools that Ekta Parishad has developed to take up advocacy are:
- Public opinion-making tools
- Task Forces
- Tools for evidence collecting
- Dialogue-related tools

Public opinion-making tools: Working with the media is essential. Tactics include producing press releases and press briefings/conferences especially with the victims themselves; interacting with local journalists in a manner that you are also interacting with state and national journalists simultaneously; networking continuously with the

journalists through exposure visits, and providing them with good stories; ensuring that actions get into the print media; preparing films of the issues and on the techniques/tools used; working to educate editors; and maintaining a log of press clippings so that analysis can be used in planning future media events.

Building up public opinion and communication capacities to influence people nationally and internationally is also crucial. The importance of networking cannot be understated, from building synergies, to getting information disseminated, to having people from outside of India raise various issues. This is easier now as the internet and websites have provided a larger network visibly on the land movement.

Task Forces: One of the tools that Ekta Parishad helped to catalyse through the Madhya Pradesh Government was the Task Force. This is a committee formed by the state government (Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, and Orissa) at the district, sub-district and state levels to address the issue of land redistribution and regularisation. The creation of a Task Force is not an end in itself - it is only a means towards the realisation of the objectives raised by the land movement, giving the government a mechanism for action.

Tools for evidence-collecting: Collection of grievances and petitions is one of the core activities of the land movement in India. Unless concrete cases are exhibited in front of the administration or courts, there is no veracity in the claims. Many of the tribal communities do not have any documentation of their claims as they have ancestoral rights. This therefore requires different legal approaches.

Dialogue-related tools: There are many kinds of conferences that are called at various levels to give voice to the poor communities and to legitimise their land rights. These are tools to voice people's problems which are outside of middle class people's perceptions, but also to create alliances at many levels. Land is a very basic building block for national development and must be seen in terms of the political economy of the country. Conferences are a way to link land rights back to livelihoods and human rights.

Summing up the four sets of tools

These four sets of tools show the progression in building up a campaign. The struggle tools reinforce the social organisational tools and vice versa, and the advocacy tools bring the whole approach into both a bottom-up struggle which is met with an advocacy aimed at the decision makers, and a legitimisation giving space and a fair hearing to the grievances that are otherwise ignored.

Section Three: Historical analysis of the tools used by Ekta Parishad in the non-violent land movement

This section focuses on the historical development of the land movement of Ekta Parishad so as to see these structural characteristics in a context. Three periods highlight the various construction and reconstruction of tools for the land movement: the first period of 1991-98; the second period of 99-2000; and the third period 2001-04. The first period was the formation of Ekta Parishad and the development of livelihood rights; the second was the build-up to the first and most significant of the long-marches (December 1999 – 2000); and the third was the time of building state-level actions in a number of states as a base for building a national campaign. This underscores the importance of sclaing-up and how to use tools that are developed through this process.

In terms of relating the history with the description above on the structure of tools, one could say roughly that the first period was marked by the tools of social organisation, the second was the fine-tuning of the tools for struggle and the third period was when the advocacy tools were developed. Therefore the struggle-dialogue-struggle continuum developed over time up until the third period.

Ekta Parishad had the benefit of about a 20 year gestation period. It sprung out of the rehabilitation of *dacoits* (outlaw communities) in Chambal (1970-76), the work around releasing bonded labourers from 1985-92, the ten year work with tribal communities throughout Madhya Pradesh and the *dalit* communities in Bihar (1980-88); and the setting up of five institutions in different regions of central and eastern India to provide training for youth and the organisation of people in the informal sector into something like a union.

It may be added that before setting up Ekta Parishad, Rajagopal did attempt to bring NGOs together into a federation in 1985, but given the fragmentation of interests, he began to see the importance of creating a 'united forum' that would not be chipped away at by the vested interests. It was the vision of creating a powerful and united force of the poor that led to the consolidation of Ekta Parishad, comprising a number of small groups and a handful of the institutions that Rajagopal himself had set up in the earlier period. This became the base that built out into a massive social organisation that today spans more than eight large states in India with a contact base of several million people.

1991-1998

Ekta Parishad was formed in Tilda in formerly Madhya Pradesh in 1991. One of the first big events that consolidated Ekta Parishad was the *Jai Jagat Jeep Yatra* (Fellowship Tour by Jeep). This crossed the state of Madhya Pradesh over a period of one month. Since it was carried out over the time of the demolition of the Babri Majid at Ayodya when communal tensions were at their height, Rajagopal wanted to respond to the tensions with a call to people (particularly to youth) to be peaceful and to be vigilant against communalism.

This use of 'touring' was common to both Vinoba Bhave's period (who had been on continual long-march for 14 years), and to Jay Prakash Narayan who had two decades earlier called the youth to oppose the misuse of political power. In this tradition then,

Rajagopal wanted to use the *yatra* to galvanise a larger formation. This became the hallmark of Rajagopal's actions for the next 14 years.

In this initial period, the first task was to bring a large number of people together into a single formation. Rajagopal started with Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa. He did not go beyond these geographic boundaries in the first period. His approach was uniquely open and non-dogmatic however. Christians, secularists, socialists, Gandhians, activists and NGOs all felt comfortable in Ekta Parishad.

The second task was to bring the clarity of the struggle to a large number of people both in the villages and outside. The message that became articulated in and through thousands of villages was "control over livelihood resources" i.e. forest, water and land. The initial emphasis of the movement was on forests because of the large membership in Ekta Parishad by tribals themselves. The sub-issues related to displacement, eviction, indebtedness, alcohol trade, lack of *nistar* and other rights to the forests. The issues were given by the mini-campaigns, and the larger campaign reflected these grassroots concerns.

Hundreds of activities went on during this period. The main work in this period however was developing the social organising tools that would be the base from which the struggle tools developed.

1999-2000

This period was the turning point of Ekta Parishad from a localised grassroots movement into a force to be reckoned with across the whole state of Madhya Pradesh. (For further reading, see Rahul Ramagundan: Defeated Innocence, 2001.) This was achieved by a six month march starting in December 1999 from Sheopurkala (bordering Rajasthan), ending on June 21 2000 in Raigarh city on the eastern border to Orissa. This was a mobilisation of more than 10,000 villages and some 300,000 people. Ekta Parishad had around 250 people at all time on the *yatra*. They walked under very difficult conditions throughout but showed the determination of an army force. They covered five regions of Madhya Pradesh analysing 24,000 grievances and dealing with hundreds of local issues.

Such a large action gave the organisation the strength to be a significant adversary in struggling against a very recalcitrant state. Over the following four years Ekta Parishad assisted in having a Task Force consolidated in every district of the state, and the distribution of 350,000 land plots. In addition it got 500,000 charges dropped by the forest department against tribals. This had such a significant impact that the Chief Minister depended on Ekta Parishad to advise his government on policies and programmes related to land.

At the same time that Ekta Parishad was advising the government, it continued to organise people and put pressure for the decisions to be carried out properly. The Task Force became a model intervention that got replicated in three other states. One of the reasons that it worked most effectively in Madhya Pradesh was because of political will. The main constraint was administrative lethargy, but headway was made. (See Pradeep Sharma – A Study on Land Distribution in Madhya Pradesh, 2004.)

The large action coupled with the energy of hundreds of small actions led to social organisation in 30 districts out of the total of 45 in the state. This meant that advocacy tools necessarily had to be developed to monitor and follow up with the government on the one hand, but continue the struggle on the other. This led to the formation of the whole advocacy effort over the next period.

2001-2004

The period of 2001-2004 saw the upgrading of the movement in many places. This can be seen by the next five large scale long-marches that took place in Bihar (September 2001), Chambal (April 2002), Chhattisgarh (February 2003), Bundelkhand-Bagelkhand (September 2003) and Orissa (February 2004). The work on advocacy tools in this period helped people at the field level to understand that working along a continuum is necessary, so that mobilisation can have more impact on political and administrative decision makers.

Section Four: Other movements

In the following section focus will be give to two other movements in order to understand the tools that they have used:
- Anti-Coca Cola struggle in Placimada, Kerala
- *Dalit* land movement in Maharastra

Anti-Coca Cola struggle in Placimada, Kerala

This is a very highly publicised movement that raised critical issues related to water use. The Left Democratic Front (LDF) in Kerala approved the establishment of Coca Cola's (Hindustan Lever Coca Cola Beverages Pvt Ltd) factory in Placimada in 1999 without consulting the village government (*gram panchayat*). The villagers in fact only came to know about it when the company actually started building on a 48 acre plot. Initially, the villagers had no idea that the factory could have an adverse impact on their ecology, social and political life as well as depleting ground and surface water. The company managers as well as state political leaders convinced the people about its benefits and assured that it would generate local employment.

Early signs of trouble began in 2001 when villagers noticed the change in the taste of drinking water and that they were not able to boil rice in it, nor wash clothes. People started noticing nausea, dysentery and visible skin diseases. This was enough to alarm them and they held the company responsible for these hazards. After these declines in water quality, the level of ground-water dropped below the level of village wells. The factory's sludge deposited on fields made soil quality deteriorate and it became dangerous for crops and cultivation. There were enough signs to alarm local people that when the licence came up for renewal, the village government rejected it. The company decided to go to court. This set the stage for a long-drawn agitation. There was a long-drawn legal battle in the High Court of Kerala (henceforth, the HC) and although the case is was not brought to a legal conclusion, it has had significant outcomes.

The villagers, through Adivasi Sangharh Samiti, supported by the village government, staged an indefinite *dharna* opposite the Coca Cola gate campaigning for its permanent closure. Strangely, political parties from the national and state level also staged a *dharna* nearby for the continuation of the Coca Cola as they were convinced that company was generating local employment, and that its closure could discourage other foreign investment to the state. It was the resolute and consistent struggle of the villagers and their local government that forced political parties to join their agitation at a later stage made then realise the seriousness of Coca Cola's affects on environmental, social and political life.

The HC asked the village government to conduct a research inquiry on the adverse impact of Coca Cola on the local environment. But the village government contended that it had neither technical expertise nor financial resources to do such inquiry. The HC allocated a separate fund for this purpose. The village government then entrusted the Agricultural University to this task. They also asked the agriculture department and local self-government to submit their reports on impact of the company on respective areas. The village government also produced 'show cause notices' to the company to provide clarifications. A university research project consolidated all the technical inputs. It proved that the quality of drinking water had worsened, that the company had dug more than the one well which had not been approved, and had spread the sludge on agricultural fields that caused deterioration of the soil and health impacts on local residents.

All these findings indicated the gross violation of laws and suggested closure of the company. In addition, the company had been using good agricultural land. The village government raised a concern that good agricultural land (usually restricted to rice growing) could be used for industrial purposes. The HC directed that state government to take a quick decision and report back. But the state government did not take any decision for almost five months.

The villagers were now getting support, mobilisation, solidarity and media attention from all quarters, local to international. They were confident that they had a strong case and wide support. Owing to the inaction of the state government, the village government got restless and the president announced a fast-unto-death *satyagraha*, which was designed to intimidate the Chief Minister, and all concerned officials both at state and national levels. In response, the state cabinet took a decision to close the company immediately avoiding a high publicised and long-drawn legal battle.

Dalit land movement in Maharastra

Jamin Adhikar Andolan (Land Rights Movement) works in Maharastra, largely representing a *dalit* population. *Dalit* people consider that land is not a matter only of somewhere to farm and live, but is the basis for gaining acceptance and social status. Land represents social justice in a caste-ridden society.

There has been progressive land reform legislation in the state and good early implementation, but since the mid-1970 onwards the pace has slowed due to lack of

political will, administrative reasons and links between big landowners and the political establishment. More recent legislation to regularise land (1978-1990) has resulted in only 25 percent of people being allocated land while others are still waiting. The laws are in the interests of the people, but they are not implemented properly. There has been no updating of land records since 1930 in the state despite it being mandatory every 30 years.

JAA uses tools to assist with the mobilisation of *dalit* communities in one region of Maharastra, Marthawada. In a situation like this where the *dalits* have not been given land and therefore they have suffered with the lack of dignity of having poor livelihoods and being a landless community, the main work of JAA is to give them confidence, building up social organisations and getting them prepared for struggle. Their main requirement is to get land to cultivate to guarantee basic food security. The use of strikes, marches, pressure tactics on local administration is done in the process of them occupying community land. Subsequently they need to get the government to legitimise their land holdings so that they can claim inputs. This requires advocacy tools such as making requests to the district administration, for example to get water access or protected irrigation.

JAA is linked with other *dalit* movements in the country so that the networking is usually within that circle. Since *dalits* have generally a difficult time getting justice, they avoid the courts and prefer to seek political interventions.

Section Five: Analysing processes in which the tools are used

Section 1 presented the continuum of struggle to dialogue and dialogue to struggle. Section 2 outlined four types of tools: social organisation tools, struggle tools, tools for scaling up, and advocacy and dialogue tools. By using all four in combination one can develop a large-scale campaign that both mobilises people at the grassroots level and brings the issues to the notice of political decision-makers at the top level. The coming together of diverse individuals and groups on one platform with a broad and non-hierarchical formation is likely to both have the highest impact and the greatest sustainability. All tools need to be framed keeping these campaign-building exigencies in mind.

Beyond this, the tools themselves have to be diverse to meet a variety of situations yet used in some sort of succession. Social organisation tools being usually precede struggle and advocacy tools. A common difficulty is that advocacy is often carried out without sufficient mobilisation or alternatively mobilisation is carried out without sufficient advocacy. Both are essential and must be calibrated to each other for maximum impact. That is why Placimada had so much success and the reason why the long march of Chhattisgarh carried out by Ekta Parishad made so much headway. Both of these had adequately pressured the Chief Minister to such an extent that there was no manoeuvrability. This is reiterated in the short case study given below.

Case study: the Chhattisgarh incident

An eight-day long *satyagraha* was launched in Pandaria town at Chhattisgarh in February 2003 as a sudden response to the murder of Birju Baiga, a local tribal leader working with the Ekta Parishad. A one-month long-march through the villages of Chhattisgarh was taken up as a way to mobilise grassroots workers against the state because the state aided and abetted the murder by trying to evict tribals from the forest. A *dharna* for eight days in a small regional town was matched by advocacy in the capital city to show the victim's case to the political decision makers and opinion makers in such a forceful way that the Chief Minister was personally forced to accept responsibility and make the forest official resign. This then helped over 6000 more families to gain title over their ancestral forest lands.

The principle tool of organising must be effective mobilisation. Without that nothing really can occur. Poor people themselves have to take up the *satyagraha* ('holding on to truth' through action) to demonstrate their capacity to endure difficult conditions, with staying power or power of endurance. This has to be seen within and by outsiders as moral power more important than money power or brute force. In India this coincides with the very ancient and deep-set notion that abstinence is a means for achieving liberation. For this reason long marches (*padyatras*) have a persuasive power in India that may not echo in other countries.

Non-violence means that the struggle should never be an end in itself. One is enduring struggle to *disarm* the opposition, not to *destroy* it. This is borne out of the notion that social relations are constantly dynamic and that the struggle is never one-time. Moreover the struggle is facing a system, not a set of individuals. The objective of struggle is not replacing one group of people with another, rather it is about changing the political culture (the prevailing economy of thought) completely.

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