Land, Community and Governance

Edited by
PANKAJ BALLABH

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National Foundation for India
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Seva Mandir
Udaipur

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For

Bram Van Leeuwen

Always straining to dignify the search for social justice

Contents

Foreword

Seva Mandir has been engaged in the field of participatory development for over three decades. During this period, it has experimented a great deal in identifying social processes that can impact poverty. In the late 1970s and the first half of the 1980s, Seva Mandir committed itself to organizing village people to demand that the state system be more responsive to their needs. It sought to do this by getting energetic and upright people elected to panchayat bodies and by mobilizing peasants into cohesive groups. Seva Mandir also put a great deal of effort in constructive work to establish models of development that could be replicated on a large scale by the state.

Yet another role played by Seva Mandir was to act as an extension agent for government programmes. For instance, under the lab-to-land scheme of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Seva Mandir did agricultural extension work with around a thousand peasant families. Similarly, it was actively involved in the National Adult Education Programme started by the Janata Party government in October 1978. Under the programme, close to 600 education centres were set up, which became the nucleus of group-building activities and served to make people aware of their rights and entitlements from the state. These programmes helped Seva Mandir establish its presence in a large number of villages and to recruit staff who could be oriented to undertake long-term development work. What was common to all these varied interventions was their premise that the final responsibility for development lay with the state, and that the role of civil society groups was to catalyse it to perform its development role more effectively.

In the mid 1980s, Seva Mandir was presented with an opportunity to explore the possibility of getting local people to take responsibility

for designing and implementing development work. Although the organization had engaged in constructive work from its inception, the idea that civil society institutions should become the locus of designing and implementing development programmes was a radical departure from past beliefs and practices. The precise nature of the opportunity took the form of a call by the National Wasteland Development Board (NWDB) to the voluntary sector to help create a people's movement to address the environmental crisis facing the country. Specifically, it enjoined non-government organizations to help land-dependent communities to undertake the afforestation of large tracts of degraded land in the country.

The idea that local groups should take responsibility for their own development appealed to Seva Mandir. Its past efforts to make the state more responsive to the needs of the poor had not yielded significant results. At best, Seva Mandir's efforts had resulted in a response from the state on a case-by-case basis. No large-scale and generically effective intervention had materialized from these claim-making exercises. The efforts to revitalize panchayats had also not shown significant results despite the fact that people with clean records associated with Seva Mandir had been elected to office. The extension-work model, while creating many positive results for the poor and also strengthening Seva Mandir, had not led to the state internalizing lessons from the field, nor had it created a secular tendency among civil society groups to feel responsible for bringing about development. The difference between being an extension agent for state programmes and the offer made by the NWDB was that the latter gave Seva Mandir the freedom to design its own programmes, while making it accountable for their impact. At the time when Seva Mandir was considering NWDB's offer, many people felt that the organization was reneging on its activist past. It was strongly felt that the new leadership in Seva Mandir was opting for a patronage-centred approach to development. In hindsight, the first part of the criticism may well have been valid; the perspective that civil society groups hold themselves responsible for designing and implementing development programmes was a departure from the strategy which held the state centrally responsible for all development work.

By the mid 1980s, Seva Mandir was well established as a non-government organization. It possessed a good physical infrastructure, employed trained humanpower, and enjoyed extensive goodwill

among the local people. The programme of re-greening the country presented an opportunity to explore the effectiveness of the idea of people's participation in development. It also presented an opportunity to see whether there was an alternative approach to development such that the state is not regarded as the 'first problem solver', but instead begins to play the role of the 'first organizer of social capacities for their solution'. It needs to be noted that the decision to accept the NWDB offer was not opportunistic, but was part of a fundamental reorientation in Seva Mandir's outlook as to who was responsible for development work and how it should be undertaken. Alongside with accepting the challenge presented by the NWDB, Seva Mandir created development capacity on a number of fronts such as the provision of health and education services, women's development work, and natural resource development in general. Needless to say, this approach did not imply that the state should abdicate its responsibility for the provision of health, education, and other development services, but indicated that civil society should also contribute to the realization of these goals.

The wasteland development programme initiated by Seva Mandir in the mid-1980s was to grow into a mass programme. Within two years of its initiation more than 5,000 peasant families became involved in its activities. The programme spread to over 200 villages in the four operational blocks of Seva Mandir. This rapid expansion was possible because of Seva Mandir's extant organizational capacity and its extensive contacts in the area. The momentum gained by the programme in the early stages was encouraging. It seemed to vindicate the NWDB premise that communities at the grass-roots level are inherently better placed to green the countryside than the agencies of the state. It also seemed to validate Seva Mandir's shift in strategy, that is, of building the capacity for development at the level of civil society institutions and the people themselves. Subsequent developments in the programme, however, did not sustain this sanguine hope. If anything, events showed that the base of civil society capacities to undertake development was weak, and it also underscored the link between the nature of the state and that of civil society. The better governed the state, the more effective are civil society institutions; the more derelict the state, the more neglected is civil society. Once it became apparent to Seva Mandir that the social and institutional base for people's participation in sustainable land use was deficient, and that peasant communities including

tribal societies are not spontaneously given to sustainable land use, it dedicated itself to addressing these deficiencies in a systematic way.

This volume has been put together in an attempt to take stock of Seva Mandir's efforts, spread over eighteen years, towards this end. The experience of addressing these issues has resulted in a great deal of learning for Seva Mandir. While it cannot claim to have found a solution, Seva Mandir does feel vindicated by the realization of the idea that the state alone cannot be relied upon to solve the problems of society. The building of civil society capacities is the key to ensuring that the state will be more mindful of democratic and egalitarian agendas and will henceforth be more meaningfully engaged in such activities.

Ajay S. Mehta
New Delhi

Preface

This volume, *Land, Community and Governance*, and the companion volume, *Decolonizing the Commons*, are the outputs of a one-year research project supported by the German Technical Cooperation. They are part of a larger effort by Seva Mandir to facilitate the development of natural resources in the tribal belt of Udaipur district, Rajasthan and to make possible their access to local inhabitants. The focus of the effort is on revitalizing natural common property resources, which have over time been degraded and illegally privatized. This volume documents Seva Mandir's understanding of the problem and its efforts to regenerate common property regimes in its area of work.

About the Project and Acknowledgements

Seva Mandir has been working in southern Rajasthan (Udaipur district) since the 1960s. More than 70 per cent of the population in the region of the southern Aravallis is poor and dependent on land and natural resources for their livelihoods. Land also defines the social formations and political identities of the local people. Not only are the people poor, but they are also significantly disempowered. Another striking feature is the fact that close to 70 per cent of the land is vested with state and statutory bodies such as panchayats. Given the extent of poverty, on the one hand, and the high availability of common property resources, on the other, the central issue for Seva Mandir has been why the local people have been unable to mount a successful campaign to make these resources more productive.

Seva Mandir has been fortunate in having the opportunity to experiment with a range of ideas and alternatives on how to make the land work for the benefit of the rural poor. The focus of our efforts during the last two decades has been to revitalize the natural common property resources which have over time been degraded and to restore this important livelihood source for the benefit and advantage of the poor people of the region.

With a view to documenting our work in natural resources management and the ways in which we have tackled the problems we have faced, we submitted a project proposal to the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), a Germany-based funding organization, with the aim of reaching out to academics, activists, policy makers, and administrators to see whether we could build on some of the positive outcomes of our work while at the same time better understand why progress has been slow. At another level, the idea

was to see if we could identify a common cause and frame a common agenda for public action that would involve a broad section of civil society and state agencies.

The present volume, *Land, Community and Governance*, is the outcome of this research project. We are eager to share this study with all those who are interested in this important issue and hope that our experiences in the field will help to guide others involved in similar work. We thank GTZ for supporting the research project.

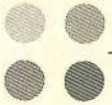
The work documented here has been aided by scores of other donors who have supported Seva Mandir since its inception—the Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO), Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst (EED), Canada India Village Aid (CIVA), the Ford Foundation, and other funding organizations from Holland, Germany, Canada, and the USA. Thanks to their support over the years, we have been able to garner rich and wide-ranging experience in the area of land and natural resources management along with the active assistance and involvement of village communities.

The bulk of the book has been authored by Pankaj Ballabh who was associated with NGOs in Udaipur for around a decade, between 1992 and 2003, working on issues related to community institutions, commons, and agriculture research and extension. Pankaj was supported by researchers who have written the individual case studies. They all deserve special thanks for their hard work. Malini Sood, a freelance editor based in New Delhi, helped with the editing of the manuscript and we are indeed grateful to her.

We are also grateful to the National Foundation for India (NFI), New Delhi, who recognized the value of this documentation project and agreed to be our partner in publishing this book. Being a donor agency involved in development communication work, NFI is in a unique position to help disseminate the lessons learnt during the course of experiments carried out in the field of development work. Nandita Roy, senior programme officer, NFI provided invaluable support in the preparation and production of this volume.

Neelima Khetan
Chief Executive
Seva Mandir
Udaipur

1



Overview

This volume documents the experiences of Seva Mandir over the last three decades in working with rural communities in Udaipur district, Rajasthan. Its focus is the lessons learnt from Seva Mandir's work with communities concerning the conservation of natural resources, specifically land. Land has been chosen as the focal point of the narrative for several reasons. Land, especially for a forest-dwelling and forest-dependent community, forms both a livelihood source as well as a source of its identity. In Udaipur, land has an extremely complex usage pattern. The emergence and establishment of new boundaries, especially after the settlement of the 1960s, has led to confusion and conflict both between and within villages. Land has also undergone significant changes in its ecological status, in addition to changes in the nature of its ownership and management. Areas that were pristine forests until a few decades ago today lie degraded, treeless, and privatized. In a vast majority of cases, the traditional norms of resource sharing, which defined the community, have not proven to be robust enough to withstand recent changes.

As Gold and Gujar write in the conclusion to their study of Sawar, a part of the erstwhile Ajmer state:

> This now familiar tale of lost community feeling, lost trees and an absence of responsibility, which is also an absence of tyranny, is evidently a social construction of the past, a shared story. It has its unexamined internal contradictions. If the village community were once united by love, mutual respect, and ecological forbearance (albeit under tough sanctions), why did it all dissolve so quickly when the feared ruling power was replaced by a constitutionally chartered 'people's power'? . . . Why should it be that community deteriorates along with nature,

and as a function of the advent of freedom? Why did 'people's power' turn out to mean not self-rule but self-interest and self-inflation?[1]

Arbitrary boundary demarcations, resource depletion, and increasing pressures—both from within and from external markets—also put great pressure on traditional resource-sharing mechanisms. As we discuss later, many of these traditional mechanisms—based as they were on *joot ka raj*[2] (literally, rule of the shoe)—failed on many counts from being good-governance mechanisms.

The state—which was expected to be a source of development initiatives, a provider of norms, and an impartial arbitrator—has failed on all counts. Instead, the soft yet authoritarian state has provided the rich and the powerful with both opportunity and strength to appropriate common resources. The existence of rampant encroachment amply illustrates this truth. In some of the reserve forest blocks of Udaipur, the level of encroachments is of the order of 80 to 100 per cent. Revenue wastelands and panchayat grazing lands also display similar levels of privatization. The new patrons, state and civil society actors both, routinely tolerate encroachments and make promises of 'regularization'.

In such a scenario, the work on natural resource management is not concerned with merely 'regenerating land'; it is also concerned with 'regenerating community'. The process of developing a value-based governance system forms the core of Seva Mandir's efforts. In some cases, the remnants of the older systems do provide a foundation for the new system; in most cases, the task facing Seva Mandir and the communities is not merely the revival of old traditions of governance, but also the need to develop new norms and negotiate afresh their relationships with their neighbours.

Clearly, there cannot be a standard blueprint for this. As we discuss later, we are at a stage where the questions far outnumber the available answers. We present a selection of case studies that attempt to provide a glimpse of different contexts, approaches, and outcomes. Some of the narratives that follow are of hope, where communities have overcome the obstacles before them and achieved meaningful results; these narratives describe communities engaged in this

[1] Ann Grodzins Gold and Bhoju Ram Gujar, *In the Time of Trees and Sorrows: Nature, Power, and Memory in Rajasthan*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002, pp. 318–19.

[2] Ibid., p. 109.

process. Some narratives also recount failure, where no meaningful progress was made.

This set of narratives does not seek to provide proof that local governance does indeed lead to better production from land resources, either in quantitative or qualitative terms. There are also several operational issues linked to work on land. Absence of relevant research, non-availability of raw materials (especially plantation materials), inadequate understanding of flora and fauna, erratic rainfall and engineering solutions to withstand it, etc. are some of these issues. These, however relevant, are not the focal point of this volume.

This study does not seek to provide a sanitized, ordered view of the ground realities, leading to a neat theoretical synthesis. What we seek to do is present village narratives that abound in 'fraught negotiations, contested realities and displays of cacophonous discourse',[3] and through them introduce to the overall discourse some basic understanding about the nature of the governance mechanisms on land, especially on public and common lands: the relative absence of robust traditional governance mechanisms, and to show how new mechanisms evolve, how fragile they are, the amount of effort—external and internal—that is required to keep them going, and how macro forces destroy and distort them.

The volume begins with a brief profile of the region and an outline of the evolution of land governance in the area. The policy regimes covering land and other critical natural resources are discussed here. This is followed by a brief history of Seva Mandir's work in the region, where the emphasis is on the work done in the area of natural resources. The heart of this book is the collection of village-level narratives. These are from a wide variety of villages, ranging from small homogeneous tribal settlements to large multi-community villages. A concluding statement follows the village narratives.

[3] Ibid., p. 3.

2

Profile of the Region

The land-governance mechanisms in the rural areas of Udaipur are a product of the historical processes which the community and its resources have lived through, and their interaction with the state and the world at large. They are influenced greatly by the spaces, both physical and political, that different actors occupy. Narratives describing the patterns of earlier village settlements are both limited and conflicting. While the genesis of Rajput rule and history (as well as the history of the other, mainly Hindu, communities) is well documented in James Tod's work, that of the tribal community is less so. Similarly, in the case of land governance, a wealth of data is available for 'arable lands', while little or no information is available for commons and public lands. This chapter draws heavily on history as recounted by village elders, specifically those from the villages of Jhadol and Kotra.

The Communities

Two communities dominate the landscape in Mewar, as Udaipur was known before Independence, especially the areas in which Seva Mandir works. They are the Bhils and the Rajputs, with other castes and communities playing a largely supporting role. Tod's narrative describes the Bhil community[1] as 'wild thieving hordes', and indeed

[1] The following definition of community is assumed: 'A set of people (i) with some shared beliefs, including normative beliefs and preferences, beyond those constituting their collective action problem, (ii) with a more-or-less stable set of members, (iii) who expect to continue interacting with each other for some time to come, and (iv) whose relations are direct

mentions that survey works and the census could not be undertaken in several areas because of their presence. Other similar village-level narratives state that the Bhils were actually brought in by the Rajputs from adjoining areas to serve, cultivate, and guard (that is, perform *vet-vegar*). The payment for this was normally in kind, i.e. by allowing the Bhils to sit on land (thus explaining the term *vet* or *baith*, literally 'to sit').[2] Tod and others such as Maxine Weisgrau talk about how the Rajputs came to Bhil-inhabited areas and how the Bhils helped them settle down and provided them support against Maratha invasions. Eventually, the Rajputs displaced the Bhils and pushed them to hilly upland areas.

The presence of Bhilu Raja's image on the emblem of Mewar, and the fact that Bhil chieftains from Ogna used to anoint, with their blood, each new ascendant to the throne of Mewar until the mid 1600s, would seem to indicate that there was a period during which there was an alternative relationship between the two communities.

The two narratives portray the status of the tribal community in widely different terms. The reality is probably somewhere in between.

Many villages (including those whose narratives are presented in this volume) are new villages, settled four or five generations ago; their origins are usually traced to a single family coming and settling in an area and then inviting others to join it. We are still exploring the exact process that this entailed. Why did the original residents move out of their old villages? What relationships did they have with the old society? How do power structures evolve in the new settlements?

(unmediated by third parties) and multiplex.' E. Ostrom, 'Community and the Endogenous Solution of Commons', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, vol. 4, no. 3, 1992, pp. 343–52.

[2] The other half of the term, *vegar* or *begar*, would translate as 'without payment'. Almost all communities, with the exception of the Rajputs and the Brahmins, were required to perform some form of *vegar*. These two communities also performed some form of unpaid labour, but without being forced to abandon their dignity as much as the other communities. The system of *vegar* has been described by several people as the 'most cruel method of exploitation', 'chief among sorrows', etc. For women, *vegar* often placed them under the control of the petty staff of the royal court, almost invariably resulting in sexual harassment.

History of Village Settlements

By 1900, the pattern of settlement in the area comprised large villages and towns inhabited by Rajputs and other communities, surrounded by dense impenetrable forests that were inhabited by tribal communities. As Tod writes:

> The local disposition of estates was admirably contrived. Bounded on three sides, the south, east, and west, by marauding barbarous tribes of Bhils, Mers and Meenas, the circumference of the circle was sub-divided into estates for the chiefs, while the *khalisa* or the fiscal land, the best and the richest, was in the heart of the country, and consequently well protected.[3]

While conventional agriculture was practised in the valley areas, tribal people residing in the surrounding forests practised a variant of slash-and-burn agriculture, termed *walra*,[4] in the forest areas. When people entered a new area for slash-and-burn agriculture, they had to take permission from the *ravla* (thakur) and pay *bhog* (offerings), which constituted about one-fourth of their produce. However, this amount was negotiable. In addition to slash-and-burn agriculture, the tribal people also tilled land belonging to the thakurs, wherein the thakurs were given three-fourths of the produce as *bhog*.

On the one hand, there was a constant, if hegemonic, pressure on tribal groups to move them from *walra* to settled agriculture. On the other hand, land was also given to the tribal people who were employed for specific purposes such as guarding land under *vet*, leading to tribal habitations in the mainstream villages. Some respondents report that by the early part of the twentieth century there were commercial relationships between forest dwellers and village dwellers, i.e. for supply of fuelwood in exchange for

[3] Lieutenant-Colonel James Tod, *Annals & Antiquities of Rajasthan, Or the Central and Western Rajpoot States of India*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1829, p. 116.

[4] New lands were cleared approximately every five years. This was necessitated by the fact that lands were sloping and a fixed crop cycle was followed, both leading to rapid soil-nutrient depletion. Where the soil was fertile, *mal* (a protein-rich grain now on the verge of extinction) and *jowar* were cultivated. Tod and others relate *walra* to a lack of commercially valuable timber in the Mewar forests.

buttermilk, or grazing the dry animals of the villagers in exchange for their first milk.

These relationships continue till today. The Adivasis (tribal people) head-load fuelwood and bring in timber and particular forest products such as *butea* leaves for upper-caste people in exchange for money and goods. Members of the upper castes also buy other forest products (seeds and flowers) from the Adivasis to sell in larger markets. The Adivasis have also mortgaged their land to Patels (agriculturists) and Rajputs, who cultivate these lands and lend money to them in times of need at high rates of interest (between 2 and 5 per cent per month). The Patels also employ Adivasi people on their fields for labour, as well as for tending their livestock.

The post-Independence process of land settlement strongly influenced the final settlement pattern. As we describe later, the process was used by the powerful to appropriate titles to the best arable lands, further pushing the Adivasis to the periphery. All of these developments have led to a settlement pattern characterized by a scattering of large multi-caste villages with control of good arable lands, surrounded by Adivasi villages located within the forest areas. This is a pattern that has been repeated across all tribal areas in India. Describing this process, M. Saha writes:

> A unique feature of the geographical distribution of *adivasis* in India is the simultaneous occurrence of high density and their existence as a numerical minority of the region's population. This is true of all major regions of *adivasi* concentration, except the Northeast . . . This enclavement at the state level is repeated at the district, block and even intra-block levels . . . This very distinctive 'enclavement' is a result of a long-drawn-out historical encounter involving the subjugation of the *adivasi* people by stronger and better-endowed communities, the length of this process itself being a unique feature of Indian history . . . The most important consequence of this enclave status of *adivasis* in India has been to prepare the objective basis for resource emasculation of *adivasi* areas through what may be best described as a process of 'internal colonialism' . . . This process was greatly accelerated after the advent of colonial rule, especially over the last century.[5]

The Feudal System and Land Tenure

Issues of land and the feudal system are deeply entwined in the history of early Mewar. Colonial rule, which significantly influenced the

[5] M. Saha, 'The Adivasi Question', *Hindu*, 2 April 2002.

power of local kings, especially their absolute control over the peasantry, had little influence in Rajputana. As Mewar was never annexed, the feudal system continued to be the dominant definer of the state.

Land titles accrued in two fashions. While the peasantry acquired title by clearing and tilling the land (*bhumiya* or *bapi*),[6] this was not the option open for the upper classes, especially the *jagirdars* (chieftains/landowners). Land was given to them as a reward for meritorious service. Land was also given in lieu of salary to the state staff. In many cases, the award was for the revenues from land, the title remaining with the concerned peasant.[7]

The quantum of land, and the nature of control over that land, defined the stature of the *jagirdar*, an important factor in an extremely status-conscious society. There were several levels of chieftains, each with a well-defined place in court and a well-defined role in governance systems. The land under the direct control of the *maharana* (ruler of Mewar) was called *khalisa*, and the other lands were divided, both in terms of ownership and revenue rights, across the *jagirdars*. As stated earlier, all of these were required to collect revenue within their areas from cultivators, traders, and craftsmen, ensure law and order, etc. In addition, they were required to pay *nazrana*, perform service in lieu of *jagir* (land), provide (and seek) advice, and supply soldiers and horses. (The level of military support was of the order of two to three men and horses per Rs. 1,000 of *jagir* earnings.) The *rana*'s share in *jagir* earnings was 75 per cent.

The *rana* was the sole authority who could grant land titles, although the *jagirdars* could grant some titles for religious purposes. Land titles were awarded for the upkeep of religious buildings such as temples, mosques, etc. (*pshatdarshan*) and state apparatus (*ravli* and *patta*); for livelihood purposes to priests (*shasnik*), state staff, craftsmen and other individuals (*chakri*), and *jagirdars*. In addition,

[6] Tod reports that 'he who clears, he who tills' receives the cherished title of *bhumiya* or *bapi*. Indeed, this was the only process by which titles to land could be created, and the right was respected by ruler and invader alike. The Mewari peasant said, '*Bhog na dhani raj ho, bhom na dhani ma cho*.' (The court is entitled to the tax, but I have the title to my lands.)

[7] In such a case, the *jagirdar* would have some lands over which he would hold the *bhumiya* title, i.e. the lands of the *thikana* itself, and there would be other lands that would come into his *jagir* for revenue purposes alone.

there were land gifts to *jagirdars* and others for valorous service (*bhumiya*, *inam*). Table 1 and Table 2 summarize the different categories of land.

Devsthan, *beed* grasslands, and *charnotta* are the only categories of public lands that are mentioned. Of these, the *devsthan* lands were intended for a specific purpose, and thus do not constitute a part of the commons. The *beed* lands were reserved in most cases for use by the state and its armies. *Charnots*, the village pastures, were thus the only defined village commons, with the forests in most cases being used to meet the livelihood needs of those who were being kept out of the 'land'. Some respondents report that forests, too, were divided into state forests and *jagir* forests, essentially being differentiated in terms of the final authority that exercised control. Of these, only the *bhumiya* and *inam* categories can be said to have had any security of tenure. The other categories were technically for the duration of state service, and continuance was at the grace of the *maharana*.

In addition to these tenurial forms, land was divided into several categories. The uncultivated lands (equivalent probably to today's revenue wastelands) were referred to as *bedakhila*. These could be taken over for cultivation, whereby the lands became *dakhila-kaccha*. Digging a well made the land category *pakka*.

Many lands, like the *khalisa* and *jagir* lands, were cultivated on a sharecropping basis, on shares ranging from three-fourths to one-fourth for the cultivator. Revenue on different lands was decided on the basis of the season, crop, and caste of the farmer. The 'good' agriculturists like the Jats and the Dangis paid up to two-thirds or half of the crop as revenue (*aghat*), while the 'poor' agriculturists and craftsmen were taxed at lower levels, usually one-fourth (*chauthia*). Many communities like the tribals and communities who did leather work, pottery, etc. paid *bhog* and did *vet-vegar* in addition to making revenue payments. To facilitate the extraction of revenue, *patwar mandals* were established by the mid-nineteenth century. Land settlement was undertaken between 1884 and 1886, wherein arable lands were categorized and revenues re-determined for each land.

As stated earlier, colonial rule had little or no impact on land governance in the region. Indeed, the support provided by the British, through their cantonments in Kotra and Naseerabad, enabled the local governments to be even more ruthless regarding revenue collection. In most cases, the land deeds were in the names of the

Table 1. Land Titles Awarded by the Court in the Feudal Period

Features	Religious (*dharamarth*)		Non-religious					
			Mafi		*Jagir* (Military)			
	Pshatdarshan	*Shasnik*	*Inam*	*Chakri*	*Bhum*	Grass	*Ravli*	*Patta*
Purpose	Upkeep of temple, etc. Later referred to as *devsthan*.	Livelihood of religious persons.	Reward for good service/act.	For duration of service.	Gifts and grants. Normally given for valorous service. Most *thikanas* were *bhum*.	In lieu of salary while in service. Later equivalent to *bhum*.	For upkeep of rana's family and princes.	For state expenses.
Revenue	Nil		Nil. The token was negotiable.	Nil. Instead paid a token *nazrana*.	As applicable. Paid *bhum-barad* as revenue.	Nil. Instead paid *tanka* as revenue.	Nil	Nil
Rights	Technically required renewal, but re-possession was seen as a sin.		Could trade or mortgage.	Nil. However, hereditary posts meant that lands were hereditary too.	Highest level of tenurial security, thus the most desired category.	Nil. However, hereditary posts meant that lands were hereditary too.	Reverted to state on demise of person.	

Table 2. Categories of Land in Early Mewar

Residential		*Padat* (Wastelands)		Agriculture lands		
				Kaccha	*Asli/Pakka*	
Kaccha	*Pakka*	*Gaucher/Charnotta*	*Be-dakhali*	*Dakhila*	*Kham-Asami*	*Bapi*
Two categories of residential lands, for new and old villages respectively.		Reserved for grazing. Shared across many villages or panchayats. Encroachments or misuse was punished.	Equivalent to today's revenue wastelands. People encouraged to bring it under cultivation, when it became *dakhila*.	First level of arable lands. Digging a well made it *pakka*.	Need to cultivate it for some generations to take it to the next category.	Literally hereditary. After one or two generations of use under *kham*. (Tod says, after 100 years of use).

upper castes, while the actual cultivation was done by the tribal people. Furthermore, the lands cleared by Adivasi people were in forest areas, where the system of land categorization had not been applied, nor titles granted. The lands given to the tribal people for *vet* came from the *bhum* lands of the concerned *jagirdar*. In most cases, there were no formal *pattas* issued; also, subsequent to clashes between the sovereign and the *jagirdars*, conflicting land deeds were issued, at times by persons with no authority to issue them. These led to, as we report later, the denial of titles to actual cultivators at the time of land settlement.

There was another feature of the system that aided revenue extraction. While persons farming in *khalisa* lands were free to migrate to anywhere else within the state, farmers owning lands (or farming) in *jagir* areas could move out only subsequent to the approval of the *jagirdar*. Similar rules applied to the tribals residing in forests falling within the *jagir* area. Thus, while in theory the *bhumiya* or *bapi* was the owner of the land, in reality even he was the servant of the *jagir*, being forced to pay ever-increasing revenues and being denied permission to leave.

Governance of Public and Common Lands

Pre-Independence

The preceding discussion on land types, tenure, and revenue would indicate that, while there was a well-defined and enforced system for managing (that is, principally extracting revenue from) arable lands, common and public lands were not so well governed (or documented). Very few details are available about the governance mechanisms on non-private lands—*charnots*, forests, and *beed* grasslands. The documentation focusing on the state mentions only the fact that forests were inaccessible for surveys and the census owing to the tribals, and that the indiscriminate felling of trees for *walra* was preventing the growth of commercially valuable timber. Alternative texts dealing with subaltern issues[8] focus not on the governance of

[8] With particular reference to two recent texts by local foresters, see Deep Narayan Pandey, *Ethnoforestry: Local Knowledge for Sustainable Forestry and Livelihood Security*, Udaipur and New Delhi: Himanshu Publications, 1999, and R.C.L. Meena and Deep Narayan Pandey, *Van ka Virat Roop* (in Hindi), Udaipur and New Delhi: Himanshu Publications, 1999.

forests, but on the more romantic aspects of traditional medicine and the role of forests in people's lives.

Gold and Gujar in their documentation of practices in Sawar[9] write:

> *Jangal* (wooded areas), *bir* (protected grasslands) and *pahar* (literally hill, but here common grazing land) all came under the *Jangalat*. . . There was a prohibition on hunting. No one could hunt. No one could cut trees. [There were] five to seven forest guards whose duties were to protect the jungle—above all from those who attempted to cut green wood or to kill wild animals . . . Those areas of uncultivated lands designated as bir were set aside solely for the Court's use. Farmers were not allowed to graze their animals or cut grasses in these areas, . . . as the Court wanted this grass for his horses . . . The common grazing land also came under the Forest Department . . . This land also belonged to the Court, and was used on the Court's sufferance or grace. Some told us that the people could graze their animals and pay no tax. Others said a grazing tax was levied on all except cows.[10]

The local narrative in Udaipur is very similar. The forest was owned by the *maharana* and the governance system principally seemed to have been designed to protect it for the pleasures of the hunt. The *rana* also had the monopoly on taxes on 'trade and passage' and on 'minerals and forests'. While the dominant strategy for forests was protection, the *thekedari* system was prevalent wherever revenue opportunities existed, i.e. a Bohra trader of Udaipur was allowed to come and take *kattha* from *khair* (*acacia catechu*) trees. The Kathori tribe from Maharashtra was brought to this area because of their knowledge of, and ability to extract, *kattha*.

Tod's *Annals* also mentions that the timber market thrived in Banswara, and that the state had a monopoly on sandalwood. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the rulers of Udaipur and those of the adjoining states were looking for ways to boost revenues from forests, and were planning to induct British foresters to initiate 'planned forestry' on the lines of the Bengal model.

The local *ravla* (*jagirdar*) acted as a proxy for the *rana*, and allowed people to cut wood for their house and own consumption,

[9] It is worth noting that Sawar was a part of the annexed states, and thus differed from Mewar in this respect.

[10] Ann Grodzins Gold and Bhoju Ram Gujar, *In the Time of Trees and Sorrows: Nature, Power, and Memory in Rajasthan*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002, pp. 147–48.

but they were not allowed to sell the wood. Hunting was banned. As stated earlier, both permission and *bhog* were required for *walra*. The mode of enforcement of the centrally declared prohibitions was force, or '*joot ka raj*', as the Sawar narrative repeatedly brings out.

Thus, while there are certainly a few aspects of the traditional *jagirdari* system of Rajasthan to which we would want to look back with wistful nostalgia, it seems clear that, in those areas with stronger central administrations and higher *jagir* concentrations, woodlands were preserved from encroachment and degradation by 'traditional' methods of resource preservation and allocation. This of course, has two aspects. Not only were the trees conserved, but the peasants and pastoralists were also prevented, frequently with extreme force, from utilizing the natural resources around them.[11]

Active local governance of forests and commons is not mentioned either in texts or in village narratives. Indeed, in most cases all persons had the same rights within the boundaries of a *jagir*, which could be denied only by the *jagirdar*. Village narratives repeatedly state that they shared the forests with all, with love (*'prem se'*). Governance mechanisms of the kind that we look for today seem to be conspicuous by their absence.[12] One explanation is that the nature of traditional governance mechanisms was strikingly different from what we are looking for today (sharing mechanisms, membership rules, etc.). An alternative explanation is that the micro governance of forests did not exist. Certain factors might possibly have contributed to this state of affairs: most neighbouring villages were a part of the same extended family, resources were in abundance, and apart from court-imposed restrictions on hunting and felling there was no active state governance of forests.

Many of the settlements are also new settlements. Could it be a contributing factor that their establishment as a village was followed in a generation's time by large-scale upheavals in state, administration, and landownership?

[11] Ibid., pp. 250–51.

[12] The two examples of local governance often cited are of sacred groves and the practice of *kesar chidkav* (sprinkling of sacred saffron on the periphery of the forest to declare the boundaries of a protected area). The worship of sacred groves is by and large a non-forest and non-tribal tradition, and instances of *kesar chidkav* are too limited and of too recent a vintage to be considered a serious 'traditional' governance alternative.

Post-Independence[13]

Independence saw three simultaneous events: the demise of the feudal system, the arrival of the forest department with its revenue mindset, and the process of land settlement that created new boundaries. The settlement process had a significant impact on private landownership as well as on village boundaries. As we have stated earlier, many cultivators did not possess clear titles to the lands that they were cultivating and thus they lost out. Many others were encouraged to under-declare their holdings, fearing higher taxes, again with similar results.

This also had significant impacts on village boundaries. For the first time, individual village boundaries were drawn, again following a process that was easily co-opted. Many villages ended up with large pieces of *charnot* and forests within their boundaries, while many others ended up with no public lands at all. These boundaries, created as part of the settlement process, were gradually strengthened over time. Lines dividing forest areas from revenue areas, too, were drawn, putting many settlements inside 'reserved forests', with little or no possibility of getting tenure over land.

The forest department operates by dividing the forest area into blocks that comprise the pooled forest lands of many adjoining villages. While the information regarding how much land of each village was pooled was noted in the settlement records, it was not demarcated on the ground. The 'rights and concessions' were 'enjoyed' equally by all villagers whose lands were incorporated into the block; they were not proportional to the forest area of their village that was absorbed into the block. In addition, the blocks were further divided into sub-divisions called compartments. The rights and concessions of the community (of all adjoining villages) could be exercised in only one of the identified compartments, which was called the 'rights and concessions compartment' (the receipt or the pass would mention the exact compartment). The department would retain the right to exercise its rights and concessions in the rest of the compartments. In case the identified compartment became degraded, people lost the legal right to exercise their rights, though they could, of course, meet their needs from other parts of the forest (thus also leave themselves open to penalization, compromise, etc.).

[13] Based on initial fieldwork reports, National Tree Growers' Cooperative Federation (NTGCF), Udaipur, unpublished.

Local people talk of the systems for sharing forest produce during this time as being based on three factors: reciprocity, resource availability, and clan feeling. For grazing and fuelwood extraction, very few restrictions are placed and extreme reciprocity is observed, as the natural boundaries and the easy availability of these two in close proximity would discourage large-scale movement. In the case of timber, however, the boundaries are more clearly demarcated, and only persons from the villages actually sharing the forest are allowed access to it.

While the village-level systems that emerged during this period were based on a recognition of the boundaries, the forest department followed a different approach. (See box, *Encroachments.*) While on the one hand, it adopted a 'preservation by exclusion' policy, simultaneously it was responsible for several waves of coupe (a small area of forest land that is earmarked for felling) and other felling in the forests. This had the dual impact of alienating the community from the forests, while contributing to resource degradation. As Ajay S. Mehta points out:

> In the post Independence period, the value and extent of resources available to the rural people diminished greatly due to over-exploitation by the state for the purposes of generating revenue and promoting industrial development . . . They continued to depend on the diminishing natural resource base for their livelihoods. Instead of trying to compensate the rural people by providing new entitlements to the land resources in the state's possession, the State continued with its custodial policies of forest management characteristic of the feudal and colonial eras. Their growing numbers, and their impoverishment due to the reduced productivity of the resource base, forced the villagers to over-exploit the resources that remained . . . Elected representatives and the state functionaries supported these sub-optimal mechanisms of survival and resource management . . . The overall effect of these distortions in the practice of development was to transform relationships of rural people from ties of horizontal solidarity to vertical ties of dependency with powerful patrons and power brokers. The extent of social fragmentation and political enfeeblement of the rural people and their institutions can be deduced from their inability to protect, manage and improve the sources of their livelihoods . . . and [from] the pervasiveness of petty corruption amongst state functionaries and elected representatives with respect to their dealings with the poor.[14]

[14] Ajay S. Mehta, *The Micro-politics of Development: An Anatomy of Change in Two Villages*, Udaipur: Seva Mandir, 1995, pp. 3–4.

Current Status of Lands and Policy Framework

Lands today are categorized into lands vested with the revenue department (panchayat lands being a specific category of lands under the revenue departments, where the usufruct rights are transferred to the panchayats) and the forest department. The panchayat *charnot*s technically are the only real commons. However, several other categories of lands, especially revenue wastelands and unused lands of, say, the *devsthan* category, are also used as 'open-access'[15] commons. The vast majority of these lands are encroached upon, and the remaining lands function as an open-access resource, essentially providing the livestock with an exercise space and the local populace with an open-air toilet.

There are several rules and policies governing these lands. Especially important are the provisions of the Rajasthan Forest Act, 1953; Rajasthan Land Revenue Act, 1956; Rajasthan Panchayat Act, 1994; and Rajasthan Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996. The relevant aspects of these Acts, specifically those that allow and regulate the local governance on these lands, are discussed below.

Revenue Lands

The conversion and use of revenue (waste) lands as village commons is at present regulated by the Rajasthan Niji Van Vikas Niyam, 1984. This order specifies that a section of revenue land can be transferred (usually through a twenty-five-year renewable lease) to a village institution for collective management. However, this order is applicable only to the Tree Growers' Cooperative Societies supported by the National Tree Growers' Cooperative Federation. As most of the revenue lands are encroached (there being a well-established procedure for the regularization of the same), and the remainder is reserved for patronage-linked activities, there is little relevance of this provision in the work area of Seva Mandir.

[15] Open-access lands are those lands which are exploited without any rules and regulations.

Encroachments

In the years after Independence, while legal access to lands by those seeking to create/expand their arable lands was denied, it was provided on an informal and arbitrary basis at the behest of derelict state functionaries, power brokers, and elected representatives. All categories of peasants were allowed to encroach on public lands, often in direct contravention of the legal provisions for such arrangements. Occasionally, those who had encroached would be legally settled, but the procedure for regularization lacked transparency and was inherently arbitrary. These arrangements, rooted as they were in arbitrary, wantonly informal, and illicit arrangements, were to force village people into ties of extreme dependence and vulnerability with host–patrons. The resulting fragmentation of social solidarity amongst villagers, as they competed to privatize their commons, made it near impossible to put in place institutional arrangements for sustainable land use.

More pernicious is the fact that while these encroachments are done in pockets of common lands, their spread and location renders large chunks of contiguous patches of commons unavailable for regeneration and development efforts. The problem is so widespread that in a survey conducted recently by a non-government organization in Udaipur, and subsequently verified by Seva Mandir, it was revealed that almost 80 to 100 per cent area in some forest blocks was not amenable to any kind of participatory land management because of widespread encroachments in pockets. The same phenomenon is true for lands such as panchayat-owned pastures, despite the fact that people have relatively well-defined ownership and stakes in them. Seva Mandir conducted a survey in around twenty odd villages in a bid to launch a project aimed at enabling the vacating of common lands through a process of negotiations at the village level and provision of alternative livelihood sources to encroachers. The survey results show that in almost all villages, the panchayat pastures are partially to completely encroached. The encroachments are largely by the rich and the influential and are driven by greed. To a lesser extent, the poor have also encroached for reasons of meagre resource endowments.

The current status of these encroachments is contested. While the state is unequivocal about the need to vacate these encroachments, especially from forest areas (see Dr V.K. Bhaguna's letter in the main text), various civil society groups and state governments are lobbying for the selective regularization of these, specifically pre 1991, encroachments. On the one hand, this doublespeak has encouraged a thriving local industry in manufacturing 'old encroachments'. On the other hand, 'given that large areas of erstwhile common lands have been declared to be "forests" without demarcation on the ground after surveys and

settlements . . . who is an "encroacher" under such circumstances remains a highly contested question and empowering field functionaries of forest departments to be the judges of the same has horrendous implications for long-standing tribal communities'.[1]

[1] Madhu Sarin, DNRM email circulation, 15 August 2002 (www.panchayats.org)

Panchayat Lands

The Udaipur project area comes under the Vth Schedule, and hence the provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), 1996, are applicable in the area. Based on the gazette published by the Ministry of Law and Justice (24 December 1996), the government of Rajasthan passed an ordinance (on 26 June 1999), which was redrafted and presented as a bill on 18 September 1999 to the Rajasthan Assembly. The Act has not been passed as of date, nor have the orders detailing out the procedures, etc. been issued. The subsequent narrative/analysis is based on the 1999 ordinance. The provisions of PESA are important on two counts. First, they provide a context and structure for larger governance mechanisms, and, second, they impact the governance of common and public lands.

The first and foremost issue relates to the meaning of the terms 'village' and '*gram sabha*'. As per the ordinance, the village 'would be one as specified as such by the Governor, by notification in the official gazette'. The Central Act (1996) is more explicit and states that a 'village shall ordinarily consist of a habitation, or a group of habitations, or a hamlet or a group of hamlets comprising a community, and managing its affairs in accordance with their traditions and customs'. The *gram sabha* will consist of persons 'whose names are included in the electoral rolls for the panchayat at the village level'.

Which definition will hold is the important question. If the definition as provided in the Central Act holds, it will be an extremely favourable definition as the Adivasis do conglomerate based on social-kinship ties, physical proximity to each other, or with respect to physical barriers created by forests and streams. These groupings have undergone large changes due to the 'boundaries' enforced by the state and other development actors. However, in some areas, as in Kotra,

these traditional groupings still exist, not only in the minds of the people but also in the way in which they live their lives. In these areas, the collectives—which are the collective users of a specific forest patch, and thus form the logical basis of a joint forest management (JFM) village forest protection and management committee (VFPMC, discussed later)—may also declare themselves as a village. Then the adult population of the declared village (*gram sabha*) would be congruent with the membership of the VFPMC, rendering a perfect subsuming of the larger governance roles with the protection of the forests.

However, as we have described in the section on settlement patterns, large multi-caste villages intersperse Adivasi hamlets. The non-Adivasi community may also have traditional ownership rights on forest lands, and are indeed the largest local consumers of forest produce. To look at forest management without considering their stake would be both non-pragmatic as well as unethical. However, the onus of protection would essentially lie with the users living in proximity to the forests, that is, the Adivasis.

The positive and relevant aspects of the ordinance relate to the ownership of 'minor' forest produce, the right to plan and manage village commons like minor water bodies, the need for *gram sabha* 'recommendations' in case of a mining lease, prospecting, or exploitation of minor minerals, and power to prevent alienation of land in Scheduled[16] areas. Lacunae exist in the operational meanings of words like 'recommendation'. Will they be binding on the administration?

The PESA ordinance of Rajasthan also talks about decentralizing the entire planning and implementation process of development projects to the level of the *gram sabha*. At the same time, the mainstream panchayati raj system is also being 'strengthened' by adding another tier of governance in the form of a ward *sabha*. There are confusions arising due to this. Which of the two systems takes precedence? What happens to the non-Adivasi settlements in the Scheduled areas?

The same ordinance also allows for communities to 'safeguard and preserve the traditions and customs of the people, their cultural identity . . . and the customary mode of dispute resolution'. Given

[16] According to the Vth Schedule, Article 244(1) of the Indian Constitution, some areas have been declared as 'scheduled' by the president.

the fluid identity of Adivasi people, and their rapid absorption into the mainstream, the community is not homogeneous. The staff of non-government organizations, Adivasi *sarpanch*s, young educated men who are moving out to work as clerical staff, etc. hold higher positions of power in the community. Further, there is a caste-like hierarchy between the Bhils, the Meenas, and the Garasias, wherein the Garasias head the hierarchy, and the Bhils form the lowest strata. The old jati panchayat (caste council), where it exists, is hierarchal and gender insensitive. Given this context, the aforementioned provisions seem romantic and probably need an arbitrator in the form of the state to implement.

The forest department owns most of the land in Scheduled areas, and where the Forest Conservation Act, 1980 applies, which of the two Acts takes precedence is also unclear. Also, the ownership of land continues to remain vested in the forest department, and the PESA does not talk about the transfer of ownership, even on a very limited scale.

Forest Areas

The forests are categorized principally on the nature of the overall control the department is expected to exercise. The majority of the forests in Udaipur are of the reserved forest category, wherein 'local rights do not exist and everything is prohibited unless specifically admitted'.[17] The Forest Conservation Act, 1980 awards absolute ownership of the lands and the produce to the forest department. The Act envisages little or no community participation in the management of forests; indeed, it was not designed to elicit that.

Two issues are gaining importance in the management of forest lands. The first relates to increasing encroachments, and the other to efforts being made to allow for community participation in forest management through the JFM programme.

As the box on Encroachments indicates, the issue of privatization of public lands has reached epidemic proportions. The official government stand regarding these encroachments is summarized in the letter dated 3 May 2002 by Dr V.K. Bahuguna, inspector general

[17] Czech Conroy, *Factors Influencing the Initiation and Effectiveness of Community Forest Management: Hypotheses and Experiences in Orissa*, New Delhi: Society for Promotion of Wastelands Development, 2001.

of forests, Government of India, to all states regarding 'eviction of illegal encroachment of forest lands in various States/Union Territories':

> I am directed to draw your attention to the problem of encroachments of forestlands which is assuming a serious proportion in the country. These encroachments have been attracting the attention of Central Government and States Governments have been requested from time to time to take prompt action against the encroachers under various Acts and Rules. Such encroachments are generally done by the powerful lobbies and cause great harm to forest conservation, particularly when these are carried out in the remote areas in a honeycomb pattern. These encroachments are also seriously threatening the continuity of the Wild Life corridors between various National Parks and Sanctuaries. Somehow, timely action is not being taken by the frontline staff for the eviction of the encroachers which further emboldens others also for similar actions. As per the information received from various States, approximately 12.50 lakh hectares of forestland is under encroachment. There may be many more unrecorded instances, which will add to the overall tally.
>
> Hon'ble Supreme Court has also been greatly concerned with this pernicious practice and in their order of 23.11.2001 in IA No.703 in WP No.202/95 have restrained the Central Government from regularization of encroachments in the country. There is now a need to frame a time-bound programme for eviction of the encroachers from the forestlands for which the following steps are suggested:
>
> 1. All encroachments which are not eligible for regularization as per guidelines issued by the Ministry vide No.13.1/90-FP.(1) dated 18.9.90 should be summarily evicted in a time-bound manner and in any case under 30th September 2002.

(The remaining provisions of the letter relate to the setting up of institutional mechanisms for achieving the above.)[18]

As is evident from the above, the order does not focus on the reasons for this high rate of encroachments (or on cases where these may have some legitimacy, say in cases of poor resource endowments), the politics of the local administration that aided, abetted, or ignored this process, and indeed on the processes that may be required to be set in place to prevent their recurrence.

The other relevant issue in the governance of forest lands is JFM. The process of JFM, of co-management of forest areas by communities and the forest department, began in 1991 in the state, and is currently

[18] Madhu Sarin, DNRM email circulation, 15 August 2002.

regulated by the circular of 17 October 2000. This circular is more progressive than previous circulars. However, as no operational rules have been framed, the progress made in the actual establishment of JFM in the villages has been very slow.

The resolution takes cognizance of the fact that well-forested, degradable areas can be brought under the ambit of JFM. One innovation that the current circular provides for is in the design of appropriate institutions, where usufruct rights shared by a group of people on a forest area can become the basis for the creation of an institution. All adult people of the village/hamlet/user group are eligible to become members of the institution (although as experience with several forms of membership-based institutions would suggest, mere eligibility often does not translate into actual membership, and indeed the eligibility criterion can be manipulated to exclude several categories of past users). Women have been recognized, albeit at a subaltern status, as the principal users and knowledge keepers of forests. A subcommittee of women is proposed to aid decision making on forest management and protection.

The resolution is also silent about the area that a VFPMC can choose to protect and regenerate, and hence while a charitable interpretation would provide for more realistic areas to be brought under JFM arrangements, the absence of guidelines can also lead to the reverse situation.

There are several inherent problems with the resolution. First and foremost, being a resolution it does not have the legal status of a law. It does not provide for secure tenure, but only access to usufructs from the forest (even within that, major non-timber produce is excluded, i.e. *tendu* leaves, gum, etc.). The usage of large timber by villagers is disallowed. The period for which a plot is handed over to a community for protection and management has not been specified, and often the interpretation takes the form of a period much shorter than the gestation period of the forests. The VFPMC is a membership-based institution and hence has concomitant problems of exclusion.

The most critical problems in JFM are located, however, in its basic premise, i.e. to attract the village communities towards forest protection by promising them a share in the final felling. While this brings in the notion of the monetizing of the forests, in Udaipur the moot point is that there are very few species of trees that have significant economic (market) value, apart from bamboo and teak

(in limited patches). The notion of felling is also in direct contravention of the Supreme Court ruling of 12 December 1996, which declared 'all felling illegal, including on plantations, unless it was in accordance with government of India sanctioned Working Plans'.[19]

The current JFM resolution meshes in with the panchayati raj process at two levels. As discussed earlier, the institutional provisions of both allow for the possibility of the VFPMC and the *gram sabha* being congruent; at another level, the JFM process demands *gram sabha* approvals for the constitution of the VFPMC, and also includes panchayati raj representatives as non-voting members on the management committee.

[19] Czech Conroy, ibid.

3

Seva Mandir: A Brief History

Genesis

Seva Mandir was conceptualized in the early 1930s and it began work in 1969. Its initial self-definition was influenced greatly by the expectation that the state would, as was constitutionally mandated, bring about social transformation, and that the role of the voluntary sector was to hold the state accountable.

The 1970s

Through the 1970s, Seva Mandir focused on promoting adult education in rural areas with the expectation that this would enable the poor to become more aware of their rights and entitlements. However, by the mid 1970s, looking at the emerging leadership and the involvement and initiative of people in village-level programmes, Seva Mandir felt that the people were ready to play a more active role in the governance of public institutions responsible for village development. This realization also coincided with the first elections held for positions in village councils and other tiers of local self-government. Some of the persons associated with village activities successfully competed for such elected offices.

These developments were encouraging, and it was envisaged that they would lead to improvements in the functioning of village councils and government agencies responsible for delivering development services. The subsequent experience, however, belied the hopes and expectations of both Seva Mandir and the communities. Most of the elected representatives could not bring about any

meaningful changes in the institutions as their substantive authority was dependent on the patronage of individuals in the higher echelons of the political and administrative structures. They were thus caught on the horns of a dilemma. By not conforming to the wishes of those in the power structure, they ran the risk of losing whatever little support and patronage was available from the state; yet if they conformed, they became indistinguishable from the people whom they had replaced.

The 1980s

Realizing that strong leadership is built on the foundations of strong primary institutions, Seva Mandir, in the early 1980s, focused on constituting and strengthening village groups. It was felt that the process of organizing strong village institutions would enable people to demand both their entitlements from the state as well as accountability from their elected representatives. However, with a few exceptions, these groups were not able to make a significant difference to their situation. They were hampered in their operations by a number of factors such as scattered and inaccessible habitations, endemic poverty, and residues of the feudal system, all of which made coordinated action extremely difficult.

Roughly around this time—the mid 1980s—two very significant changes in the external environment for development work by the voluntary sector took place. First, the government began to reach out to civil society in a bid to share its burden of implementing development programmes. This approach was a departure from the earlier approach, which saw the state as the implementer and civil society bodies as the recipients of development.

At the same time, towards the end of the 1980s, two donor organizations, ICCO and EZE (now known as EED),[1] offered support to Seva Mandir on an institutional basis, which was a welcome departure from the standard mode of project-based funding. These two events prompted Seva Mandir to take stock of its own work and outline a long-term approach to institution building and the empowerment of deprived communities.

[1] ICCO (Inter Church Organization for Development Cooperation) is a support organization operating in the Netherlands. EED (Evang Entwicklungsdienst) is a support organization based in Germany.

A comprehensive overview of Seva Mandir's experiences over the last two decades indicated that it should move beyond preparing village people to demand development from the state. Instead, Seva Mandir should develop its own capacity to undertake developmental interventions. This formulation of people's own associations and voluntary organizations, preparing to 'do' rather than to 'demand', contrasted with the view, adopted earlier, that the responsibility for improving the lot of deprived people was principally that of the state.

This shift in perspective—seeking to locate development capacity in civil society institutions—was to influence the future evolution of Seva Mandir. From the mid 1980s onwards, Seva Mandir engaged with rural communities in all spheres of their lives and livelihoods.

The 1990s

Through the 1990s, Seva Mandir was fortunate to be able to raise resources to work in accordance with this paradigm of development. At the operational level, the paradigm shift resulted in the initiation of activities that aimed to empower the village communities to undertake developmental activities themselves.

A large cadre of village-level knowledge workers was also created. These para-professionals worked as health workers, foresters, teachers, women development workers, and community mobilizers. Through their actions they sought to create an alternative definition of leadership, one that was based on shared knowledge and democratic functioning.

The failure of development was no longer understood as simply being the result of dereliction on the part of the state, but now also came to be seen as an indicator that local people and civil society institutions lacked the values and norms consistent with the idea of making society more egalitarian and democratic. Undertaking developmental activities also meant that village communities had to take on the responsibility of preparing and actualizing plans for their own development. It meant that they had to cooperate among themselves to resolve conflicts over contested resources and priorities. These negotiations were most complicated in the case of commons such as community pasturelands, watersheds, and also degraded forest lands. On the one hand, the resolution of these long-standing conflicts impacted livelihoods, and, on the other hand, it created a

base for other governance initiatives. The creation of appropriate values and norms for good governance then became a critical priority.

Good Governance

Simply put, 'governance' means the process of making and implementing (or not implementing) decisions. Good governance has eight major characteristics; it is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive, and adheres to the rule of law. It ensures that corruption is minimized, that the views of minorities are taken into account, and that the voices of the most vulnerable sections in society are heard during the decision-making process. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society.

Participation by both men and women is the cornerstone of good governance. Participation could be either direct or indirect, that is, through legitimate intermediate institutions or representatives. It is important to point out that representative democracy does not necessarily mean that the concerns of the most vulnerable sections in society will be taken into consideration in the decision-making process. Participation needs to be informed and organized. This means freedom of association and expression, on the one hand, and an organized civil society, on the other hand.

Good governance requires *fair legal frameworks that are enforced impartially*. It also requires full protection of human rights, particularly those of minorities. The impartial enforcement of laws requires an independent judiciary and an impartial and incorruptible police force.

Transparency means that decisions are taken and enforced in a manner that follows rules and regulations. It also means that information is freely available and directly accessible to those who will be affected by such decisions and their enforcement. Adequate information is provided and is available in easily understandable forms and media.

Good governance requires that institutions and processes are *responsive* in that they try to serve all stakeholders within a reasonable timeframe.

There are several actors and as many viewpoints in a given society. Good governance requires the *mediation of different interest groups in society to reach a broad consensus* on what is in the best interests of the whole community and how this can be achieved. It also requires a broad and long-term perspective on what is needed for sustainable human development and how to achieve the goals of such development. This can only result from an understanding of the historical, cultural, and social contexts of a given society or community.

A society's well-being depends on ensuring that all its members feel that they have a stake in it and do not feel excluded from the

mainstream. This requires that all groups, but particularly the most vulnerable, are given opportunities to improve or maintain their well-being on the basis of *equity and inclusiveness*.

Effectiveness and efficiency as part of good governance means that processes and institutions produce results that meet the needs of society while making the best use of resources at their disposal. The concept of efficiency in the context of good governance also covers the sustainable use of natural resources and the protection of the environment.

Accountability is a key requirement of good governance. Not only governmental institutions but also the private sector and civil society organizations must be accountable to the public and to their institutional stakeholders. Who is accountable to whom varies depending on whether the decisions or actions taken are internal or external to an organization or institution. In general, an organization or institution is accountable to those who will be affected by its decisions or actions. Accountability cannot be enforced without transparency and the rule of law.

Source: *What is good governance?*
http://www.unescap.org/huset/governance.html

Gram Vikas Kosh: The New Synthesis

The paradigm shift of the late 1990s was based on three distinct realizations: (a) the capacity of civil society institutions to undertake meaningful governance initiatives had been severely eroded; (b) the anxieties and concerns of interveners also need serious attention. Indeed, there is a need to create both the conviction and the capacity to actually undertake participatory development; and (c) these discussions cannot happen in a vacuum.

When Seva Mandir began supporting communities to undertake development activities, it was with the expectation that this would ease two major constraints. The communities did not have to wait for approvals and funds from the state, and non-governmental support meant that the communities were free to evolve their own rules and regulations. The initial expectations that people would come together to rehabilitate their degraded resources—especially since livelihoods were dependent on these resources—were very high. While most communities did respond positively to opportunities to improve their private resources, a similar response was not seen in the case of resources vested with the state and village councils. The state was not willing to facilitate access to the resources under its control. A

deeper complication was that the communities themselves had lost their stakes in the development of these resources. Most of the resources (especially land) were mired in controversy regarding their ownership, use, and future. The resources were being used in the patronage game and most individuals had been co-opted. The abdication by the state of its arbitration role meant that community efforts to create norms and rules did not receive any support.

The orientation and value systems of Seva Mandir's own staff were hierarchical. For many of them, adapting to democratic and egalitarian norms in their own work was a challenge. Equally problematic for Seva Mandir was to find people with the appropriate professional skills and high levels of motivation, as most western-educated professionals found it difficult to do sustained work in remote places and adapt to the rhythms of community-based work. Seva Mandir has worked towards balancing the two needs, developing a culture of professionalism among the field staff and village communities, on the one hand, and institutionalizing a culture of mutual respect and dignity between colleagues and village communities, on the other hand.

It was also clear that there was a need to evolve a synthesis at the village level that would, in many senses, re-introduce the idea of norms at the village level, and also enable the communities to deal with the external world (including Seva Mandir) on a more equal basis. The *gram vikas kosh* (GVK) (village development fund) was designed to be the village corpus fund. The GVK was the new commons, ahistorical and conflict free. It was to be built out of the villagers' own contributions, thereby ensuring absolute ownership. It would provide village people a reason to meet and deliberate on issues of common concern. GVK would act as the conduit for all funds and payments at the village level, ensuring transparency and accountability (from the recipients of funds). GVK would also provide communities with a platform where new norms could be created and tested, and then applied to other spheres of life. Also, the process of creating and managing the GVK would foster among them the capacities to demand accountability from other development actors.

The GVK has spread to more than 461 hamlets and it has a capital base of over 10.12 million rupees.[2] It provides a context to all village-level interactions of Seva Mandir. This is seen most clearly in the

[2] As on September 2003.

case of the livelihoods programme. The establishment of GVK grew out of the need to create solidarity and capacity for sustainable land use at the village level. Now that the idea of GVK has taken root, it has become an instrument for forging the solidarity and norms needed to make broad-based work on natural resources possible.

The Three Programmes

By the mid 1990s, Seva Mandir had divided its work into three functional categories focusing on sustainable improvements in livelihoods, enhancement of people's capabilities, and creation and strengthening of village institutions, respectively. Each programme, while achieving its programmatic goals, was designed to build the values and social capacities needed to achieve development and democracy for the poor.

The livelihoods programme of Seva Mandir seeks to improve the productivity of commons and farming systems. Its components deal with rehabilitation of degraded private and public wastelands; conservation of water for drinking and irrigation; and evolution of appropriate farming practices. Working on complex and contested resources, this programme has become an instrument to transform social relations. It has made it worthwhile for villagers to opt out of debilitating patron–client relationships and inherently unstable property relations. Further, it has also created a basis for sustainable land use and for engaging the state to comply with both the letter and the spirit of its progressive land policies.

The capabilities programme draws on Seva Mandir's long, rich, and varied experience of working on enhancing the capabilities of the people. It initiated its work in the area of rural development by promoting adult education in villages. Subsequently, it also became involved in trying to ensure universal access to primary education. In the early 1980s, it also began addressing gender concerns and problems related to health care.

The institution-building programme of Seva Mandir aims at fostering robust people's institutions that are effective in bringing about sustainable development in remote rural areas. While traditional community institutions do enjoy legitimacy, they do not have a democratic tradition and are largely governed by hereditary leaders and elders in the community. Such institutions provide little of the social capital required for democratic development. The GVK serves as a non-historical, development-oriented people's fund and allows the community a space wherein the building of norms can take place. This initiative is central to all the activities of Seva Mandir.

Interventions in Natural Resource Management by Seva Mandir

Livelihoods and Their Link to Natural Resources

Farming in Udaipur is geared to meeting subsistence needs. About a quarter of the total geographical area is arable (see Table 1), while the remaining area comprises non-arable public lands. Nearly 50 per cent of farming families in the district cultivate small, fragmented, rain-fed holdings. The farms do not yield enough to sustain a family for the entire year, and farm incomes need to be supplemented by non-farm activities. Recurrent droughts further aggravate the conditions of scarcity. The employment options available in the village are limited, and migration for wage labour is the principal livelihood source for many families. According to a recent survey, farm and non-farm activities together account for two-thirds of family income.[3]

The continuing process of forest degradation has affected the soil and water regimes of the area, resulting in a decline in soil moisture and groundwater levels, which in turn affects agricultural productivity adversely. The appropriation of commonly used resources by the state, their commercial management, the community's alienation from the village and its resources, along with an increase in human and cattle population, and the failure of forests to regenerate, can be identified as the major causes behind the rapid degradation of forest and other village common lands.

The extremely fragile natural resource base, and the limited availability of alternatives locally to supplement household incomes, merely reinforces the vicious cycle of degradation and alienation—with survival compulsions leading to over-extraction, in turn causing degradation and resulting in communities losing their stakes in the upkeep of commons. This not only impacts lands and livelihoods, but also the state of normlessness that it legitimizes serves to weaken the social fabric of the village. Although these lands are limited in their ability to support livelihoods comprehensively, they are important from the ecological point of view and their contributions are important as they help communities tide over critical periods.

[3] A Health Facility and Health Status Survey, conducted by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Princeton University, and Vidya Bhawan, February 2002–August 2003.

Table 1. Land Classification in Seva Mandir's Operational Area (area in hectares)

Block	Area under public land				Private land	Total area
	Forest	Pasture	Others	Total		
Badgaon	5,485	5,938	16,117	27,537	36,665	64,202
Girwa	31,916	10,531	58,896	101,342	35,517	136,860
Jhadol	77,410	4,095	27,541	109,046	35,054	144,100
Kherwada	26,496	8,203	33,201	67,900	41,191	109,091
Kotra	164,415	5,565	40,777	210,752	31,480	242,237
Gogunda	25,231	9,627	20,688	55,546	34,547	90,093
Total area	330,953	43,959	197,217	572,129	214,454	768,583
Percentage of total	42.07	5.59	25.07	72.73	27.27	100.00

Source: District Census, 1991

While the need to work on these degraded resources is fairly evident, there are several constraints to their regeneration. The access of the community to such lands is severely limited, the majority of the lands being forest lands. Ground-level distortions of policy, which aid and abet encroachment on these lands, also limit both the physical lands available and the capacity of the community to work in a cohesive fashion. We also do not understand fully the governance mechanisms of the past and the reasons for alienation, and this limits the institutional alternatives that emerge.

This situation calls for a multi-pronged approach. One needs to work simultaneously on livelihood-related issues of individual families, improving the access of communities to common lands hitherto unavailable to them, and organizing and empowering communities to tackle the complexities and confusions under which they live. One also needs to understand the past and work towards preventing the recurrence of factors that lead to this state of physical and social degradation.

Core Activities: Evolution

During the first comprehensive plan (April 1989 to March 1994), Seva Mandir made a modest beginning through its programmes targeted at increasing the productivity of individual wastelands. This was done as it was easier to gain access to such lands compared to public lands. These programmes were intended to address livelihood issues by raising the productivity of individually owned lands, while also creating an environment for a wider discussion on the regeneration of other lands. In the following years, work was also extended on common lands such as panchayat pastures. During this period, water resource development activities were confined to the construction of anicuts (masonry dams). The physical activities benefited the people by providing employment in the short term and increased availability of fodder, fuel, and other ecological services in the medium and long term. These efforts resulted in greater awareness among rural communities regarding the need to take up forest protection and planting of trees on their lands. At the village level, a pool of individuals who were trained in the technical aspects of natural resource management was also created.

During the second comprehensive plan (April 1994 to March 1999), the programme of developing private wastelands was refined

by focusing on the development of private lands as a pool, making the development of even very small parcels of land a viable proposition for the farmers, and also introducing elements of collective action into the programme. Meanwhile, the work on public lands also gained momentum as more village pastures were enclosed during this period.

At the same time, it was felt that wasteland regeneration needed to be viewed from the perspective of overall land use and that other categories of lands, especially forests, needed to be incorporated into the planning. This realization coincided with and was aided by a shift in forest policy, which allowed for the participation of local communities in the protection and development of forests under the joint forest management (JFM) programme. The guidelines on watershed development, which encouraged the participation of non-government organizations in watershed development, were announced at the same time.

Combining the watershed principles with the JFM programme, micro plans identifying the priorities of the people were prepared. These plans outlined community priorities, including the initiation of community governance on the entire (public) land base of the village and the development of water resources in order to boost incomes from agriculture.

Organizing village communities into focused institutions such as the FPC, the lift-irrigation users' group, and the watershed development committee, helped in actualizing these initiatives, with each committee being accountable to the larger and more inclusive village group, the *samuh*. Enhancement of skills, both of the community as a whole and of selected 'para-professionals', to manage community assets created at the village level was an important part of the effort.

The experience gained during the execution of the second comprehensive plan was taken forward during the third comprehensive plan (April 1999 to March 2002). It was decided that the focus would be on increasing the level of integration in the execution of land and water resource development activities, thus ensuring significant impacts on the livelihood base of the people. While under both the first and second plans extensive work on land and water resource development had been carried out, the activities were executed by different functional units and were thus often spread across villages. The integration of these activities, both within the organization and at the village level, was the focal point of the third plan strategies.

It was decided that watershed projects, wherever taken up, would incorporate an integrated plan for the development of all categories of lands and resources, namely, forests, common pastures, revenue lands, water, etc. Anicuts would be constructed subsequent to treatment of the catchment area. Agricultural research and extension works would be initiated in villages where watershed and/or lift-irrigation projects had been completed or were underway. At the organizational level, all discrete units were merged into one functional unit: natural resources development. The current activities under the natural resources development programme are:

1. Nursery raising for wasteland afforestation
2. Wasteland development (private, pooled private, public lands, including JFM and pastures)
3. Integrated watersheds
4. Water resource development (masonry dams, *talai*s)
5. Lift irrigation
6. Agriculture and animal husbandry (participatory varietal selection, intensive vegetable cultivation, horticultural programmes, veterinary camps in watershed villages)
7. Capacity building (of community and paraworkers)

Table 4 summarizes the types and numbers of physical works done till 1999. All of these efforts are integrated with the GVK. The process of routing all payments through the GVK has begun, especially for village paraworkers. The voluntary contributions from

Table 2. Afforestation and Pastureland Development Programmes

S. No.	Name of scheme	Target group	Land-ownership
1.	Individual plantation	Marginal farmers	Private
2.	Mini *chak*	Marginal farmers	Private
3.	Assisted natural regeneration	Marginal farmers	Private
4.	Private *chak*	Medium farmers	Private
5.	Pasture *chak*	Village community	Panchayat pasture
6.	School/*devsthan chak* (sacred grove)	Village community	Panchayat/ temple
7.	Joint forest management	Village community	Forest department

Table 3. Area Developed Under Wasteland Afforestation Programmes

	Public lands	Private lands	Total
Area developed (hectares)	1,261.04 (13.8 %)	7,881.51 (86.2 %)	9,142.55
Number of sites	75 (0.5 %)	14,340 (99.5 %)	14,415

the community form the corpus of the GVK, ensuring their ownership over both the physical asset under renovation as well as the GVK. In the case of private asset development programmes and pooled asset programmes such as lift irrigation where the entire village does not constitute the beneficiary group, the beneficiaries are required to provide additional contributions to the GVK.

Outcomes and Constraints

The work of Seva Mandir on the rehabilitation of private and public lands in the village has had far-reaching effects not only in merely physical terms, namely, that of increasing the productivity of resources, but it has also led to the strengthening of village-based associations that manage the common pool assets created in the village. The access to these resources, and the benefits therefrom, by the poor and marginal sections of the community has also increased. The work on livelihoods has also shown significant results. However, non-availability of critical inputs, conflicting recommendations by research agencies, and poor infrastructure are critical constraints.

Another significant outcome has been the emergence of federations such as the Van Utthan Sangh, a network of communities engaged in forest protection. This network has worked towards negotiating with a difficult partner like the state forest department. Communities have also engaged in collective action to protect, and in some cases to evict illicit encroachments from, common lands and they are working towards establishing collective governance on these resources.

The limiting factor in many cases is the inability of the community to legally access these lands. The process of JFM is long and tedious and, as in the case of PESA, positive policies are not actualized on the ground in the absence of necessary rules and procedures.

Table 4. Afforestation and Pastureland Development

Scheme	Year of initiation	Sites (nos.)	Saplings (nos.)	Area (hectares)	Beneficiaries (nos.)
Individual plantation	1986	13,349	4,644,980	4,839.42	13,349
Private *chak*	1987	96	538,084	1,040.95	1,111
Pasture *chak*	1987	59	556,564	1,038.01	4,786
Mini *chak*	1992	867	711,905	1,934.01	2,236
JFM	1992	4	114,150	187.00	577
Sacred grove and school *chak*	1992	12	15,372	36.03	563
Assisted natural regeneration	1999	28	0	67.13	65
Total		14,415	6,581,055	9,142.55	22,687

The wooing of the constituency by elected representatives, and in some cases also by non-government organizations, leads to conflicting statements being made at the village level, several of which are populist and could have a significant long-term impact on the ecology, the economy, and the society.

Village Narratives

4

Introduction to Village Narratives

There are several questions that still remain unanswered.

What caused this rapid cycle of alienation and degradation to begin? Why is it that forests that survived several centuries of profligacy by kings did not survive for even a few decades in the era of 'people's power' and under the care of a custodial forest department?

In many village narratives people talk of working as labourers for *thekedar*s who were undertaking coupe cuttings. They were aware of the fact that the harvest was in excess of the allotment in terms of species, areas, etc. What causes a community so dependent on these local resources to participate in their destruction?

The tribal population was dependent on the forests for fuel, fodder, food, medicines, and all other livelihood-support goods. Indeed, the forests provided them with their gods and their identity. It is unthinkable that a community that was so deeply dependent on the forests for its livelihood and security would not have any structures of local governance in place, and would instead rely totally on externally imposed systems for governance. This is especially surprising considering that there seem to have been very elaborate rules, norms, and arbitration procedures governing other aspects of life among tribal communities. Is it that current research trends, being influenced by colonial stereotypes of tribal peoples, have ignored the evidence of resource governance in tribal societies?

The norms used to assess 'good governance' have not been derived in consultation with the local community and to that extent may not endure beyond the period of intervention. The issue of enabling socially fragmented and impoverished communities to internalize

democratic values stays as a challenge. Empowered participation of local communities could provide a way forward.

Ownership of and control over land continue to be highly contested issues. Legislation such as the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) (PESA) Act, 1996 and policies such as joint forest management (JFM) instead of resolving the conflict only serve to add another dimension to it. What are the options open to communities that want to enforce collective-governance mechanisms on the commons? And, more importantly, what causes villages like Suali and others to break away from this general trend of normlessness? From where do these villages derive the strength to enforce their norms? Do they provide any direction to external interveners?

The village-level narratives that follow examine some of these questions and point to the answers that are emerging, albeit in very local spaces.

5

Viyal[1]

Viyal's claim to fame in the history of Seva Mandir's interventions has been that the Adivasi (Bhil) community in this village managed to get together against the socially powerful Rajput community and forcibly removed the encroachments made on the village *charnot* (pastureland) by them. Arriving for the first time in Viyal to gain a personal understanding of what had transpired there, we were surprised when Somalal, the Bhil village headman, asked a young Rajput boy and his friends to sweep the community centre where we were supposed to meet the villagers who had played an active role in the struggle against the Rajputs. The boy and his friends happily swept the floor and laid mats for us to sit on. It was a simple act, but this first impression of social relations in Viyal was intriguing and it led us to question the stereotypes with which we had come.

On subsequent visits, and through discussions with representatives of Seva Mandir who have witnessed recent events in the village at close quarters, we were able to see many more snapshots of life in Viyal.

In the description that follows we have tried to create a collage of impressions from the images of what we saw and the things that we heard. We describe Viyal's story by piecing together various narratives. This is a story of individuals, families, and communities, their relationship with the land on which they live and the bounty which it offered, and how it has now all vanished. It is a story of power, omnipresent and multi-layered, and the struggle for it, of

[1] Researched and prepared by Narayan Lal Ameta and Pinaki Roy.

aspirations and greed, of compulsions and struggles, and how all these affect the lives of people and communities.

'Reality' is too complex to be penned down on paper, and we are reasonably certain that some of the critical links in the chain of human relations that form the story of Viyal were not shared with us. Many events that shaped the present of the village are hidden forever in the past. We hope that this narrative has managed to capture some of the critical events from that struggle and can offer an understanding about why it all happened.

The Village

Viyal is a revenue village of Dhar panchayat in Girwa tehsil in Udaipur district. The village, situated just 27 km. from Udaipur city, lies high on top of a hill that is part of the Aravalli mountain range. The settlement is divided into two hamlets, Upla ('upper') and Nichla ('lower'). About ninety families reside in the village, out of which seventy belong to the Bhil community. Most of the remaining twenty families belong to the Rajput community, and stay in Nichla Viyal.

The land on the western side of the village is owned by the Nathdwara Temple Board (the temple is also referred to as Srinathji, the local name for the presiding deity), which uses this grassland (*beed*) to open graze its cattle, brought in for about one and a half months in a year. The north and the south of Viyal are mostly bordered by land that belongs to the forest department. The agricultural lands in Viyal lie mainly on the eastern side, and beyond them the pastureland forms the border of the village in the east.

Background

The Bhils

The history of Viyal is intimately linked with the Srinathji temple in Nathdwara. The entire land on which the village is situated used to belong to the Srinathji temple authorities, but some area for the village was carved out of the temple land around three generations ago. The first family to settle in the village was appointed by the temple authorities as *goyala* (literally cattle watchman) to guard the *beed*. This happened around five generations ago. The family came from Bhutala, and belonged to the Kher clan of the Bhil tribe.

The next family, belonging to the Kapaye clan, settled in the area a few years later; it was from Kapasan near Bagdunda. The

subsequent Bhil settlements in the area took place after the 1950s, when three more Bhil families, belonging to the Aeri, Vadera, and Kalawa clans, came from Godan, Dudavli, and Jholawas respectively and settled in the village. The seventy Bhil families who live in Viyal today are all descendants of these five families.

The Rajputs

A Rajput family from Kundal had owned land in Viyal for long, but the first Rajput families to actually settle in the village were from Jholawas. This happened when Mohan Singh and Ber Singh moved in with their families around thirty to forty years ago. They used to graze their cattle in the open woodlands around Viyal, and came in contact with the then *damar* (village headman), father of the present *damar*, to whom they expressed their wish to settle in the village. The area then was still sparsely populated and the *damar*, thinking that the village would be more secure if a larger number of people came and settled there, gave his consent.

The next family to move in was that of Uday Singh Rathore; they came from Nedach, in Goduch, around twenty years ago. Gop Singh Rathore's brother's family was the last family to move into Viyal. The brother came from Kundal and was from the same family which owned land in the village in its early days. All the Rajputs now residing in Viyal are the descendants of these families.

Snapshots from the Past

Agriculture and livestock were significant sources of livelihood for the people of Viyal. The *walra* (slash-and-burn) method of agriculture was being practised till five or six decades ago. Under this system, the plough is not used. The village leadership used to choose an area on the wooded slopes of the hills around the village. It did not have to take permission from any authority as no direct control was exercised by anyone over the wooded land around the village. Men from the entire village then worked together to cut down all the trees at the site. The leaves and the cut-off branches were then left on the slopes to dry, and when dried they were set on fire just before the rains. The ash dissolved in the rainwater and provided important nutrients to the soil, making it fertile. The slope was then divided into vertical strips and these plots of land were distributed among the families in the village. Seeds were dribbled into small holes dug

with a pointed wooden stick. From the time of sowing till the crop was harvested—that is, for three and a half months—the men of the village used to stay on the slopes to guard their crops from wild animals. The principal crops used to be green gram, *mal*, *safed jowar*, *samla*, etc.

Apart from agriculture, the villagers were also dependent on different types of forest produce, including fruits such as *batala*, *palka*, *napra*, and *kakri*. Crystallized gum from trees found in the forest (*khera*, *dhaura*, *maka*, etc.) was also collected as food. The bark and the crystallized sap of the *maka* tree played an important role in the diet of the villagers during drought years when they faced a shortage of their staple foods. The villagers in such times of scarcity would grind the bark and the gum along with rabbit droppings and this 'flour' was used to make roti.

The people of Viyal used to pay their *hasal* (revenue) to Delwara's palace. It had to be paid once a year. An official under royal employment would come to the village and stay the night; the villagers had to provide him with due hospitality. Depending on the crop yield, the official would determine the percentage of the crop that had to be paid as *hasal*. The next morning the villagers had to accompany the official, carrying the stipulated amount of the crop on their heads and deposit it at Delwara.

The Leadership

Traditional

The leadership at the village level was hereditary and was in the hands of the *damar* and the *numberdar*. In Viyal, the post of *damar* was held by the family which had first settled in the village. The *damar* is also on the payroll of the Srinathji Temple Trust. He is responsible for resolving minor disputes in the village, and in this role as the village arbitrator he could impose small fines, which generally went into a village fund. He is also responsible for *hela para*, i.e. summoning the entire village to discuss important issues of common concern. Traditionally, the *damar* is also responsible for interacting with government officials. In fact, in the past whenever government officials came to the village, they would ask for the *damar* first and take necessary action through him. The *numberdar* of the village acted as a deputy to the *damar*. In Viyal, the post of the *numberdar* had been held by the family that was the second to settle there. In

the past the *numberdar* and the *damar* would consult each other about important matters and then instruct the villagers; their decisions were binding on the villagers.

Present

The reins of leadership in Viyal continue to be in the hands of the two families which have traditionally controlled life in the village; only some of the titles have changed. The families between them have held the office of ward *panch* under the panchayati raj system for the past few years. But this transition in local self-government has not been smooth. With the advent of panchayati raj, Viyal was declared a ward (subunit) of the neighbouring village of Kundal. This allowed the Rajputs from Kundal, by virtue of their superior socio-economic and political position, to ensure that their candidate came to power as Viyal's ward *panch*. As a result, Gop Singh became the ward *panch* representing Viyal; he has held the post for many years.

It was only much later—about fifteen years ago—that Viyal was separated from Kundal and was *recognized* as a separate ward of Dhar panchayat. This meant that an Adivasi person could become the elected representative of the village. From that time onwards Viyal has had Adivasi ward *panch*s, who have been elected unanimously. The first person to become the ward *panch* of Viyal was Valu, the brother of the then *damar*. The *damar* did not stand for the post himself as he could not read or write. The next person to become the ward *panch* was Kesu, brother of the last *numberdar*. Kesu held the post for two terms and even became the *upsarpanch* of Dhar panchayat. Valu's daughter-in-law currently holds the post, but it is his son Fatehlal who acts as the de facto ward *panch*.

Thus, power in Viyal has traditionally been concentrated among members of these two families. This trend is also reflected in the composition of the committee formed as a part of Seva Mandir's initiative in the village. The key positions—that of the president and the treasurer—are held by Homaba (son of the *numberdar*) and Somalal (present *damar*) respectively. Fatehlal, the de facto ward *panch*, is also on the committee.

Though the power of these two extended families in the Bhil community in Viyal is significant, at the village level the presence of the Rajputs has created an interesting matrix. The Rajputs of the village sit separately to discuss matters concerning their own community. However, on issues of concern to the entire village, men

from both communities come together and the negotiated settlements reached are not along caste lines (as will be seen later).

Recent Developments

The first significant changes in the traditional way of life of the Bhil people occurred around fifty years ago when they could no longer cultivate under the *walra* system and had to adapt to settled agricultural practices. The next change came in the post-Independence period when the forest department declared many areas as protected, thus restricting the access of villagers to the surrounding lands. As a result of these developments, the cultivated area and the cropping pattern changed dramatically. Today, some varieties of cereals like *safed jowar* have become extinct. Even though some of the traditional crops continue to be grown, the elders in the village claim that acute water shortage, low soil-nutrient levels as a result of overuse of agricultural plots, unavailability of dry leaves and branches for fertilizing the land due to the complete decimation of tree cover in the area, and so on, have resulted in a drastic fall in the yield of such traditional crops, making their cultivation an unviable proposition. As a result, these crops are cultivated, if at all, in small quantities. Problems that were supposedly never faced under the *walra* system (such as the proliferation of weeds), it is now claimed, are responsible for lowering the yield of newly 'adopted' crops.

In the 1970s, the forest department started giving licenses to contractors to fell trees for making charcoal. The area around the village, which was thickly wooded even thirty years ago, was ravaged. The people did not do anything to protect the forests. In fact, in those trying times of shrinking livelihood options, the villagers themselves carried head loads of firewood from the village and sold them in the city.

The Encroachments

The first incidence of encroachment in the *charnot* of Viyal took place around twenty-five years ago with the consent of the entire village. At that time, about 4 bighas[2] of land from the *charnot* were given to Lehar Singh, a disabled soldier from another district who had married the daughter of one of the early Rajput settlers. As the new

[2] 1 bigha = 1/6 hectare. (In Rajasthan, the government has standardized one bigha as measuring 1/6 of a hectare.)

family did not have any land in the village, the villagers got together and agreed to give a plot from the *charnot* to them. Later, at the time of revenue settlement, Lehar Singh was able to get the land transferred formally in his name.

The first surreptitious encroachments in the village started around twenty years ago when three persons—Tej Singh, his brother Dalpat Singh, and their uncle Bhawar Singh—started encroaching on the revenue wastelands to the west of the *charnot*. Soon they began expanding their encroachments to the east as well, and together controlled around 14 bighas of *charnot* land. At that time, they had not made boundary walls around their encroached lands but had only put up a basic stone demarcation, marking the area under their control.

Around the same time, another Rajput, also called Bhawar Singh, encroached on 30 bighas in the *charnot*. His brother Naar Singh encroached on 2 bighas. Lehar Singh's son Vandan Singh was the next person to establish control over a portion of the *charnot*. After a few years, Chandan Singh, the only Rajput living in Upla Viyal, extended the boundary of his 3 bighas of land[3] adjacent to the *charnot*, and encroached on 3 bighas of the *charnot*.

Even though Valuji, the ward *panch* of Viyal at the time, had been against the encroachments, the matter failed to become an issue for the village in general. In fact, in the late 1980s, when Tej Singh, Dalpat Singh, and Bhawar Singh decided to build walls around the *charnot* land which they had encroached, many Adivasis, including some who were in leadership positions, willingly worked as labourers for them.

Resentment in the village against the dominance of some Rajput families had been growing, but it was only in 1991 that the villagers sat down together to decide what could be done about it. At this meeting they decided that the walls of the encroachments in the *charnot* had to be broken down. This was accomplished without any serious opposition. The matter soon slipped out of the collective memory of the villagers, and within a year the encroachers were able to re-establish their control over all the land that they had earlier occupied.

[3] This land had been willed to Chandan Singh by a priest at the Ubeshwar temple out of gratitude as the Rajput had taken care of him in his last days.

By 1999, when the issue of encroachment once again became a serious matter for the village, the Rajputs had significantly increased the area under encroachment. By this time, some Adivasis had also made encroachments of around 2 bighas into the *charnot*. Around twelve to thirteen people had small encroachments in *abadi zameen* (habitation area) and *bilanam zameen* (revenue wastelands).

Seva Mandir's Involvement

The first contact between Seva Mandir and the residents of Viyal took place in the late 1970s, when an adult education centre was opened in the village. The centre was open till about 1980, after which Seva Mandir lost contact with the village. Contact was re-established by the villagers in the early 1990s, notably by Gop and Dalla, health paraworkers trained by Seva Mandir. Kesu, the ward *panch*, and a few others started attending Seva Mandir's zonal and block-level meetings at Madar and Badgaon respectively.

Some months after the relationship had been re-established, a meeting was called in Viyal. Seva Mandir staff members from the zonal office also attended the meeting, but the message that went across to the villagers during the meeting ended up causing a lot of confusion. The villagers feared that Seva Mandir would take control of their lands. Only a few people expressed their willingness to be associated with the organization.

At subsequent meetings in Viyal, the Seva Mandir staff members cleared up the confusion, and the attendance of the villagers at the meetings rose significantly. Seva Mandir had recently finished watershed work in the nearby village of Nayakheda, and the experience gained from this work was still fresh in the minds of its staff. Gauging the interest of the Viyal residents, the idea of undertaking similar watershed work in the village was mooted, and the process of forming a 'village group' was started.

In 1995, three years after contact with Viyal had been re-established, the first physical work was taken up in the village. As part of the watershed programme, and in accordance with the practice followed by Seva Mandir at the time, work was taken up on individual wastelands. Boundary walls were constructed and plantations were made. Work on individual wastelands continued along with other activities till 1997, and in all six sites were developed. In all the six sites the beneficiaries were Rajputs. At least

two of the beneficiaries, Lehar Singh's son Vandan Singh and Bhawar Singh, used this opportunity to strengthen their encroachments on the *charnot* and undertook development activities on the encroached *charnot* by claiming that they owned the plots.

Field bunding was taken up next. Around 150 villagers were involved in this work. Construction of boundary walls for pooled private wastelands was to be taken up next. By now Seva Mandir's policies had been revised, and before any work could commence stakeholders were required to get the records of the land proposed to be treated from the local revenue official (*patwari*). The villagers did so. Most of the stakeholders in this *chak* were Adivasis.

Work on the *charnot* land was taken up next. By this time 40 bighas out of 90 bighas had been encroached, with Bhawar Singh alone encroaching on more than 30 bighas. At that time, there was no consensus in the village for or against the encroachments, and at village meetings it was decided that work would be confined to the area of the *charnot* that was free of any encroachment. With this understanding, a boundary wall was erected.

Subsequently, work on another *khatedari chak* was taken up on the land adjacent to the temple *beed*. The villagers also wanted to explore the possibility of working on the temple land. The Seva Mandir staff spoke with the authorities of the Srinathji Temple Trust. They were agreeable to building the wall and undertaking soil and moisture conservation activities on the land, but they refused to give permission for pitting and plantation activities. As a result, the idea was rejected and work was taken up on the private wastelands alone. Around eighty people from villages like Viyal, Kundal, Mahadevji ka Doli, and Vanadiya had stakes in this *chak*. In 1999, drainage line treatment in the *charnot* was initiated.

After this work was completed, physical work in Viyal was stopped. Viyal was relegated to the back burner of Seva Mandir's priorities as many of the staff who were in regular contact with the village were transferred out of the zone and their successors could not maintain the momentum of activities. The result of these developments was that the people of Viyal had to fight their critical battle, which was just over the horizon, all alone.

The Conflict

The leadership in Viyal adopted a system called *suiya* to protect the enclosed area of the *charnot*. Under this system, the responsibility

of patrolling the *charnot* went to each family in the village on a rotational basis, four times in a year. After the monsoon, the 'guards' found women from the three Rajput households cutting grass in the enclosed area. A meeting was called, and the three families were asked to explain this action. They claimed that the land was actually *bilanam* (revenue wasteland) and that they had control over it for the last fifteen years. They said that they had been paying penalties to the government for it as per the norms.

The villagers demanded that the three families should get the *patwari* to verify if the land fell within the *charnot*, in which case they should give up all claims to it. The offenders agreed and the *patwari* was called. He declared that the encroachments were indeed on *bilanam* land, even though in reality only a part of it was *bilanam*, the major portion being in the *charnot*. To make matters worse, the villagers discovered that a part of the boundary wall around the *charnot* had strayed inadvertently over the *bilanam* land which was controlled by these families. The *patwari* told the villagers that they had no right to cut grass from the disputed area even though most of it fell within the *charnot*. This caused a major furore in the village as the grass on the land was being appropriated by members of a group other than those who had worked on treating it. The entire village was called for a meeting.

The Stand-off

After extensive discussions, it was decided that the only way of getting the encroachments vacated would be through an application to the *tehsildar*. The villagers agreed to seek the state's intervention in removing all the encroachments by all the villagers over all types of land in the village. It was then decided that the exits from the village would be blocked till each and every family had signed the application. For three days and three nights, most of the men of Viyal ensured that no one was allowed to leave or enter the village. There was tremendous pressure on the few families who would lose out the most if the application was sent. At the end of the third night, Bhawar Singh, who had the maximum encroachments, relented and signed the document.

The application with the signature of the head of every household in the village was taken to the *sarpanch*, but he refused to put his stamp and sign the document, fearing that doing so would get him

into trouble. The application without the *sarpanch*'s signature was then taken to the *tehsildar*'s office. The *tehsildar* on reading the application advised the group to go and see the district collector. On reaching the district collector's office, the villagers were directed to yet another official since the collector was on tour. The group members do not know which official they met, but the official on seeing the application promised that action would be taken within a week. There was a risk that the grass in the *charnot* would be spoiled if there was any further delay. The villagers told the official of this risk, and he promised that he would deal with the matter as soon as possible.

The order from the collector's office instructing the *patwari* and the panchayat to investigate and take immediate action in accordance with the wishes of the villagers was issued within three days of submitting the application.

The End Game

The day after the order was issued, the *patwari* and the entire panchayat (*sarpanch* and all the ward *panch*s) came to Viyal. All the men in the village accompanied them to the disputed site, and the *patwari* spent the whole day demarcating the disputed land. He repeatedly said that he would be agreeable to whatever the villagers decided. A meeting was convened in the evening. The order from the collector's office ensured that the officials were very cooperative and that there was no serious opposition from vested interests in the village to the decision to remove the encroachments. When all the villagers sat down to discuss the matter, the people who had encroachments in the *charnot* said that if everyone in the village was willing to vacate their encroachments, irrespective of the type of land on which these were located, then they, too, would follow suit. The *patwari* assured the villagers that if they decided to remove all the encroachments, then he would deal with anyone who opposed the move. It was agreed that everyone would assemble early next morning and the boundary walls of all the encroachments in the village would be brought down one by one.

Next morning when the men came together once again, it was soon revealed that the *patwari* who had promised to support the villagers had quietly slipped out of the village in the early hours of

the morning, in order to avoid any trouble. This development shook the resolve of many of the villagers who had assembled that morning. There was talk that only the encroachments in the *charnot* should be removed. Many people feared that removing encroachments from *abadi* (habitation) and *bilanam* lands could prove to be problematic in the long run as the encroachers could file cases against anyone who was party to this.

Some villagers tried to convince the others that there was no reason for them to fear such action from the encroachers because the order from the collector's office would act as a deterrent against any such move. They further assured the people that in the unlikely event of a complaint being filed with the police by any of the encroachers on the *bilanam* and *abadi* land, they would claim all responsibility and face any consequence even if it meant going to prison. With such assurances, the people's resolve was again reinstated, and the entire village, including the people who had significant encroachments, worked together and broke down the boundary walls of every single encroachment.

That night the heads of all the families in the village met again, this time to discuss the measures that should be taken to prevent any such incident in the future. The meeting went smoothly. At the end of the meeting a document listing the new norms was drawn up. It stated that anyone who tried to rebuild the boundary walls, which had been torn down earlier in the day, would have to pay a fine of Rs. 5,001. The document also stated that anyone building any structure in the village without getting the consent of the entire village, at a public meeting, would be fined Rs. 1,001. This document was signed by the heads of all the families in Viyal, including Tej Singh, Dalpat Singh, and the two Bhawar Singhs, who together controlled almost half of the *charnot* land. This step marked the end of the first chapter in the struggles of Viyal.

The Fallout of the Conflict

The first fallout of the conflict came within months of the meeting. A few years ago, the neighbouring village of Vanadiya had built a wall marking the boundary of their village. They had done this with the assistance of a local non-government organization. This wall also marked the boundary of the *charnot* land on which Bhawar Singh had his encroachment. After this encroachment was removed, the

villagers of Vanadiya started claiming that their boundary actually extended beyond the location of the wall. They wanted to build a new wall located well inside the land that had been vacated by Bhawar Singh.

This situation caused a great deal of tension between the two villages. The leadership of Viyal demanded to know why the people of Vanadiya had not said anything earlier about the claims that they were now making. The people of Vanadiya stuck to their position. After many deliberations it was decided that the *patwari* should be called. The *patwari* declared that the boundary wall of Vanadiya had been built correctly and that the claim by the people of Vanadiya for additional land was out of order.

The next struggle in Viyal was over a 100 sq. ft. plot of land located in the middle of Upla Viyal. The Srinathji Temple Trust authorities had built a small guardhouse on this plot many years ago. The building had eventually fallen into disuse. About thirty years ago, a person from the Kalal community came to the village and started living in the guardhouse. During the few years that he spent in Viyal, the man also acquired agriculture land in the village. When he left Viyal, he sold his land to Bhawar Singh (the man who had encroached over 30 bighas of *charnot* land). Bhawar Singh claimed that this man had also sold him the land on which the guardhouse stood before he left and that he (Bhawar Singh) had the papers to prove this. This particular plot had been demarcated as ***abadi*** land, and the villagers knew that the Kalal did not have legal possession over this land. In fact, on the day the boundary walls of all the encroachments in the village were broken down, the wall of this particular plot was the first to be demolished.

There was a general consensus in the village that this plot would be an ideal location for a village community centre. A proposal for funding the construction of a community centre had already been sent to Seva Mandir. The villagers had to procure a no-objection certificate for the use of the land from the panchayat. They approached the secretary of Dhar panchayat, but were informed that Bhawar Singh was claiming ownership over the plot. The villagers made repeated requests to Bhawar Singh to show them the paper proving that he was the rightful owner of the plot. When Bhawar Singh finally showed them the paper, it was found that the paper only mentioned the agricultural land that the Kalal had owned. The villagers went back to the secretary of Dhar panchayat and told him

what they had found out, but the secretary continued to drag his feet.

Not willing to accept this situation, the villagers started picketing the panchayat secretary whenever he came to the panchayat office and even started harassing him at his home in Udaipur. At his wits' end, the secretary came to the Seva Mandir office in Badgaon to complain that he and his staff were being harassed by the villagers. The secretary was told that Seva Mandir totally supported the people's position as they were the ones who were being wronged. He relented and completed all the required formalities within a few days. The construction of the community centre could then be taken up. Seva Mandir provided the raw materials, which had to be purchased from the market, and paid the wages of the skilled labourers while the *samuh* members volunteered for ordinary labour. The centre was completed in June 2002.

Viyal Today

The people of Viyal are bracing themselves for another boundary dispute, this time with the village of Gehloton ka Vas, which they claim has extended its boundary into Viyal's land. The leaders of the two villages have tried to sort out the matter between them, but have failed to reach an agreement. As a result, representations have been made to the panchayat, the *patwari*, and the forest department. The officials of both the departments were supposed to visit the disputed site in the middle of September 2002, but an outbreak of a contagious disease in the panchayat area forced the officials to cancel the visit. Subsequently, a new application was given by the residents of Viyal. However, despite several meetings the boundary dispute still continues.

Despite the fact that they have been able to maintain a united front on key issues, cracks, although subtle, are now clearly visible among the youth leadership that has emerged in the last eight or nine years, even to outsiders like the Seva Mandir staff. Personal differences and ego clashes between the *damar* and the de facto ward *panch* are all too evident. Though this has not yet affected the collective position taken by the villagers over important issues, one cannot help but think that the skies above Viyal could once again be filled by dark clouds.

In the meanwhile, people continued to enjoy the benefits of the pastureland. Grass from the *charnot* was cut in November 2002. All

the households in the village were asked to attend a meeting on 20 November 2002 to discuss matters relating to the cutting of grass. It was decided that each family which was eligible to take grass would have to pay Rs. 10 each. A fine of Rs. 50 for each turn missed under the *suiya* patrolling system had also been imposed, but due to protests from those who had been fined, a compromise was reached. The defaulting families had to take eight turns at patrolling instead of the usual four during the next year (2003).

Conclusion

Many important questions about Viyal remain unanswered. It is very difficult for anyone to delve into the mind of an individual and say definitively why s/he acted in a certain manner. It is impossible for outsiders like us to ascertain the innermost thoughts of the people whose actions resulted in all that happened in Viyal. We asked villagers with whom we spoke some of the following questions: Why did some people choose to encroach on the common lands in the village? Why did the majority remain silent spectators for so long? Why did they suddenly rise up and take definitive steps against the encroachments?

To our mind, the answers that we got were not wholly persuasive and conveyed an attitude of 'people did what had to be done'. It is perhaps impossible to describe the course of a swift river when one is in the water, at the mercy of the surging currents. Perhaps it is easier for us as outsiders to interpret and analyse the struggle that the villagers witnessed. Power is the central issue in any struggle, and Viyal is no different. Its expression, however, is contextual.

The seeds of Viyal's struggle were sown when the state demarcated the open lands around the village. In the 1970s, the lands that were demarcated as forest lands were decimated because of the actions of government officials. In the early 1980s, the state, realizing its mistake, reacted and in its efforts to 'save the environment' took steps to restrict the access of the villagers to these lands. Thus, by the mid-1980s the growing population in the village found itself increasingly boxed in, with limited individual landholdings, adverse geo-climatic conditions, and decreasing access to fuel and fodder sources.

It is these conditions that triggered the illegal encroachments, first in the *bilanam* lands and then in the village *charnot*. But why did only the Rajputs, who were a minuscule minority in the village, make

these encroachments? Weren't the people from the Bhil community equally affected by the circumstances that led to the encroachments? The simple answer to these questions, again, would be the struggle for 'power'.

It must be reasserted at this point that only a few Rajput families made the encroachments. The economic circumstances of most people in Viyal, whether Rajput or Bhil, did not differ much. Though the history of Mewar has been dominated by the Rajputs, the Rajputs in Viyal belong to the periphery of this community, being merely peasants, shorn of the grandeur that is traditionally associated with the history of this community.

The political fulcrum, at the point when the first encroachments were made, lay outside the village. Viyal was still a ward of Kundal, and the Rajput community dominated politics there. The few families who had active contacts with the local political and administrative establishment outside the village took advantage of their position and made their encroachments discreetly. The external circumstances, however, soon changed. Viyal was separated from Kundal and was declared a separate ward of Dhar panchayat, and an Adivasi assumed the office of the ward *panch* for the first time. Yet the issue of encroachment failed to enter the public sphere of village life, even when the encroachers tried to consolidate their holdings by erecting walls to demarcate their land. The effects of encroachment had not yet touched the lives of most people in the village. In fact, many of the leaders in the Bhil community had been employed by the Rajputs to erect the walls and had thus benefited financially from the encroachments. When the first feeble attempts to counter the greed of the encroachers were made in the early 1990s, the village was thoroughly divided on the issue and nothing came of it.

Encouraged by this atmosphere, more people started making encroachments in the common lands and the older encroachments were extended. The Bhil community, which had recently been granted formal access to the political establishment, continued to be by and large mute spectators to these developments, and the access to sources of fuel and fodder for the majority in the village continued to decrease. It was in these circumstances that the villagers, seeing the land regeneration work undertaken by Seva Mandir in neighbouring villages, first approached the organization for assistance.

In its initial forays into Viyal, Seva Mandir ended up inadvertently helping the powerful to consolidate their encroached landholdings. Despite this, the villagers continued to flock to the meetings held when Seva Mandir functionaries visited Viyal. Such high participation can perhaps be attributed to the fact that the people's situation was becoming desperate and perhaps they thought that Seva Mandir might offer them some hope, a new platform that could help to counter the established power nexus in the village. On Seva Mandir's part, such high attendance in public meetings was interpreted as a very positive sign. Work on a watershed project in a neighbouring village had just been completed, and its success had buoyed the confidence of the staff. It was felt that Viyal would be an ideal village for the implementation of work based on a watershed approach. When the work was about to begin, however, the Seva Mandir staff discovered for the first time that almost half of the *charnot* had been encroached. In the negotiations that followed in the village, a compromise was reached and it was decided that work would only be undertaken on the unencroached part of the *charnot*.

By the time work on the *charnot* began, almost a decade had passed since the Adivasi community had taken the first tentative steps towards the formal establishment of a political organization. The Adivasi leadership which had been established by Seva Mandir (especially the youth who had become a part of the committee) had been exposed to the struggles in other villages where the organization worked, and had seen for themselves how villagers elsewhere had confronted powerful people and had forced them to give up their encroachments on common lands.

The deprived section of the village had formed the workforce labouring to enclose the *charnot* land; the responsibilities for protecting the enclosed land were also shared by these people. After the monsoons, when they found women from households which already had substantial encroachments in the *charnot* cutting grass from the newly enclosed lands, a hue and cry was raised in the village. When the offenders claimed that parts of the land on which the villagers had worked actually belonged to them, it proved to be the last straw. It was time for the emerging power base within the village to flex its muscles. The crisis of resources had dragged on for a long time. The people had come together to do something about it, but even this effort was under threat from the 'haves' in the village. For the first time an effort by the majority to change their circumstances

was being challenged directly by the powerful minority. The issue of encroachment had become a personal issue for everyone in the village, and the leadership of the majority was in a position to capitalize on the general resentment of the people.

In the negotiations that followed, both Bhils and Rajputs were able to come together against the few families which had significant encroachments in the village. The first step taken by the majority was to draft an application to the government with a request for assistance in the removal of all encroachments in the village. The families which had minor encroachments in the village agreed to this strategy as they felt that they had more to gain materially if access to the commons could be regained. This step enabled all those who were opposed to the few families who controlled huge portions of the *charnot* to come together on a single platform.

What followed thereafter—the coercing of those who were not willing to sign the document, approaching the *tehsildar* and the collector's office, the removal of all encroachments in the village, and finally the setting up of norms and rules to prevent any repetition of encroachments—is a reflection of the final shift in the balance of power in the village. This also speaks of the maturity of the leadership that has emerged in the last decade.

We have already mentioned the success stories of the village leadership since the encroachments were removed. Today struggles and problems continue in Viyal, although largely beneath the surface, but what is important is that these struggles are between equals and do not happen at the cost of any one community.

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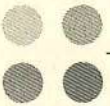

Suali[1]

Officially there is no forest area allocated to Suali hamlet, though 651 ha. of forest land fall within the revenue boundaries of neighbouring Bhamti. Around twenty years ago this hamlet decided on the basis of traditional user rights to start protecting a 200-ha. section of this forest area (*kakrot ka jungle*). Although Suali and Bhamti have traditionally been two separate villages, they fall within the same revenue boundary. However, for all practical purposes, they have distinct identities.

Since then Suali has fought hard to protect the forests from government contractors, illegal felling by people from nearby villages, etc. The Suali residents have developed and established norms, rules, and regulations for forest management over the years. They constituted a FPC almost a decade before the official announcement of the government's policy for people's participation in forest management. Paradoxically, however, even after investing a great deal of time and effort in this struggle, the residents of Suali still do not have any official rights over their green patch of forest. Currently, they are struggling to gain official recognition of their rights over the forest.

This case study seeks to understand and analyse the various factors that contributed to the functioning of the community forest protection system and the development of local governance in Suali.

The Village

Suali is part of the revenue village of Bhamti under Garanwas panchayat of Jhadol tehsil in Udaipur district. It is located 39 km.

[1] Researched and prepared by Ashish Aggarwal.

south of Jhadol. The village is 9 km. from Phalasia, which is the main village and facility centre of the area. The village is connected to Phalasia by 5 km. of tar road and 4 km. of *kuccha* (seasonal) road. To the north of Suali lies the village of Nichli Sigri, to the south lies Samlai Panwa, and to the west lies the main revenue village of Bhamti. The forest area is to the east.

There are 106 households in the village, with a population of around 650. All these households are scattered over a considerably large geographical expanse, of which the exact area is not known since there are no land records for Suali alone. Bhamti revenue village in all is spread over 1,390 ha. The topography of the village is undulating and the habitations scattered, a typical feature of the area. There is one government primary school in the village. To attend middle school, the village children go to the villages of Nichli Sigri, Som, or Garanwas, depending on the proximity of the school from their house. They have to go to Phalasia to attend high school. The literacy rate among the men of the village is as high as 90 per cent, while among women it is around 55 per cent, significantly higher than the district average of 20.4 per cent.

The village is not electrified. The local post office is in the nearby village of Som. The primary health centre, the police station, and the local forest check post serving the village are all located in Phalasia.

Social Composition

Suali is homogeneous in terms of social composition since the Bhil tribals alone inhabit the village. They belong to various *gotras* (clans) such as Kharadi, Bodar, Sivana, Vadera, Ahari, Himat, Pargi, Khokhariya, Darangi, Modia, Bhagora, and Kasota. Among all these *gotras*, the Khokhariya and Vadera clans are dominant in the village.

Village History

Around 150 years ago, two families, one belonging to the Khokhariya clan and the other belonging to the Vadera clan, settled in Suali. The Khokhariya family came from Padliya village in Kherwada tehsil and the Vadera family migrated from the nearby village of Upli Sigri. At that time this area was thickly forested and land was available in abundance. The *mokhi* was the officially designated representative who used to act on behalf of the local *ravla*. One person from the

ravla used to visit the village and would collect *bhog* from the *mokhi*. People from the nearby villages also used these lands for *walra* (slash-and-burn agriculture). Some of them also set up temporary settlements (*wadas*) here. Due to an increase in population pressure and consequent land fragmentation, these people started settling in the *wadas*. Thus, in the last twenty to sixty years, people belonging to various clans from the nearby villages of Patia, Boria, Sada, Amlia, and Samlai Panwa settled in Suali. Many people believed that the sacred spaces in the forest would cure their diseases; many people with chronic diseases settled in the village in the hope of getting well. Thus, the people of the Bodar clan of Samlai Panwa also came to settle in Suali. Suali (and its parent village of Bhamti) was in Nichli Sigri panchayat till 1995, after which it became part of the newly declared panchayat of Garanwas.

There are different stories about how the hamlet got its name, but according to the most common explanation the name 'Suali' was adopted because it represents the pleasant environment and fertile soil of the village (it is derived from the word *huali*, which means 'good' in the local language).

Livelihood

The main sources of livelihood are agriculture, livestock, and forest produce. Although the major occupation of villagers is agriculture, it

S. No.	Clan	Native village	Period of settlement (years)
1.	Khokhariya	Padliya*	150
2.	Wadera	Upli Sigri	150
3.	Kharadi	Nichli Sigri	50
4.	Bodar	Samlai Panwa*	60
5.	Sivana	Amlia	40
6.	Pargi	Patia	20
7.	Himat	Boria	20
8.	Darangi	Sada	30
9.	Modia	Khojanghati*	15
10.	Kasota	Sigri	50
11.	Ahari	Bhilakh*	35
12.	Bhagora	Nagmala	65

* Villages in Kherwada tehsil; the rest are in Jhadol tehsil.
(This information was gathered at a meeting with villagers.)

is highly dependent on the rains. Also, due to the undulating topography of the region and a lack of other inputs, agriculture can only provide subsistence support. Wage labour, through short-term migration, has become an important part of the people's livelihood over the years.

Land

While landholdings range in size from 0.32 ha. to 6.52 ha., most villagers have holdings between 0.65 ha. and 0.85 ha. Out of this total land, 70 per cent is cultivable and the rest is wasteland. Only around 3 per cent of the total agricultural land is irrigated.

Crops*

Cropping season	Crops
Kharif (Monsoon)	Maize, rice, pigeon pea, black pea, cowpea, sesame, sunflower, jute, horse gram, chilli, ginger, turmeric, yam
Rabi (Winter)	Wheat, mustard, gram, barley
Jaid (Summer)	Green gram

*For a normal rainfall year
(This information was gathered at a meeting with villagers.)

Migration

Members of almost all the households of the village (98 per cent) migrate out for wage labour. In a normal rain year, villagers go out for three months (August to October), while in a drought year they migrate for six months or more. Most of the villagers migrate to places in Gujarat (Idar, Rajkot, Ahmedabad, etc.), where they work largely in fields, in construction activities, and other petty jobs. A few of them go to places in Rajasthan like Udaipur and Kelawa, where they work in mines or on construction sites. The majority go to Gujarat as it is close to the village and since there are more labour opportunities available there.

Livestock

Cattle constitute an integral part of tribal life and culture. Cattle does not contribute significantly to livelihood in cash terms as there are no marketable surpluses, but the other outputs are very significant for their contribution to agriculture. In the absence of modern inputs, oxen are used for ploughing and cattle dung is used as manure

in the fields. On an average, there are eleven cattle heads in a household, out of which nearly half are goats. People prefer goats as they have a better capacity for survival in drought conditions; they can be sold and bought 'off the rack' in the market and hence serve as liquid assets.

Forest

Based on traditional use patterns and proximity, Suali has access to 200 ha. of forest land, which lies on the eastern side of the village. This forest is known as *kakrot ka jungle* among the locals. It is relatively dense and rich in biodiversity in comparison with nearby forest patches. The traditional use rights are uniform, except in the case of mahua trees; individual rights exist for select families for the collection of mahua flowers and fruits as per the forest settlement. These rights have been given to some households of the Khokhariya and Vadera clans who were the earliest settlers in the village.

Village Institutions

Mokhi[2] (traditional)

Every tribal village was traditionally headed by a *mokhi*. This office is a very strong social institution, and generally the *mokhi* belonged to the family who had settled in the village first. The position was hereditary; in most cases the son of a *mokhi* (if he was capable) was recognized as the new *mokhi* after his father's death. In the pre-Independence period, the *mokhi* was recognized by the court of the king at Udaipur. In the court (durbar), the *mokhi* was called *herjiya* (tax collector in the local language). The *mokhi* had to run the administration and handle all the affairs of the village on behalf of the durbar. All the taxes on agriculture and forests (*bhog*) were collected by the *mokhi*, and he used to transfer all the tax money and materials to the durbar, after keeping a fifth of it for himself. The *mokhi*'s presence was essential at all social occasions of death, marriage, and so on as well as religious functions in the village. His role was also critical in settling disputes in the village. Bhima Gameti was the first settler in Suali and hence the first *mokhi* of the village. At present Nagji Ram is the *mokhi*, but he does not belong to Bhima's family.

[2] The dates in brackets denote the approximate date of inception.

The Bhakt Movement (the 1960s)

In the 1960s, the village came into contact with the Bhakt movement, which was then at its peak in Gujarat. Due to its proximity to Gujarat, Suali was influenced by the movement. There were two major religious sects in the movement—the Kabir *panth* and the Nath *panth*—following the same basic principles, with minor differences in rituals. The Nath *panth* was founded earlier, and had its headquarters at Girnar, Gujarat, with Guru Gorakhnath as the leader. The Kabir *panth*, which came a little later, had its headquarters at Ahmedabad; followers considered the social reformer Kabir as their guru. Gradually all the families of the village, except fifteen families, became *bhakt*s (followers of the religious sects). Both sects had almost equal numbers of followers in the village.

Adherents of these sects observed certain codes of conduct. For instance, they did not consume eggs, meat, liquor, and other intoxicating substances. They also abstained from quarrels and fights. These religious movements led to a number of social reforms in the village. Villagers saved money due to non-consumption of meat and liquor. There was a reduction in the number of disputes and fights, which earlier had been commonplace under the influence of liquor. Social functions such as weddings and funerals also changed a great deal and became less expensive. Formerly these events used to be incredibly expensive and compelled people to borrow from the moneylender at exorbitant interest rates. Gradually the expenses were borne with contributions from the villagers.

Dhapa pratha (bride price)

This custom is prevalent among the Bhil tribe. During a wedding the groom has to pay *dhapa* (bride price) to the family of the bride. The amount ranges from Rs. 250 to Rs. 4,000 depending on the village, the type of marriage (love match or arranged), the demand from the bride's family, and the financial condition of the groom. The maximum amount asked for is in cases where a love marriage takes place between two cousins. The religious reform movement in Suali had a significant impact on such customs. The villagers stopped taking *dhapa* during the 1970s as it put a needless burden on the groom's family.

Janvadi Mahila Samiti (1980)

The Janvadi Mahila Samiti is based on the ideology of the Communist Party. These *samitis* were formed in 1969 all over

Rajasthan, with the basic objective of empowering tribal women by organizing them in groups. These groups discussed issues related to women at their monthly meetings. The Janvadi Mahila Samiti was formed in Suali in 1980. An eleven-member executive committee was elected from among the village women to fight against the use of liquor and drugs, which was prevalent in the area. This committee also attempted to deal with issues of violence against and exploitation of women. The Suali committee had strong links with other committees in nearby villages. They collaborated with each other to resolve common problems. Last year, in 2003, when a man from the nearby village of Nichli Sigri beat his wife, all the committees of the area protested against it, and he apologized and assured the women that this would not happen again.

Sahakari Beej Bhandar (Cooperative Seed Bank, 1981)

Till the 1980s the villagers did not store the crop seeds for the next season; they used to sell the entire produce in the market. The excess would be sold against the purchase of other requirements. So, at the time of sowing in the next season, they had to purchase seeds from the market at prices that were much higher than the prices at which they had sold the seeds the previous year. The sowing season coincides with the period during which the villagers have low cash availability, and hence they are forced to take loans from the moneylenders of Phalasia to purchase seeds.

In order to address this problem, the village leaders constituted the Sahakari Beej Bhandar in 1981. An eleven-member committee was constituted under the leadership of Nand Lal Bodar and sixty-two families became members of this *bhandar*. Every member family initially deposited 11 kg. of maize seed and Rs. 3 (towards the purchase of pesticides and other storage expenses) in the *bhandar* after the harvest. At the time of sowing, families could take seed from the *bhandar* as per their requirement, with the stipulation that after the harvest they would return a quarter more than they had borrowed. In this way, the quantity of seeds increased in the *bhandar*. The families slowly started the practice of storing the seed in their own houses and gradually the utility of the *bhandar* declined. The committee decided to sell all the stored grain. An amount of Rs. 28,934 was generated after the sale. This money has been given as loans to different members at an annual interest rate of 36 per cent.

Van Suraksha Samiti (Forest Protection Committee, 1981)

Villagers began discussing the problem of the degrading forest and its repercussions in the late 1970s. Under the initiative of Nagji Ram and Nand Lal, a *van suraksha samiti* (forest protection committee) was constituted in 1981 by nominating eleven members at a village meeting. Nagji Ram was elected president. But the committee was still in the learning stages and there were no norms for forest management in place. There was no organized community forest protection, and only a handful of villagers used to patrol the forest. Also, nobody kept records of duties, offences, meetings, etc. The FPC realized these shortcomings in its functioning. On 10 June 1985, the first formal elections were held, by a show of hands, to form an eleven-member committee to manage the forest. Certain norms and rules were laid down for the management. All the candidates were elected through consensus. Nagji Ram was again elected president of the committee.

It was decided that a monthly meeting would be held on the 15th of every month. Initially, over and above this meeting, two or three other meetings were held every month to set up the necessary systems. At the monthly meeting the main issues discussed were those of the illegal felling of trees and how to stop this, as well as other problems related to the forest. Sudden raids in the forest during the night were organized by the villagers to frighten those who felled trees.

After the first formal elections in 1985, there have been other elections and the committee has been reconstituted twice. The second elections were held on 25 February 1992. It was observed that when the male members of the committee tried to stop women from the nearby villages from felling trees, they were accused of molesting them. The committee then decided to include a few women members. After the elections, a twelve-member committee was constituted with four new members, of which two were women. In 1993, the committee sent its request for registration to the forest department through a non-government organization (Aravalli Volunteers' Society), but nothing materialized. Following the next elections, held on 13 August 2002, an eleven-member committee was formed as per the JFM regulations. The constitution of a separate women's advisory committee was facilitated by Seva Mandir to ensure a greater role for women in forest management.

Gram Sabha (1992)

This is the most powerful institution in the village. It has been in existence since 1992. All major decisions of the village are taken by it. It was constituted to manage the village funds collected on social occasions such as weddings, funerals, etc. or through the caste panchayat. The sum of Rs. 2 was collected per family if there was a death in the village. This fund covered all the expenses of the death rites and rituals. Similarly, before the start of the monsoons, the entire village participates in prayers and makes offerings to the gods; the money to cover these expenses is raised through a Rs. 2 contribution from every family. Again, after the harvest, the village organizes prayers at the local temple of Patha Bavji, also known as Kakrot Bavji, with a contribution of Re. 1 or 50 paise per family.

Since different people were responsible for collecting money on various occasions, there was often duplication of effort. There was no agency to monitor and manage the entire sum of money collected. So it was decided to constitute an eleven-member committee to manage the village money, and Ratan Lal, Mava Ram, and Bhuri Lal were nominated president, secretary, and accountant respectively. It was decided to have a meeting on the 25th of every month. A person appointed as the *helot* (herald of the village) makes an announcement in the morning and the entire village gathers for the meeting. The committee had around Rs. 3,000 in its bank account, out of which the sum of Rs. 2,800 was given as loans to six people at an interest rate of 36 per cent (the prevalent market interest rate is 60 to 120 per cent). The loan is given only after an assurance is received from two reputed persons in the village.

Gram Vikas Committee (Village Development Committee, 1997)

The *gram vikas* committee was constituted in 1997 so that all village development activities under Seva Mandir could be brought under its jurisdiction. The committee has seven members, with Kama Ram as president. The mandate of this committee is to liaise with different village development organizations such as the panchayat and government and non-government organizations. The committee also takes care of the management of and contributions towards the *gram vikas kosh* (village development fund) initiated by Seva Mandir. The committee has deposited a sum of Rs. 220,746 in its bank account

in Phalasia. All the other committees in Suali report to the *gram vikas* committee.

History of Forest Protection

Villagers claim that their rights to the *kakrot ka jungle* go back to the time of the settlement of the village. Older residents recall the changes that took place in the forest under different governance systems.

Before 1948, Suali was part of the kingdom of Mewar and was governed by the Rao of Panarwa. The village *mokhi*, the de facto leader of the village, was the link between the village and the Rao. He collected *bhog* (tax, usually in kind) on the crops and forest produce, and passed it on to the Rao of Panarwa after keeping back his own share. The traditional leadership of the village managed the forest and ensured that the villagers took products only according to their needs. Rules determining the quantity of timber and bamboo that could be extracted for the construction of houses were also put in place. The trees that could be felled were marked by the *samiti* members.

The population of the village was also small, and the biophysical condition of the forest was excellent. The forest was rich in different plant species such as *sisam*, *kaliya*, *sagwan*, *kheda*, *grad*, *ron*, *haldu*, *biya*, *karmela*, *bans*, *tendu*, *tahda*, etc. Animal species were equally diverse, with rabbit, fox, wild boar, bear, deer, monkey, leopard, and tiger all being found in the forest.

The 1950s

In 1950, when forests were declared state property and the forest department started asserting its rights over forest land, the villagers felt totally cheated. '*Raton rat hamara jungle sarkar ne le liya*,' (The government appropriated our forest overnight), said a disgruntled villager. No longer could they go into the forest to fetch products as per their needs. This created feelings of anguish and rebellion among the villagers. They started felling trees indiscriminately. Even the nearby villagers were allowed to harvest the forests. If the field-level forest department workers tried to stop the villagers from felling trees, the villagers threatened them and sometimes even beat them up. They invented a punishment, *kolyalakdi*, for forest officials; they tied the offenders' legs and arms with strings to wooden poles and

put them in a dark room for a few days. The elderly people of the village recall having done this to foresters two or three times. This terrorized the forest officials and nobody dared to come to the forest.

The 1960s and the 1970s

The exploitation of the forest continued till the early 1960s, when the forest became degraded and seasonal forest products became scarce. The villagers started facing problems resulting from the changes in the local environment and the scarcity of basic products that constituted an integral part of their livelihood. In 1962, the villagers raised these concerns at the Adivasi Sangh.[3] It was decided to appoint a president who would be responsible for forest protection in every village of the area. Rupdas was elected president in Suali. He collaborated with the other presidents of the nearby villages. As bamboo had become almost extinct in the Kakrot forests, the villagers used to go to the nearby Sarwan forests, which were used by a number of nearby villages as well. The people of Suali decided to protect the Sarwan forests as well. Every day six to ten villagers used to go to the Sarwan forests and a similar number to the Kakrot forests to protect them. But Suali could not continue protecting the Sarwan forests as the other villages refused to cooperate. So the people of Suali decided to protect only their own forests. But this measure could not be very effective in the long term as the entire responsibility of managing the affairs of the forest lay with one person, i.e. the president. There were no rules or norms in place for this kind of system. Despite the efforts of the villagers, the degradation of the forests continued.

The 1980s

In 1981, an eleven-member FPC was constituted and initially an arbitrary system of protection was established. In 1985, fixed management, norms were adopted and the *khunti* (literally stick) system of protection was introduced (See box *Khunti*). A need-based harvesting system was also prepared.

In 1987, there was a severe drought in the region. The crops failed miserably, and the people faced a scarcity of the three basic

[3] The Adivasi Sangh, a large federation of tribals, provides a platform for the area-wise representation of issues and holds discussions on these and other problems faced by the group.

committed for the third time, the offender's axe and fuelwood were seized, he/she was fined Rs. 11.25, and was socially ostracized. If the offender belonged to another village, then the wood and axe were seized, although the latter was returned after collecting a fine of Rs. 5.25. The committee talked to the *mokhi* and other influential persons from the offender's village to further pressurize him/her. The committee had established good relations with all such powerful people in the area.

Nobody could carry an axe with him in the forest. If somebody was found carrying an axe, it was seized. It was returned only after the payment of Rs. 1.25. This amount did not vary for outsiders.

The decision to give women representation in the *van suraksha samiti* in 1992, as mentioned above, was triggered by the problems faced by the all-male committee in regulating offences committed by the women of neighbouring areas. When male members of the *samiti* tried to stop women offenders, they were charged with sexual harassment. The decision to include women as executive members on the committee left the women offenders with no option but to stop their illegal cutting.

Two women, Panu Bai and Velki Bai, were elected executive committee members. These women took a leading role in organizing other women from the village. They started going with men to guard the forest. The women of Suali were also empowered as a result of social reforms in the village and also due to their involvement in a number of committees. The Janvadi Mahila Samiti also contributed towards this empowerment. It provides a platform to women where they can discuss their problems. In the past it protested against alcohol consumption in their area. In cases of wife beating, even in nearby villages, members of the *samiti* pressurize the offender to make an apology and pay a fine. At present the women play an active role in the village decision-making process and have emerged as strong leaders. On 19 September 2002, when the villagers of Nichli Sigri and Sonkala tried to cut the trees in the forest, the women of Suali went by themselves to the forest and chased them away.

Rights of the Villagers

The *samiti* has decided on certain rights for the members. They are permitted to collect dry twigs for fuelwood from the forests but only for self-consumption and not for sale. For timber needed in the

construction of houses or for making agricultural implements, the *samiti* has to be approached. The committee will then assess the real demand, and two committee members will go into the forest and demarcate a tree for felling in accordance with the demand. For this service the committee charges Rs. 11 from the person who will get the timber and gives him/her a receipt for the same.

Factors Responsible for Sustained Forest Protection

Plural and Able Leadership

Suali has strong leaders who have a long-term vision for village development. Leaders like Nand Lal, Nagji Ram, Mava Lal, Ratan Lal, Kama, Panu Bai, Velki Bai, and Sugna Bai have worked with integrity and selflessness for the betterment of the village, thus also motivating and guiding the villagers towards the goal of forest management. The leadership in Suali is also plural. Different persons have different roles and responsibilities on different committees. Nand Lal is the political leader of the village due to his affiliation with the Communist Party of India (CPI). Nagji Ram is the traditional leader due to his role as the village *mokhi*. Similarly, responsibilities are divided among other leaders, and this arrangement balances both the power and the work load.

Although in the initial phase of forest protection in the early 1980s, the participation of women was overlooked and they were not included in the executive of the *van suraksha samiti*, they have gradually come up in the leadership hierarchy due to their strong commitment to the cause. Today the women leaders of Suali play an active role in the decision-making process. They are not passive observers like the women of most nearby villages. Due to the efforts of women leaders, the women of Suali have become more aware about their rights and responsibilities, and are playing a key role not only in the development of their own village but also of the region.

Religious Beliefs and Social Reforms

Social reforms in Suali are largely related to the religious movement. A majority of social reforms in the village such as restraint in the consumption of liquor and meat, and the giving up of wasteful practices like *dhapa* and death ceremonies, were the result of the *bhakt* movement. Over time 87 per cent of the households became *bhakts*. Suali became a single cohesive unit due to the adoption of

common beliefs and religious sentiments. The people began organizing bhajan *mandalis*. All these activities brought about greater understanding among the people, resulting in fewer quarrels. This also led to increased participation in village development activities. These social reforms have resulted in the social and economic upliftment of the village.

Kakrot Bavji

The sacred grove of Kakrot Bavji is located deep inside the forest, and the people of the region have strong religious sentiments towards it. In the month of March, at the time of Holi, many people go there to pray, especially those who have a newborn in the house. They come to pray and seek blessings for the long life of the newborn at a function called *doondh*. The grove also plays an important role in the protection of the forest. The forest around it is still very dense. People are fearful of cutting the trees in this forest; illegal tree fellers pray to Kakrot Bavji to forgive them and request the gods to make their endeavour successful before felling and carrying away the wood on camel backs.

Kesar chidkav

Due to the widespread belief that the gods will punish any person who cuts down a tree after *kesar* has been sprinkled around it, trees have been protected in the enclosed area even during years of drought.

Political Climate

Suali has been under the influence of the CPI since the early 1970s. Nand Lal Bodar, who is now the tehsil president of the CPI, introduced the ideology of the party in the village. He initiated its work by uniting the villagers to fight against the exploitation by moneylenders in the region. In 1975, when moneylenders from Phalasia collected 150 quintals of grain from Suali as their share and wanted to take it away, the villagers decided to act. They did not allow the moneylenders to take away the grain, and they also tore up the account registers. Subsequently, the moneylenders started boycotting the villagers and refused to give them any loans. However, with the support of the CPI, the villagers managed to resist the boycott and subsequently matters returned to normal. This incident served to strengthen the villagers' affiliation to the CPI. Slowly, Suali

became the centre of activities of the party in the region. The CPI has provided the people the support and the platform where they can discuss their problems with the administration freely. This has also allowed them to oppose government decisions that were not in the interest of the village. For instance, in the early 1980s, when the village forest was allotted to a contractor for felling, the entire village protested and did not allow the contractor to enter their forest.

Ecological Factor

In the 1960s, the village forest was harvested indiscriminately. As a result, the villagers noticed changes in their microclimate. Due to the loss of vegetative cover, the run-off increased, which in turn resulted in increased soil erosion. Consequently, the water level in the wells decreased, which in turn had an adverse impact both on human beings as well as cattle. The villagers also attributed the irregularity and scarcity in rainfall to deforestation. The good environment which had originally earned Suali its name now started deteriorating. This prompted the worried villagers to take care of their forest.

Economic Factor

The biodiversity of the forest was rich till the 1950s, and the villagers were able to extract several products from it around the year. This rich biodiversity was threatened by intensive harvesting in the 1960s, and species like bamboo (used for construction, basket making, etc.), *tahda* (used for making ploughs), *dhawda* (used for construction), and *safed musli* (used for medicines) became scarce. This ecological imbalance affected the lifestyle and livelihood patterns of the villagers, who were totally dependent on forests. Sometimes villagers had to buy these essentials from the nearby villages. This scarcity prompted them to think seriously about the management of their forest.

The Challenges Ahead

On 5 September 2002, the period of enclosure by *kesar chidkav* ended. As the region has faced continuous drought over the last four years, there is bound to be excessive pressure on the forest. The *van suraksha samiti* is worried about the fate of their forest. People from the nearby villages have already made attempts to fell trees. On 19 September 2002, a few people from Nichli Sigri and Sonkala villages

made attempts to cut trees, but they were chased away by the villagers of Suali. On 28 November 2002, there was another attempt to cut trees by the people of Samlai Panwa. When the cattle grazers of Suali saw the camels of the intruders, they called their fellow villagers. Those who had come to cut trees ran away, leaving behind their camels and wood. The wood was seized by the *samiti* and the animals set free in the forest.

The *kakrot ka jungle* is dense and green compared to the forest of Nichli Sigri, which is continuous with the forest of Suali. The people of Suali managed to maintain the health and well-being of their forest only through great efforts and by exercising much restraint during the drought years. Now the *samiti* is worried about forest protection and their rights over the forest land and its products. It does not want to perform *kesar chidkav* again as they believe that after seven years of restraint, it is too much to expect the villagers to be patient much longer; the villagers now need to fulfil some of their basic requirements from the forest. Moreover, the *samiti* believes that the practice of *kesar chidkav* cannot be effective forever, as eventually the people are bound to start losing faith in such a system.

The *samiti* wants to get the forest enclosed with a stone fence to demarcate its boundary. They believe that this would also have a psychological effect on the residents of the nearby villages as their boundaries would also be clearly demarcated and established. The construction work would also provide the people with employment, a very critical need in this difficult period of drought. Although the *samiti* has submitted the details of the JFM committee for registration, it is sceptical about the intentions of the forest department insofar as recognizing the rights of Suali over the standing forest. The *samiti* feels that if the rights of Suali are not duly *recognized* now, the people would completely lose faith in the state machinery.

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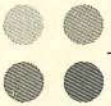

Nayakheda[1]

The Nayakheda cluster comprises the villages of Ghodach and Usan. These villages belong to the Ghodach panchayat, and are a part of the Khamnor panchayat *samiti* of Rajsamand district. The villages are located around 40 km. from Udaipur town and comprise a number of hamlets. This narrative outlines the events that led the people of Nayakheda to unite against the dominant (and exploitative) local power structure, and their subsequent efforts to establish common governance mechanisms on community lands.

Name of hamlet	Dominant community	No. of households
Nayakheda	Adivasi	35
Devron ka Guda	Rajput	21
(Upla + Nichla)		(12+9)
Gairiyon ka Guda	Gairi	28
Khedata	Rebari	18
Vandariyon ka Guda	Gairi, Nai, others	24
Bhilon ki Talai	Adivasi	26
Total		152

Nayakheda first became associated with Seva Mandir through an education programme. An adult education centre, run by Shivlal Parmar, was set up in 1979, and was attended by fifteen to twenty young adults. Regular contact with each other while attending the centre helped strengthen the bonds of trust between them, and sowed the seeds for future discussions on developmental activities.

[1] Case study prepared by Narayan Lal Ameta. Translation from the original Hindi into English by Pankaj Ballabh.

Between 1980 and 1985, Seva Mandir attempted to decentralize its activities, and as part of its revised strategy it sought to focus intensively on identified clusters. Creating strong federations and seeking to influence the functioning of panchayats was also part of the new strategy. Nayakheda was one of the areas selected as part of this effort. In this period, the lab-to-land programme and activities such as well deepening, etc. were undertaken, and a link road connecting Nayakheda to the main road was constructed.

In 1985, a *padyatra* (procession) was organized. A five-member team conducted a house-to-house contact programme and organized night meetings. The meeting in Usan was attended by nearly thirty-five people. A local leader, Bhanwar Singh, also participated in this meeting. He was very curious about the aims and activities of Seva Mandir, and said that there were no problems in the village as he personally had provided employment to each household in the village. The other participants also agreed with him. He then instructed everyone to leave.

However, according to most villagers, Bhanwar Singh was, in fact, a local tyrant. He belonged to a local Rajput family and was very powerful, both economically and politically. He owned three soapstone mines in the area, and each household in Nayakheda was required to send at least one able-bodied person to work in these mines. The workers were poorly paid and exploited. Those who tried to protest were assaulted. Bhanwar Singh also had a gang of about ten strongmen, who constantly terrorized the local people.

The period between 1986 and 1989 was one of acute drought and deprivation. One of the first relief activities launched by Seva Mandir involved individual plantations, with which eighty-three farmers were associated. This provided them with wage labour, and the pits dug for plantations also increased grass yields. This encouraged several other farmers to join the programme. In this period, recurrent droughts had destroyed the economic base of the people's livelihood. The state government provided little or no relief. These programmes of Seva Mandir offered the only hope. The activities, beginning with individual plantations, moved on to collective activities such as regeneration of pooled wastelands and pasturelands, etc. Simultaneously, programmes focusing on health and institution building were also launched. This led to discussions focusing on more comprehensive land-development schemes and collective-action programmes.

Shivlal's association with Seva Mandir began in the 1970s, when he joined the organization as a superviser of its adult education programme. Pannalal Rebari, the local ward *panch*, was inducted into Seva Mandir as a health paraworker. Prem Singh Devra also became involved with Seva Mandir's activities as a *vanpal*, or forestry paraworker. This triumvirate of Shivlal, Pannalal, and Prem Singh was to play a critical role in the future struggles of the Nayakheda cluster.

In 1989, Madhav Taylor, a zonal worker employed by Seva Mandir, focused on the Nayakheda cluster as the centre of the region and attempted to develop local-level leadership by focusing on hamlet-specific concerns. He also attempted to unite this leadership to address issues of common concern. Working on individual issues so as to strengthen the village institution was a key part of his plan for the cluster. Another critical component was the creation of an institution that would enable members of different communities to sit together on a common platform to work on issues of mutual concern.

In the same year, Prem Singh and the zonal team initiated an assessment of past work on the commons and the reasons for their failure. It emerged that a plot of 7 ha. that had been enclosed in 1988 was traditionally used by animals from Bhilon ki Talai for grazing. The people of the hamlet were, however, not involved in the process, and no efforts were made to establish a management system on the plot. The local residents were told that all outputs from the enclosure would be taken away by the panchayat. Consequently, the enclosure's walls were broken and the plot was opened for grazing.

The first step was to build an understanding among the constituent hamlets. After two years of concentrated effort, two proposals to enclose and regenerate the pasturelands emerged, in 1992. Two more proposals were put up in 1993. It was clear that members of certain communities tended to encroach on these lands. Gairi families, too, used these lands to graze their sheep during the monsoons. Finally, it was agreed that the entire area would not be enclosed, and 7 to 8 ha. of land would be left open for grazing. Eventually, a total of 35 ha. of land was enclosed in four pieces according to the availability of pastureland in the village.

In 1993, the Bhilon ki Talai group proposed the regeneration of the pastureland plot that had been damaged earlier. The group

obtained the requisite permission from the panchayat and started work with support from Seva Mandir. A problem now arose over rights of passage through the plot. Uda Dangi of Usan had been using a path through the plot as a shortcut to his fields across the pasture. Due to the enclosure, he was forced to go around the plot. He demanded that the group leave a passage for him in the middle of the plot. When repeated discussions did not result in a solution, the group called the representatives of the seven hamlets, the *sarpanch* of Usan, and the *patwari* to mediate. The *patwari* and the *sarpanch* clarified that the passage being demanded was not part of the official maps, and instructed Uda Dangi to use the path outside the pasture plot. The villagers told Uda Dangi that in case of any future disputes, they would take legal action against him and would seek compensation equivalent to wages lost because of the dispute.

The work on the plot was completed and Hari Ram Gameti was appointed watchman. He was paid a yearly salary of Rs. 700, which was covered from money collected during the grass harvest, the excess being deposited in the common village fund. Annual *shramdan* (voluntary labour) to repair the wall, and place thorns on it, was part of the protection plan. Similar arrangements were made for the other plots.

In the meanwhile, in 1990, Bhanwar Singh was engaged in competing with Sundarlal Sharma, of the nearby village of Rama, for the leadership of the local wing of the Congress Party. Bhanwar Singh was unable to accept the progress made by Sundarlal, who had both financial and physical clout. Matters took a new turn when Bhanwar Singh was assaulted by Sundarlal over a dispute involving a commercial plot. In order to avenge this loss of face, Bhanwar Singh and his family members crashed a dump truck into a jeep carrying Sundarlal and ten of his associates, killing them all. In 1990, the local court sentenced Bhanwar Singh, his brother Vijay Singh, and his father-in-law to jail terms. Later the High Court released Bhanwar Singh, but passed a death sentence against Vijay Singh. The Supreme Court finally acquitted Vijay Singh in 1998. In the same period, Bhanwar Singh also lost his hold over the panchayat, largely due to his loss of control over the people following his arrest and the court proceedings.

This sequence of events had two results. First, there was widespread revulsion among the people against Bhanwar Singh and his associates. Second, the influence he had once wielded in deciding

local issues now declined because of his enforced absence for four years from the local scene. When his family instructed the Adivasi hamlets to send five people daily to guard his home during the period of his absence, the residents of Nayakheda refused. (The other two Adivasi hamlets, Usan Bhilwara and Solankiyon ka Bhilwara, however, sent their men.)

During the period of Bhanwar Singh's absence, a four-member team comprising Madhav Taylor, the zonal worker, Shivlal, Pannalal, and Prem Singh, had done intensive work in the cluster. They planned to strengthen leadership in each of the seven hamlets, develop a system of collective leadership across the hamlets, and undertake extensive work on an individual basis in order to create a platform for collective action.

The sequence of meetings and workshops held at various levels—hamlet, cluster, and organization—helped evolve plans for comprehensive development as well as served to remove misconceptions among the residents of the hamlets. The plans that emerged from these efforts included the construction of a community centre in Nayakheda, development of pasturelands, installation of lift irrigation to improve crop productivity and incomes, etc. These efforts also resulted in the emergence of a united leadership of around thirty to thirty-five people from all the hamlets.

The community centre was the first evidence of the success of these joint efforts. Seva Mandir provided the construction material and the community provided the labour. To celebrate the completion of the community centre in 1993, the group organized a large common feast and also laid the foundation for a lift-irrigation scheme. The success of this collective effort further strengthened the desire of the group to create a strong cluster.

The identification of the well site for lift irrigation was done collectively by the cluster, and the services of both technical experts and traditional water locaters were utilized. The community did most of the work; only the expenses of the rock blasting were borne by Seva Mandir. The work on the well brought the community up against Bhanwar Singh's family. Bhanwar Singh owned compressors, which were needed for working on the well. The people requested his wife, Chandra Kunwar, to send the compressors. She refused, citing the earlier lack of support by the group in guarding her house, and declared that no development work should happen in the village without Bhanwar Singh's approval.

However, the group decided to continue with the work. The other compressor owners were anxious, so the group nominated people who would escort the compressor from the main road to the site and back. One day Chandra Kunwar came to the site armed with a sword, along with some associates, and threatened to kill those who were working there. Prem Singh, who was related to Bhanwar Singh, knelt down and offered his neck to her, whereupon she withdrew.

The following week Bhanwar Singh's family systematically closed all roads leading from Nayakheda and Khadeta hamlets to the nearby village of Khandawali, and they also walled off all grazing lands and animal pathways. The group decided to use the law to counter this attempt at intimidation. Madhav Taylor and the village representatives contacted the police superintendent at Rajsamand and demanded immediate action. The representatives of the seven hamlets escorted the police to the site. After inspection, cases were filed against Chandra Kunwar and her sons. The villagers united in breaking down the walls and obstructions that had been built.

This victory further emboldened the community. They decided that they would at the same time remove the old encroachments made by Bhanwar Singh on the Valra pastureland plot. This plot had been developed by the panchayat in 1988–89, and had been encroached on by Bhanwar Singh. He had, in turn, passed on the management of the land to Bhera Gairi, who could also draw benefits from it.

Nearly 150 villagers went to the site and worked till nightfall, removing the boundary wall made by Bhanwar Singh and opening the plot for common use. The next day the people realized that merely opening the plot was not enough. They decided to contribute labour to build a new fence around the plot. In 1996, the community managed to undertake plantation activities on the plot with the panchayat's support. The plot is under permanent protection at present.

By 1994, thanks to the enclosure of the plot, the effect of the work already done was becoming apparent. The protected plot had turned green, grass yields were increasing, and the village fund had more money received as a result from the sale of grass. The community decided to extend the work to cover all lands in the village. In the initial stages the idea spread slowly, but within two to three months it had become the dominant topic of conversation in the village.

Through discussions with the villagers, the block officials realized that while the people knew the component activities that needed to be undertaken, they had little practical understanding of the complexities of such work. The block officials decided to hold a small workshop, followed by a technical and social survey of the area. By April 1994, the first plans were ready. The area was divided into two watershed units, one of 125 ha. and the other of 75 ha. In order to impart practical understanding of the work among the people, it was decided to first initiate work, before the monsoons, on a 6.5 ha. micro watershed section that was privately owned.

The treatment on the land of twenty-two farmers was carried out under watershed activities. Land management systems such as the ban on free grazing were initiated. While the work was underway, Bhanwar Singh was released from jail. People were apprehensive about his reaction to the development work initiated in his absence. The zonal and block teams of Seva Mandir decided to stay at the site. This reassured the people of Nayakheda, who managed to complete the work despite Bhanwar Singh's presence.

The government watershed department contacted the community in 1994 and asked them to take up the remaining activities through their project. The leadership reviewed the work already done and found that it lacked quality and that it was also incomplete in some respects. They decided that the work would be done with Seva Mandir's support alone.

In December 1994, panchayat elections were announced. After a long and complex contest, the cluster ensured that Shivlal, who had contested as an independent candidate, managed to get elected to the post of *sarpanch*. The people also succeeded in ensuring the defeat of Bhanwar Singh who wanted the post of *upsarpanch*, although they had to ally themselves with the Bharatiya Janata Party to achieve this goal.

In the years between 1995 and 2000, the work in the area was undertaken with a renewed sense of purpose. All the remaining lands were treated on a watershed basis, the open grazing of cattle was restricted, separate animal sheds were created in each household, and an additional lift-irrigation system was installed. Other development activities were also initiated in the cluster. Many activities initiated in Nayakheda were extended to other parts of the panchayat.

The impact of this work soon became evident. A region that was once deprived has now been transformed into a place with no

shortage of water and fodder even in drought years. Livelihoods are more secure, and the trend of land alienation has apparently been arrested to some extent. The Nayakheda cluster has accumulated Rs. 175,000 in its common fund.

As Nayakheda has prospered, the status of Bhanwar Singh among the villagers has correspondingly declined. His entire family is mired in court cases. He remains powerful and politically well connected, but he is no longer the unquestioned power centre that he once was.

There has also been a change in the status of the Adivasi community in the Nayakheda cluster. They have achieved equality with other communities and now command respect. Even among the larger Adivasi community, the Adivasis of Nayakheda have a special status. They have also helped forge relationships among all the adjoining Adivasi hamlets and have created a common platform on which they can all come together.

However, the real impact of the events in Nayakheda is visible elsewhere, outside the cluster. The adjoining villages of Barawa and Kaylon ka Guda have adopted similar plans for land regeneration. At least four other villages are proposing to adopt similar activities. Many panchayats have contacted Seva Mandir for assistance in initiating similar activities. The values adopted in the work in Nayakheda have impacted the working of not only the local panchayat but also the panchayats of adjoining villages. Inspired by the unity and strength displayed by the people of the Nayakheda cluster, villages such as Viyal are also undertaking similar action against powerful encroachers in their own area. Learning from the experience of Nayakheda, four Adivasi villages of Madar panchayat have formed their own federation and are making plans for comprehensive development. Nayakheda has truly been a source of inspiration for many communities.

8

Kojon ka Guda[1]

This case study documents the negotiations over rights to a forest patch among three villages located 48 km. from Udaipur city: Kojon ka Guda, Saharia, and Padtal. After decades of peaceful coexistence, the three communities found themselves pitted against each other when the forest that was seen as being common to all three villages was enclosed under the joint forest management (JFM) programme, with only one village represented on the forest protection committee (FPC) constituted for the purpose. The idea here is to present the details of significant events from a long-drawn-out conflict and emphasize the efforts at conflict resolution by the communities to overcome this problem.

The Socio-economic Context

The residents of all three villages belong to the Rawat Meena community. However, their *gotra*s (lineages) are different. The people of Padtal claim that their ancestors came from Umra and settled in an area about a kilometre north-east of the present-day Kojon ka Guda settlement. They firmly believe that this was the original Kojon ka Guda village. A few hundred years ago the ancestors of the Padtal residents shifted to their present location, but they continued to retain land in the old settlement area, the site of the present-day Kojon ka Guda, also referred to locally as Dholi Magri. The present inhabitants of Kojon ka Guda village arrived about a hundred years ago.

The people of Saharia had shifted from the nearby village of Lalpura to their present settlement a few decades ago. Till recently

[1] Researched and authored by Prakash Kashwan.

Saharia had been one of the hamlets of Lalpura village, and in 1994 it was granted the status of a separate revenue village. Most of the people in each village have common ancestors, and hence the residents of one village are related to each other by blood. Also, the people of Padtal and Kojon ka Guda have been historically close to each other. In addition to these social bonds, economic interdependence was also strong.

The people of Kojon ka Guda are the poorest of the three villages. They frequently work as labourers in the agricultural fields of the affluent people of Padtal and Saharia. As a result, they are often treated as objects of mercy by influential and powerful people.

Padtal is dominated by seven families, whose members have permanent jobs in the nearby Jhamarkotra mines. These people earn between Rs. 5,000 and Rs. 15,000 per month from the mines and have acquired productive cattle and agriculture lands, thus generating additional income for themselves. They are reasonably powerful and control the day-to-day politics in the village. The remaining population relies on subsistence farming and agricultural labour for their survival, and they are as poor as most of the people in the other two villages.

In Saharia, the state of agriculture is better than it is in the other two villages. For many households, agricultural income is supplemented by income from the government or other private organizations. Many of the traditional leaders come from this village. However, a section of the people here are amongst the poorest.

About 50 per cent of the land in Kojon ka Guda is owned by the people from Saharia and Padtal. Agricultural production is poor in this village and is insufficient to meet the requirements of the community. The people are always on the lookout for some kind of employment nearby. Because of their poor economic status, they are too weak to speak up against powerful leaders from the other two villages. A few years ago the poor from Kojon ka Guda used to work as labourers, doing household chores in the houses of the influential people of Padtal.

The Religious Bond

Padtal was the home of a visionary religious leader called Maharaj, who was the caretaker of a shrine. Maharaj used his status as a religious leader to promote social harmony and unity among the

residents of the three villages, who revered him and frequently accepted his suggestions. Maharaj and the *dhuni* (a sacred fireplace) became a binding force between the three villages.

As Maharaj aged, he wanted to appoint as his successor his most trusted aide, a young man from Saharia called Premji. But he could not do so because his family members and the villagers of Padtal vehemently opposed the appointing of an outsider as caretaker of the shrine. However, Premji commanded a lot of respect in the area and set up an alternative shrine in his own house. This apparently did not hurt the relationship between Saharia and Padtal, and people from the three villages continued interacting with each other on social occasions.

Interventions of Seva Mandir

When Seva Mandir launched its interventions in this area in 1979 through its non-formal education programme, Premji took the initiative and played a key role in bringing Seva Mandir and the villagers close to each other. Subsequently, Premji was appointed by Seva Mandir as its paraworker for these three villages. In the panchayat elections of 1994, he was elected the *sarpanch* of Lalpura. All the three villages reposed confidence in him because of his perceived wisdom and his contacts with Seva Mandir. The people believed that he would bring the same kind of transparency and fair play in the functioning of the panchayat as he had seen and practised at Seva Mandir.

Since the beginning of its interventions in these villages, Seva Mandir considered the villages of Saharia, Kojon ka Guda, Devda, Lalpura, Budal, and Bhalawaton ka Guda as a cluster because of their proximity to one another and their strong social ties. People from these five villages would often sit together to discuss issues of common interest. Decisions were taken by consensus. The group was led by a few active people.[2] The cluster had developed a comprehensive plan for undertaking the overall development of this region in 1992, the priorities being development of agricultural land and the launch of multiple small lift-irrigation schemes.

[2] Padtal was not an active village group then. Since a few families from this village had jobs at the mines, they were not interested in developmental interventions.

Forest Regeneration

In 1991–92, Seva Mandir initiated soil and water conservation activities in these villages as per this plan. Initially, some structures were constructed on agricultural land. These structures were washed away during the rainy season, causing damage to the agricultural fields downstream. The source of the problem was traced to the fact that the upper catchment had not been treated. Since the area was in the custody of the forest department, it was decided to take up work on it under the provision of JFM. A FPC comprising people from Kojon ka Guda was constituted and registered with the forest department in 1993. Although it was known that all the three villages were using the forest area, only Kojon ka Guda had rights to the forest according to the forest settlement. Permission was obtained by the FPC to treat the catchment area by constructing loose, random, rubble check dams across streams. At this time no enclosures were made. For the most part, the soil and water conservation work was completed without any difficulty under the supervision of a monitoring committee comprising representatives from all three villages.

During this period, Premji, who held the twin responsibilities of a health worker as well as that of a part-time community worker, was asked to relinquish any one of the posts in keeping with a new Seva Mandir norm of one person one post. Subsequently, when he was elected *sarpanch* in 1994, he was asked to quit the health worker's post too, on the ground that somebody who had been democratically elected to a public position should not continue to be a paid employee of Seva Mandir. This was in spite of the fact that in some instances paraworkers were allowed to retain their positions with Seva Mandir even after being elected to local bodies. The arbitrary interpretation of the rules in this case affected the relationship between Premji and Seva Mandir, and influenced the future course of the conflict.

Inter-village Disputes Over Property Ownership

Two incidents described below help to illustrate the increasing uneasiness in the relationship between the two villages of Padtal and Kojon ka Guda. Khem from Padtal had built his house in the revenue wasteland within the revenue boundaries of Kojon ka Guda. A dispute between the women of Kojon ka Guda and the women from

Khem's family spiralled into a serious conflict that culminated in the people of Kojon ka Guda lodging a complaint against Khem and demanding the removal of his encroachment from their village boundaries. Khem received a notice from the revenue authorities asking him to vacate the encroachment, which would have resulted in the demolition of his newly constructed house that had cost him Rs. 200,000. Khem reportedly spent about Rs. 20,000 in bribing the revenue authorities to avert this step.

In a similar incident, about ten days before work on fencing off the forest plot was to begin, Harji's boundary wall was broken down by the people of Padtal. His land and house were located in Kojon ka Guda and adjoined the Padtal settlement. Premji offered to mediate and requested people not to bring in outsiders like the revenue official or the police. However, the people of Kojon ka Guda called the *patwari* (village revenue officer), who declared that Harji's land was located within the boundaries of Kojon ka Guda. He also said that thirteen houses of Padtal were inside the revenue boundaries of Kojon ka Guda. A few days after the demarcation of the revenue boundaries of Kojon ka Guda by the *patwari* had taken place, a black flag was planted on the boundary between Kojon ka Guda and Padtal. In the local context, this act signals daring one's opponent to death. The people of Padtal regarded the planting of the black flag as a direct threat.

JFM: The Trigger

The forest department granted permission to take up forest development activities in October 1993. Preparations for JFM started towards the end of 1994 after the completion of soil and water conservation measures on the selected site. Initially, individual household forms were filled out for membership of the FPC. These forms were distributed to all three villages, that is, Saharia, Kojon ka Guda, and Padtal. However, the forest department maintained that the FPC could be formed only with the revenue village that had the rights and concessions in the concerned forest patch. Thus, the membership forms of Saharia and Padtal were rejected. The people of these two villages perceived this to be the handiwork of the people of Kojon ka Guda.

The ongoing boundary disputes also fuelled scepticism among the people of Padtal. They believed that if the forest protection work

in the business of cutting small trees and fuelwood from the forest and selling this in nearby markets. JFM threatened the possibility of extending their encroachment any further into the forest area, and would also have put a stop to the illicit felling of trees in the forest. Thus, Pura and his sons tried their best to stall JFM. Babru was their cousin and helped them by supporting some of the anti-JFM activities. For example, the letter that was given to Seva Mandir and the forest department to pressurize them to stop work on JFM was drafted under Babru's guidance. Similarly, some of the families from Padtal were also eyeing the forest as a prospective site for their own encroachments. Local forest officials, who stood to gain personally from both illicit encroachments as well as the illicit felling of trees, also colluded with such people and supported them clandestinely.

During the same time, when work on the construction of a boundary wall around the forest patch was to begin, a project to construct cattle sheds in Saharia was abandoned so that people could work on JFM.[4] Similarly, a video show and training programme on JFM that was to be conducted at the community centre in Saharia was shifted to Kojon ka Guda. This decision was taken as a serious blow by many people in Saharia, who saw this as an indication of the decline of their own influence and power. The changes in Seva Mandir's policies coincided with a change of personnel. However, these changes were not seen as a mere coincidence by the people of Saharia. Premji took this up as a personal fight with the block secretary, and was keen to prove his mettle as the undisputed leader of the cluster at the earliest opportunity.

Ownership of Resources, Issue of Identity, and Politics of Dominance

The boundary and property disputes between the villagers from Padtal and Kojon ka Guda were of long standing. Harilal's encroachment was dismantled in 1991 by the people of Kojon ka Guda. Harilal avenged this by instigating his co-villagers to demolish the boundary wall of Harji, a resident of Kojon ka Guda. Thus, ownership of land is a point of dispute between the two villages. This, more than

[4] The people of Saharia wanted to work on the construction of cattle sheds in their village while the residents of Kojon ka Guda insisted that since all three villages were to participate in JFM, both Saharia and Padtal should send people to work on enclosing the forest land.

anything else, seems to be a way of asserting the influence and dominance of the villagers. The people of Padtal wanted to dominate through the exercise of money power acquired by some of the village leaders through their employment in the mines. The people of Kojon ka Guda regarded themselves as 'sons of the soil'. Even today some of them openly dismiss the people of the other two villages as 'outsiders', who are trying to grab their land. They say that both Padtal and Saharia were part of Lalpura village and owned forest and land resources in the village. The residents of Kojon ka Guda also recount stories of how their elders, Dalla and Mava, were allotted the entire land during a settlement made before the people of Padtal arrived on the scene. The people of Kojon ka Guda possess a settlement record from 1971, when the village was given rights in the forest area.

There are some interesting stories that account for the private agricultural lands of some families from the other two villages falling within the boundaries of Kojon ka Guda. Bhajja, a staunch proponent of the sovereignty of Kojon ka Guda, says that their ancestor Uda had gifted some land within the boundaries of Kojon ka Guda to his rakhi sister from Saharia. This is the land which six or seven families (Pura and his sons) from Saharia were cultivating at the present time. Bhajja says that it was on the basis of this land, given as a gift, that these people wanted to grab the forest and common lands of Kojon ka Guda.

However, despite all these events, Kojon ka Guda was ready to accommodate the two other villages in the JFM initiative, even to the extent of letting them benefit from the wages that would be paid for performing physical labour and were also willing to provide the two villages with an informal but fair share of forest produce (fodder, timber, etc.). But many people from Kojon ka Guda were unwilling to accept the formal sharing of land rights between the three villages. They describe these rights as a legacy passed on to them by their ancestors and which they in turn will pass on to the next generation.

The determined resolve to be in command of their own land has been further reinforced by multiple attempts by the neighbouring villages to assert their rights on Kojon ka Guda's land and forest areas. The people of Kojon ka Guda complain bitterly that a few people from Padtal had also visited the state capital to gain access to the archives of the revenue records to prove their presence in the area from a time even before they had arrived there. However, they

could get nothing out of this. 'The land where we took birth can never be taken away from us even if people go to Delhi,' said a determined Kojon ka Guda resident. However, not all residents of Kojon ka Guda are so adamant or stubborn about the issue of ownership of land and forest. Much of this confrontational attitude is also fuelled by the egos and ambitions of individuals such as Bhajja, who was the site supervisor during the period of watershed treatment on the JFM site.

This led to a peculiar situation; people stopped attending meetings because they refused to visit the places of importance in other villages. To overcome this obstacle, Seva Mandir workers decided to hold a meeting at a spot where the roads to the three villages meet so that people could air their views in a neutral setting. However, another problem arose because people chose to sit at different heights on the hillock, the site of the meeting. At last the meeting was held at a location close to the middle of the hillock, and everybody agreed to move a little closer to the new position, and so a compromise was reached on the sitting arrangement, at least.

Many people, especially leaders, always look forward to an opportunity to settle old scores and disputes with their rivals and foes. JFM, being a community initiative, provided a suitable opportunity for many of these players to indulge in power games. This state of affairs also helped those who had ulterior motives in preventing the forest from being enclosed. The Kojon ka Guda people had been the most accommodating of all the residents of the three villages until the jati panchayat decision against them was handed down.

Issue of Traditional Users

The entire case can be seen as a tussle between the rights of traditional users and the rights of legal users of the forest. Here it would be pertinent to point out that the residents of both Padtal and Saharia have got their rights in forest blocks that are not very far from their own villages. However, it is the location of the agricultural fields (especially in the case of Padtal), and the practice of grazing their cattle in particular adjoining forest patches, that explains their insistence on being a part of the FPC.

Initially, Seva Mandir maintained that only the people of Kojon ka Guda had the rights to the forest area where JFM was to be taken up. The residents of Kojon ka Guda had an old settlement document which stated that only they had rights in the forest land since much

of it had been carved out of the *charnot* land of Kojon ka Guda.

However, as the long-term objective of Seva Mandir was to strengthen community-level institutions at the level of a cluster of villages, it convened several meetings to bring these villages together on a common platform. It was during these meetings that Seva Mandir learnt that the people of Padtal and Saharia had agricultural lands within the revenue boundaries of Kojon ka Guda. This prompted Seva Mandir to conduct extensive surveys in order to compile a list of such families from Saharia and Padtal. It proposed to the villagers that they approach the forest department with this list as the basis for constituting a revised FPC. However, the people did not accept this proposal initially. But later on the dispute was resolved by the villagers themselves, and a consolidated list of villagers from all three villages—Saharia, Padtal, and Kojon ka Guda—was drawn up and a FPC reconstituted. In 2003, this FPC received sanction to work on a 50-ha. area of forest land under the JFM programme. Seva Mandir also used a bit of coercion to bring the parties to the negotiating table. It suspended all developmental activities in the three villages and made it clear that work on all other projects would only be resumed when the parties involved decided to bury their differences.

9

Badlipada[1]

The origin of Badlipada village dates back to nearly sixty years ago, when in search of free land people from the neighbouring area migrated and settled in the two hamlets of the village. This narrative focuses on events that occurred around 1980, when the villagers of Badlipada united and set up a village institution for the development of the village commons. This case study documents their seven-year-long struggle, during which time they fought against influential political powers, battled a corrupt system and the police, and even confronted death threats.

Badlipada is a revenue village in Khatikamdi panchayat of Jhadol tehsil in Udaipur district. It is located 19 km. south of Jhadol, nearly 70 km. from Udaipur city. It is located in the Aravalli mountain range and hence has an undulating topography. A seasonal stream locally known as Pana Bawadi, which separates Badlipada from the neighbouring village of Goran, demarcates the northern boundary of the village. On the eastern side is located Richawar village, to the south are the villages of Ranjitpura and Saradit, and to the west is Jagannathpura village. Badlipada is 1 km. away from the tar road, and is almost equidistant (about 7 km.) from Baghpura and Madri, both important facility centres of the area.

The 630-member settlement is divided into two hamlets, Badlipada and Kala Choki. Of the 115 households in the village, fifty-five are in Badlipada hamlet and sixty are in Kala Choki hamlet. The houses are scattered as the people live on their agricultural lands. There is a government primary school and two non-formal education centres (facilitated by Seva Mandir) in the village. Villagers go to Madri and

[1] Researched and authored by Ashish Aggarwal.

Baghpura for higher education and for access to health and market facilities.

Social Composition

The social composition of the village of Badlipada is homogeneous, since it is exclusively inhabited by Bhil tribals. Various clans of Bhils—Bhajat, Kasota, Damor, Pargi, Ahari, Jarpa, Patela, and Vadera—reside in the village, the first two being the prominent clans. The Bhajats are largely based in Badlipada cluster, and the Kasotas in Kala Choki. The different clans migrated to Badlipada village from neighbouring villages. They continue to have strong ties with their native villages. These historical relationships also define the social interactions in the area and the use of the commons by the two hamlets of the village.

Village History

Prior to 1940, there was dense forest and no habitation on the land that is now Badlipada. Villagers from nearby Pargiyapada, Debinbara, and Goran used to practise *walra* (slash-and-burn agriculture) in this area. In the early 1940s, two families from Debinbara, one belonging to the Kasota clan and the other to the Damor clan, settled in the Kala Choki area. Today there are sixty families in Kala Choki, the majority of whom are Kasotas. This hamlet got its name from the fact that in pre-Independence times lords and *jagirdar*s travelled in palanquins (known as *choki*s in the local language), and it was at this spot that the *choki* carriers used to rest and were replaced by a fresh team of men.

Around the same time, two Bhajat families from Katar village of Baghpura panchayat settled in Badlipada hamlet. The first family of this hamlet had a huge banyan tree (*badla* in the local language) near their house, hence the name Badlipada. Today there are forty-one families of the Bhajat clan in the hamlet.

The villagers who shifted to the two hamlets maintained close contacts with their native villages, where their lands were located and where their relatives still lived. They participated in social gatherings in their native villages, attendance at which generally defines traditional village boundaries. For all social functions of marriage and death and other festivals, they invited people only from their native villages. There was no participation of residents from

other hamlets. Though administratively both the hamlets came under one revenue village, for all practical purposes they behaved like separate villages. It is only very recently that people from the two hamlets have begun participating in each other's social functions and ceremonies.

The people of Kala Choki came from the nearby village of Debinbara, which traditionally shared the forest of Badlipada; therefore, they got rights to use the forest area. Those from Katar, on the other hand, who now lived in Badlipada hamlet, did not have any rights to use the forest. This forest-use factor also contributed to the feeling that both the hamlets had separate identities rather than being a common village group.

Common Lands

Badlipada has 75 bighas of pastureland, which lies at the north-west boundary of the village and is very close to the village of Goran. It was only in 1980, when a government land surveyor came to the village, that the residents came to know of the existence of pastureland in the village. Since the exact status of this land had not been known earlier, many encroachments on it had taken place in the intervening years.

Apart from being a source of livelihood forests are an integral part of tribal culture and identity. Traditional-use patterns assert the rights of a community over a forest patch. Government records do not show any forest land belonging to the revenue village of Badlipada, but on the basis of their traditional-use pattern the people of the village have had access to the forest of Upla Magra, on the western side of Badlipada. The forest block of Upla Magra has traditionally been shared by the villages of Pargiyapada, Jagannathpura, Debinbara, and Ranjitpura and falls under the Madri forest block.

Name of the forest area	Traditional-user rights
Enclosed area (Mulla dara, Vadiya mahuda, Nanki nal, Motki nal, and Kaccha dara)	Jagannathpura and Pargiyapada
Panyali	Debinbara and Kala Choki phala (Badlipada)
Malawada	Ranjitpura

So now the forest area of Panyali is shared by the villages of Debinbara and Badlipada, although it is at a distance. On the southern side of the enclosed area is another forest known as Malawada, which is used by the people of Ranjitpura. These specific rights over different parts of Upla Magra have been defined by both proximity and traditional-use patterns of different villages.

Although traditionally only Debinbara and Kala Choki hamlet of Badlipada village had rights over the use of the Panyali forest, now, after establishing a common identity with the people of Kala Choki, the villagers of Badlipada hamlet are allowed to use it for all their needs except the collection of mahua flowers. The villagers of Badlipada and Debinbara have their traditional rights over mahua trees in Panyali. The residents of Kala Choki are the descendants of people from Debinbara, so they have inherited rights over these trees. Almost all Kala Choki residents have rights over mahua trees, ranging from ten to fifty in number. Except for six families in Badlipada hamlet, who are natives of Debinbara, the other residents of the hamlet do not possess any rights over mahua trees.

Livelihood

The livelihood of the people is largely and adversely affected by periodic droughts, which have become a permanent feature of the region. The major sources of livelihood are agriculture, wage labour, and forest produce, especially from mahua trees. Agriculture is the major contributor in a normal rainfall year and wage labour in a drought year.

An average family has around 5 bighas of land, out of which around 3.5 bighas are cultivable and the rest is wasteland, which is used for fodder and the grazing of cattle. Agriculture is primarily dependent on rains. Out of the total agricultural land only 3 per cent is irrigated, the rest being rain fed. Most of the land in the village is undulating, and people do not have the financial resources for agricultural inputs. As a result of all these factors the agricultural productivity in the area is poor. Consequently, agriculture alone cannot meet all the livelihood requirements of the people.

The forest contributes to the village livelihood mainly in the form of fuelwood, fodder, timber, and several other products such as mahua flowers and seeds. Though all other products contribute indirectly to livelihood, mahua products provide a direct income to

the people. One tree yields about 60 to 70 kg. of flowers, which have an average market price of around Rs. 6 per kg. In addition, mahua seeds (*dolma*) collected in the month of June (the average yield from one tree is around 15 kg.) sell for Rs. 5 per kg. in the local market. Thus, nearly 30 to 40 per cent of the income of a family could come from its mahua tree.

Cattle forms an important part of the culture and livelihood in the region. Although they may not seem very productive from a purely economic point of view, there are other values associated with cattle.[2] An important reason for raising cattle is their dung, which is used as farm manure. Most villagers are unable to afford chemical fertilizers, so they depend entirely on cattle for manure. Goat excreta is considered to be good manure for growing chillies. Although there are three to four families in the village who do not own any cattle, the general trend is for a family to have around one pair of oxen, one cow or buffalo, and three goats or sheep. Regular droughts in the region have taken their toll on the cattle population both in terms of numbers and composition. Over half the village's cattle population has perished due to continuous drought during the last three years. Bigger animals such as the ox, cow, and buffalo are the chief sufferers. Goats, however, have a far lower death rate. Moreover, they can be sold at any time and therefore serve as a liquid asset for a family. It is not surprising, then, that 41 per cent of the total cattle population comprises goats.

Livelihood Sources (in percentage)

Source	Villager with mahua trees		Villager without mahua trees	
	Normal year	Drought year	Normal year	Drought year
Agriculture and livestock	60	30	60	30
Wage labour	10	20	40	50
Mahua products	30	40		
Loans		10		20

(Source: Village group meeting)

[2] In a tribal society the status of a family is determined by the number of cattle it owns. A family owning a large number of cattle, especially oxen, holds a high status in the society because this indirectly indicates not only the amount of agricultural land that the family holds but also its productivity.

However, in a drought year village-based livelihood options cannot sustain the people; they have to take loans to meet basic survival expenses. The loans are taken for the purchase of grain, fodder, and other household requirements from moneylenders in Baghpura and Madri. The monthly interest rates on the loans vary between 5 and 15 per cent, depending on the extent of the need and the financial condition of the borrower.

Felt Need

In order to meet the demands of an increasing population, more and more land in the village was brought under cultivation. Thus, the proportion of private wastelands declined sharply. Crop residue and grass in private wastelands were sufficient only for six months. At the same time, the nearby forest areas of Jagannathpura and Pargiyapada were enclosed, and villagers from both these areas imposed a strict check on open grazing. The forest of Panyali is 4 to 5 km. away from the village, and it was thus difficult for cattle to be taken there daily for grazing. This problem was more serious for people from Badlipada hamlet as the distance to the forest was even greater for them. This led to an acute shortage of fodder in the village.

In 1987, when there was a severe drought in the entire region, the situation worsened further. The crops failed and there was no vegetation around. Villagers fed their cattle leaves of *khakhra* and peepul trees which they brought from the forest, but this, too, was not enough. Around 60 per cent of the cattle population of the village died due to the scarcity of water and fodder.

Role of Non-Government Organizations

Although formal development interventions in the village began in the 1980s with Seva Mandir's adult education programme, the process of formation of village institutions was gradual and slow. Organizations like Seva Mandir, Bharat Agro Industries Foundation (BAIF), Churchill's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA), and World Vision entered the village, but their interventions comprised a range of isolated activities. Still, they did help in the process of institution building by disseminating information and creating awareness about various issues.

Seva Mandir contributed to the process of institution building to a large extent through its continuous involvement with the village. It set up two adult education centres, with one centre in each hamlet. The field workers of Seva Mandir started conducting meetings and motivated people to come to these centres. After some initial hesitation, the villagers did come. The adult literacy programme was a big success both in terms of the number of adults educated as well as in initiating the process of organizing the villagers. These centres became platforms for discussing village issues, although people from the two hamlets sat separately and each discussed problems in their own hamlets.

In 1986, along with its education programme Seva Mandir started individual plantation programmes under which the villagers were given plants of their choice to grow on their own available wastelands. The main objective of this programme was to create awareness among the villagers about forests, trees, and other natural resources. Though this work was not significant in terms of physical volume, it did have an impact in making people aware of the need for developing their wastelands.

As the tempo of development interventions picked up, people from the two hamlets started discussing the distribution of developmental works so that people from both hamlets could benefit equally. This led to increasing communication between the two groups. Leaders from both groups started meeting more frequently and discussed common problems. They developed a good rapport with Seva Mandir's local staff and started participating in the various meetings and programmes of the organization. This had a positive impact in that villagers got to know about various developmental schemes and programmes being run by non-government and government organizations in the area.

A major turnaround in village events occurred in 1995 when a village education committee was set up with the help of Seva Mandir. It had eleven members, with representation from both the hamlets. The committee surveyed the uneducated children of the village and ascertained that the reason behind most children being out of school was because of the distant location of the school from the village. As a solution, it suggested that Seva Mandir should set up non-formal education centres in the village to impart primary education to younger children and prepare them to attend school for further education. This was a major event in the process of group formation

in the village. The village education committee was the first institution that took up the responsibility of working for the entire village. It delivered well, and a sense of belonging to a common village gradually emerged among the residents.

In 1995, two non-formal education centres were set up. The village education committee took on the responsibility of ensuring that children went to these centres regularly. As the committee became an accepted institution, it started calling village meetings whenever necessary. Since the instructors were from Badlipada itself, they acted as a link between Seva Mandir and the village. These instructors attended Seva Mandir's monthly meetings and shared the information at village meetings. All issues related to health, education, agriculture, pasture, forests, and other social concerns started being discussed at village meetings. As villagers became interested in more and more development-related issues, the frequency of the meetings increased. Finally, it was decided to hold regular monthly meetings on the 25th of every month.

The village education committee grew powerful and acted as a medium for all development works in the village. With the help of the panchayat, it constructed a platform for village meetings as well as roads connecting Badlipada to neighbouring Saradit and to the main road. In 1997, thanks to the efforts of the committee, a school building was constructed under a government project. The committee implemented development programmes with other agencies as well.

Developing the Pastureland

After the drought of 1987, the villagers thought of enclosing their pastureland to improve the fodder situation of the village. But some villagers had encroached on it and were cultivating a part of it.

The Encroachers

Two of the encroachers, Raju and Bhera, belonged to Badlipada, but Lakhma came from the nearby village of Richawar. All three encroachers were economically well-to-do. Each had his own private agricultural land and other assets. Raju and Bhera had their private lands close to the *charnot*. They encroached on the *charnot* to increase the size of their landholdings, and were optimistic about getting these regularized with the backing of political power and financial inducement.

Profile of the encroachers

Name of the encroacher	Encroached area (bighas)	Investment in encroached area	Other lands (bighas)	Period of encroachment (years)
Raju/Nana	20	House, agricultural land	25	20
Bhera/Jagmal	10	Agricultural land	12	7
Lakhma/Kalu	20	House, agricultural land	5 (irrigated)	7

(Source: Village group meeting)

Twenty years ago Raju's father Nana had encroached on about 20 bighas of land, which Raju subsequently inherited. Since his father was a politically powerful man in the area, nobody dared oppose him. He built a house on the encroached land and began cultivating it. Raju intended to encroach upon the entire *charnot*. But the villagers began protesting against his encroachment. As the two hamlets came closer together and united on the issue of encroachment, Raju found it difficult to oppose the entire village. In 1995, he encouraged Bhera and Lakhma to encroach on the *charnot* land in order to build support for himself. He promised the two men that the land would be regularized. Like Raju, Bhera and Lakhma were also powerful and well known in the area. Bhera had around 12 bighas of land, and Lakhma had 5 bighas of irrigated agricultural land.

When the process of regenerating the *charnot* began, the village committee was not strong. Eventually it started holding regular monthly meetings and discussed the issue of encroachment at every meeting. The village committee called on the encroachers to attend the meetings so that the issue of encroachment could be resolved amicably. But the encroachers led by Raju rebuffed every effort made by the committee. The villagers requested Seva Mandir to assist them in regenerating this land. The villagers wanted the land to be developed soon. However, Seva Mandir could not help until the last encroachment was removed.

There was a breakdown in communication, resulting in misunderstanding between the two clusters over the issue. As the *charnot* was in Badlipada hamlet, the people of Kala Choki were uncertain whether they would benefit from freeing the *charnot* of encroachments. They were therefore not very enthusiastic about its

development. Meanwhile, as a result of all this confusion and uncertainty, the encroachers continuted to benefit.

The village education committee, too, was unable to play a meaningful role in the process. The president, Dhanraj, as the villagers today claim, joined hands with the then *sarpanch* and the encroachers for the advancement of his personal interests. He became inactive on the issue of the *charnot* and gradually became irregular in attending the village meetings. When the other committee members and villagers pressured him to pursue the case, he stopped coming to village meetings. Another committee member, Sukhlal, was informally appointed as the leader of the committee. Subsequently, he along with the secretary of the committee, Thavarchand, played a leading role in the developmental activities in the village.[3]

Since the villagers failed to get help from Seva Mandir in the construction of a boundary wall, they tried to enclose this land with the help of the panchayat in 1992–93. At that time the village was under the Madri panchayat. The construction of the boundary wall began. When the work was midway, with around 1,200 feet of wall having been constructed, it was stopped abruptly on the pretext of lack of funds. However, as the villagers now recall angrily, the *sarpanch* took bribes from the encroachers and stopped the work. The villagers opposed the *sarpanch* and complained against him; as a result he had to face inquiries. Nevertheless, the construction of the boundary wall was not completed.

In 1996, the committee members went to the sub-divisional officer of Jhadol to appeal for action against the encroachers. The officer promised every possible kind of help. He asked the villagers to get the boundaries of the *charnot* demarcated. The villagers did so with help from the revenue inspector and the local *patwari*, and the entire area of 75 bighas was declared legally to be the village pastureland. Pressure was mounting on the encroachers. The villagers persuaded Bhera to leave his encroachment. Raju and Lakhma, however, did not give up their rights over the land.

[3] In October 2000, there was a reconstitution of the village committee, and Sukhlal, Thavarchand, and Phulchand were elected president, secretary, and treasurer respectively of the new committee. This committee was renamed the *gram vikas* committee (village development committee) and was given the responsibility of managing the *gram vikas kosh* (village development fund).

Nevertheless, the villagers were encouraged by this partial success. They thought of finishing the boundary wall through voluntary labour. So they resumed the construction work. However, this was not an easy task. Whatever the villagers constructed during the day was destroyed during the night. To overcome this problem, the villagers took turns to guard the wall at night. There was a lot of tension in the village. Every now and then quarrels would break out between the encroachers and the villagers. There were physical skirmishes, too. To put additional pressure on the encroachers, the villagers also boycotted them. They were not invited to village functions and social gatherings. This state of affairs continued for almost a year, until both the encroachers agreed to sign an agreement stating that they no longer had any rights over the encroached land. The agreement was signed between the villagers and the encroachers in June 2000. The villagers were overjoyed at this development.

However, despite this agreement Raju cultivated his part of the encroached land in November 2001. The village education committee members requested him not to do so, but he did not pay heed. Annoyed, the villagers called a meeting and decided to destroy the crops when they were ready for harvesting. They passed this proposal at the local ward *sabha* to formalize the entire proceedings. On a predetermined day cattle from the entire village were driven into Raju's encroached field where the crops were ready to be harvested, causing substantial damage. In January 2001, Raju filed a case in the sub-divisional officer's court in Jhadol against eight people. When they were summoned to the Baghpura police station, nearly 100 villagers accompanied them. Seeing the reaction of the villagers, the police let the eight individuals go after recording their statements. Raju could not do much against the entire village despite his political connections. In February 2001, the villagers decided to destroy the remaining crops. This time the assault was considerable, with almost all the village cattle being driven in; this led to the complete destruction of the crops. Although his crops were destroyed, Raju did not vacate his house in the *charnot*. Infuriated, the villagers finally broke into his house one day and threw out all his belongings.

Finally, the villagers freed their common land from all encroachments. They approached Seva Mandir with a fresh proposal, and work for the development of the *charnot* finally began in April 2001. The *charnot* was enclosed with a boundary wall of loose stones. The entire area was planted with trees and shrubs such as *havan*, *kikar*, bamboo, *kaliya siras*, *khair*, etc.

Management System of the Charnot

The village development committee is responsible for the management of the pasture. All decisions related to protection, appointment of watchmen, grass harvesting, and maintenance are taken by the committee during the monthly village meetings. The committee appoints two watchmen, one from each hamlet, for protection against animals. The watchmen are appointed for the period of October to July, after the grass has been harvested and till the rains come. This system is different from the ways in which other villages operate. They appoint watchmen for the period June to September, i.e. after the rains till the time of grass harvesting. In Badlipada, after the rains the entire village takes care of the pastureland, though there are no fixed duties assigned. The villagers' rationale is that animals tend to make their way into the pasture in the grass-scarce period (November to July), whereas after the rains grass grows on open wastelands so that the animals are not tempted to venture into the protected areas. Moreover, in the early part of the monsoon, most villagers are in the village and are busy with agricultural tasks, whereas later after harvesting the kharif crop they go out of the village in search of wage labour, which is the period for which they appoint watchmen for the protection of the *charnot*. Each watchman is paid Rs. 300 per month.

When the boundary wall is damaged at some places due to the sudden rise in the level of water in the nearby stream after the rains, the villagers repair the damaged portions through voluntary labour contributions. On 28 October 2002, the villagers performed *kesar chidkav*[4] in the *charnot* and have enclosed it for five years. Some committee members went to Chandwas Mahadev, a temple located 35 km. away, and brought some *kesar* after conducting prayers. The

[4] Sprinkling of holy saffron (*kesar*) along the plot boundaries so as to declare it protected against illegal harvesting. Villagers go to a temple that they consider the most blessed one in the local area and bring back holy saffron from there after conducting prayers. The entire village gathers and sprinkles this saffron along the boundary of the land. After this ritual, the land is declared enclosed for a few years (generally five years). Nobody dares to cut the trees or grass on that land during the declared period of enclosure. It is widely believed that if somebody breaks the rule, he or she will face the wrath of the gods. During the grass-harvesting period, villagers collectively seek special permission from the gods to harvest the grass.

entire village gathered to sprinkle the auspicious *kesar* around the boundary of the *charnot*.

Grass-Harvesting System

The enclosure has restricted the free grazing of animals in the plot, and this step has resulted in a positive impact on the vegetation growing in the *charnot*. Before grass harvesting begins, the committee fixes the price per sickle. The money collected in this way is used to pay the watchmen and to meet other expenses related to the maintenance of the *charnot*. The rest of the money is deposited in the village development fund. One member per household is allowed to cut grass.

After the enclosure of the *charnot*, villagers have harvested the grass twice. In the first year they were able to harvest 8,000 *pulas* (grass bundles weighing around 1.5 kg. to 2 kg. each). In the second year the village group fixed the rate per sickle at Rs. 27. One member per household was allowed to cut the grass. Eighty-five families harvested 7,500 bundles of grass. A sum of Rs. 850 has been deposited in the village development fund. As a result of drought over the last four years, the quantity of grass steadily decreased. Though the amount of grass harvested was inadequate for the entire village, it nevertheless instilled a sense of security against the ravages of the drought amongst the most vulnerable families.

In order to realize these benefits, it took seven years of sustained efforts by the people of Badlipada to free their *charnot* of encroachments. In addition to the cultivation of grass, the village development fund is also increasing and these developments have instilled a sense of confidence in the villagers.

Collective Action

10

The Van Utthan Sangh[1]

Background

Seva Mandir's involvement with joint forest management (JFM) dates back to 1992. Seva Mandir took up its implementation after the issuance of a Rajasthan state government resolution on JFM in 1991. The government order was viewed as an opportunity for village groups and non-government organizations to contribute to the development and management of state forest lands, access to which had hitherto been denied. Seva Mandir took up the task of organizing village forest protection committees (FPC) and financed the development of degraded forest lands on their behalf.

Work under the JFM model was taken up first in Shyampura village in 1992. The catchment of the village stream experienced heavy soil erosion due to which a water-harvesting structure situated downstream was prone to siltation. The catchment area had been demarcated as forest land and belonged to the forest department. In the pre-JFM period, the village community did not have the right to participate in any regeneration efforts on forest land, even within their own village. However, the JFM resolution did provide an opportunity for Seva Mandir and the village community to initiate a dialogue with the forest department on the development of the area. A FPC was constituted to carry forth the plan, and a micro plan for the regeneration of the forest area was prepared and submitted. The forest department granted permission to undertake afforestation work on 50 ha.

[1] Authored by Mamta Vardhan and Suresh Sharma.

Just as the treatment work was to begin, the fact that parts of the sanctioned area had been illicitly encroached upon by around nineteen families came to light. Any efforts to enclose the forest area would require that the lands of the encroachers should either be left out of the demarcated area or that the encroachers should be asked to relinquish their illicit claims. A dialogue was initiated with the encroachers, asking them to vacate their encroachments for the common benefit of the entire village. After prolonged negotiations, the encroachers agreed to give up farming on this land. They also agreed not to continue living in the houses they had built there. In 'exchange', an irrigation scheme was initiated by Seva Mandir to bring water to their farmlands. Eventually, the plantation on the proposed forest area was taken up and the responsibility of its protection was given to the FPC. However, on several occasions the protection system followed by the FPC broke down on account of the continual infringement by the residents of the neighbouring villages of Amlia and Turgarh. As the two villages and Shyampura shared a common resource catchment, joint meetings were convened in order to find a solution to this recurring problem. This realization—that villages sharing resource boundaries need to deliberate collectively on the management of their resources—was the genesis of networking amongst forest protection groups.

Need for a Network

The story of Shyampura, and its efforts to undertake the successful regeneration of its forest, was well received in the nearby villages, and proposals to initiate work on the lines adopted by Shyampura began flowing in. Seva Mandir, enthused by the people's response, forwarded their proposals to the forest department. At the same time, the forest department also started working on the rehabilitation of degraded forest lands on a large scale under the aegis of the Aravalli Afforestation Project, launched with financial support from an overseas donor. Participation of local communities in these efforts was sought through FPCs. Meanwhile, the proposals submitted by Seva Mandir to take up afforestation on behalf of several FPCs received no positive response from the forest department. The initial enthusiasm shown by the forest department, seen in its attitude towards the participation of non-government organizations in JFM,

now waned. The proposals submitted by Seva Mandir awaited sanction for more than two years.

As the physical spread of JFM grew, largely due to the forest department's initiative, it was observed that the FPCs formed had little institutional support. Many of them were at best paper institutions, with little knowledge about the provisions of JFM or the responsibilities of the community and those of the forest department. While the forest department followed a 'target-based' approach to spread JFM to greater areas, the FPCs looked upon the well-funded programme as an opportunity to gain wage employment in the short run, with no idea about the incumbent responsibilities of protection and management. In many cases, JFM was practised with scant regard for traditional users, or their access rights vis-à-vis their institutional and legal rights. As a result, many latent conflicts were in the offing between neighbouring villages over issues of curtailed access and disputed boundaries. Sometimes these conflicts resulted in the disruption of protection efforts of JFM villages in the form of theft or encroachment by villages opposed to or excluded from JFM.

The Beginnings of a Network

At this time Seva Mandir seized the opportunity to spread awareness about JFM among village communities. This step gained significance in the light of the fact that about 70 per cent of the land in areas like Jhadol (where Seva Mandir worked) was forest land and that JFM is an avenue for community members to participate in the protection of their forests. JFM also provided the legal instrument for many forest protection groups to stake bona fide claims to their entitlements as a collective, rather than choosing to illicitly encroach upon them for private gain. In this context, Seva Mandir decided to lend support to these fledgling FPCs and contribute towards institutional interaction at various levels—from the village to the forest department—for balanced negotiations and resolution of impeding issues. To operationalize these concerns into practice, the idea of constituting a network of FPCs took shape.

This network, the Van Utthan Sangh, was initiated in 1997 as an informal group of FPCs, meeting regularly under the banner of Seva Mandir, to deliberate on implementation issues of JFM. The

network included members from FPCs formed by the forest department, non-government organizations, and even self-initiated groups engaged in forest protection. The network took upon itself the responsibility of providing training to member FPCs on the provisions of JFM and to the uninitiated communities on the significance of forest conservation vis-à-vis encroachment. The range and beat-level forest department staff were also roped in and were sensitized on the need to support the FPCs when they report forest offences, especially if they are unable to address them on their own. On several occasions the forest department staff provided the FPCs with copies of registration letters and MoUs and helped them to contain forest offences and resolve boundary conflicts. Gradually, the network became more structured, with fifteen formal members, an executive committee, and a general body of member FPCs. The network levied a membership fee of Rs. 101 on the members of the working committee and an entry fee of Rs. 51 on FPCs. The members of the network attend meetings on a voluntary basis. Seva Mandir covered the travel costs of network volunteers to attend monthly meetings. At present there are fifty members in the network.

Outcomes

Members of the federation were motivated through systematic efforts at training and skill building to negotiate with the state. These efforts have not been in vain, and the network members are forthcoming in voicing their concerns and entitlements to the forest department. They have also come together as a group to deliberate on norms for forest management and to resist illicit encroachment. The network has been instrumental in organizing new FPCs in the area and equipping them with information about JFM.

Role of the Network

1. Liaise with the forest department to improve institutional interaction, and subsequently improve the collective bargaining power of FPCs
2. Initiate conflict resolution among FPCs by way of dialogue and negotiations
3. Spread awareness about provisions of JFM

4. Undertake training and capacity building of FPCs
5. Thwart attempts at illicit access to forests
6. Undertake policy advocacy on state resolutions on JFM through field research

Over the years, the network has also begun a dialogue, and lobbied for sanction, with forest department officials at the division level on JFM proposals submitted through Seva Mandir. The network members met the divisional forest officer on a regular basis and followed up on submitted proposals. This strategy was successful and the forest department, which had earlier not paid heed to the repeated requests of non-government organizations, now yielded to the demands of the people's representatives. The JFM proposals submitted to the forest department by Seva Mandir were eventually accorded sanction. The network members have been able to lobby successfully and have received sanction to undertake work on around 548 ha. of forest land on its first attempt. The pace of work has been unprecedented. This marks the beginning of a new solidarity between the forest department and local communities.

List of JFM Proposals Submitted to the Forest Department

Name of FPC	Date(s) of submission	Date of sanction
Bada Bhilwara (100 ha.)	21 November 2000; 19 July 2001; 23 July 2002	19 December 2002
Nayakhola (100 ha.)	19 June 2001; 8 March 2002; 23 July 2002	19 December 2002
Pargiyapada (100 ha.)	17 July 2002; 8 March 2002	19 December 2002
Talai (92 ha.)	17 July 2002; 8 March 2002	19 December 2002
Jhabla (100 ha.)	17 July 2002; 8 March 2002	19 December 2002
Madla (56 ha.)	6 January 2003	14 February 2003

Issues

JFM has matured and found acceptance as an idea among the local communities, which is evident from the issues that it has addressed.

Earlier, the communities wanted to participate in JFM to seek short-term benefits of wage labour; now they look upon JFM as a means to secure access to forests as well as an instrument to subvert claims to their privatization. The major concerns raised at the meetings of the network revolve around the following issues:

1. Adopting means to strengthen the network and accord a formal status to it, consequently increasing its effectiveness
2. Enlisting new FPCs
3. Presenting a strong front to oppose encroachment and cooperating with the forest department to evict encroachers
4. Seeking greater support from the forest department in recognizing the network as a problem-solving forum

JFM has been a watershed policy in the history of forest management in India as it envisages a breakthrough in the role of forest-dependent communities and non-government organizations to contribute to and participate in forest management. As previous policies did not allow for such a space, it was indeed a welcome opportunity for non-government organizations like Seva Mandir, which had been working on land rehabilitation, to take up forest land development as well. The majority of the tribal population depends on forests for its livelihood. Apart from the economic concerns of the community, the ecological role of forests in upland areas like Udaipur cannot be denied. Alongside, public lands constitute as much as 70 per cent of the land in tribal villages, and form the mainstay of the especially marginalized sections of the rural community. Hence, it is imperative to take up the rehabilitation of this public resource.

The experience of organizing FPCs around formal administrative entities such as the revenue village often results in negating traditional-user rights, thus creating conditions of conflict between the traditional users and the FPC. These differences can be contained through dialogue between various stakeholders so that effective resource management arrangements between resource-sharing communities can emerge and work effectively. The network of FPCs in Jhadol embarked on this process by organizing meetings and holding discussions between villages sharing resource boundaries to arrive at effective solutions for the protection of the area and the distribution of benefits from the same.

Another issue taken up by the network is to seek the active support of the forest department in dealing with offenders. This has gained

significance in cases where forest areas have been protected for a few years and where the vegetation that has subsequently grown is prone to pilferage by neighbouring villages. Although the JFM resolution charges communities with the responsibility of protecting forests, it denies them the much-needed authority to deal with many of the problems they face. The members of the network have taken up the task of reporting offences to the local and division-level forest department staff, and as a group they have backed the efforts of the FPC in resolving such conflicts. The most important instances of this collective cooperation are witnessed when FPC and network members deal with illicit encroachments. (See box *Encroachment on Forests*.)

Another issue is the forest department's reluctance to grant sanction to proposals submitted by non-government organizations. Members of the network have tried to deal with the question of access of village communities to JFM. The forest department often denies sanction to protect and initiate forest development, even on patches of forest that are vulnerable and prone to degradation and encroachment or where the communities are willing to bear the cost of conservation. To this end, the members of the network have established contact with forest department staff at various levels—range, division, and circle.

Encroachment on Forests

The people of the neighbouring village of Tundar and a few families of Bada Bhilwara had encroached on the forest land of Bada Bhilwara. FPC members of Bada Bhilwara opposed this act and lodged a complaint in 2001 against the encroachers with the local forest department beat office. Officials from the office visited the site and tried to persuade the encroachers to vacate the occupied land. The encroachers did not agree and the problem persisted.

The FPC members then contacted members of the Van Utthan Sangh, and with their support contacted the division office of the forest department at Udaipur. They met the conservator of forests in 2001 and apprised him of the situation. A forest department team was sent to the site to evict the encroachers. The encroachments were removed and the forest land belonging to the village of Bada Bhilwara was reclaimed in September 2001. The FPC members then submitted a proposal in July 2002 to enclose the area and develop it under JFM. The proposal was ultimately sanctioned in December 2002. This success has paved the way for more associations to come together to resist the privatization of their common resources.

At the community level, conflicting interests of community members jeopardize the process as well as the outcome of conservation of the commons. More often the elite and powerful sections of the community are implicated in the process of encroachment, and they oppose the very idea of the community taking up the responsibility of protection. Members of the network have deliberated on this issue at many of their meetings and have conveyed its significance to other villages that are contemplating participating in JFM.

Conclusion

There are many constraints in scaling up participatory forestry, such as the inherent contradictions in land management policy and practice and related patron–client links. The consequent schisms at the community level, and the apathetic attitude of the state, offer the opportunity to federate institutions and introduce their processes across villages engaged in resource management. These federated institutions have the potential to prepare communities to face these constraints by allowing neighbouring villages with common resource boundaries to deliberate on problems of resource management and share the cost of evolving norms of protection, distribution, and penalties.

11

Conclusion

The picture that emerges from the efforts to rehabilitate the resource base and rebuild communities presents no simple answers to the problem of how the natural resource base of the region can better serve the needs of the poor. There are many complicated factors that prevent a resolution of the problem of mass poverty coexisting with gross misuse of land. The situation is piquant because even as the state has changed its policies to provide local people both access to, and a stake in, the use and management of these resources, local communities for the most part have not been able to take advantage of these policies. The fact that people are not institutionally prepared to manage state-owned lands should not come as a surprise. Till recently local communities were not encouraged to develop a sense of ownership and responsibility towards the management of these lands. Simultaneously, since people were denied access to as well as denied the benefits of the lands vested with the state, there was inevitably pressure from below. Rather than changing the existing property arrangements so as to share benefits more equitably, the state resisted change, on the one hand, and acquiesced in illegal access and ad hoc benefit appropriation, on the other.

State lands were increasingly encroached upon, causing conflicts among villagers as well as between villagers and functionaries of the state. This also led to a great deal of corruption, resulting in the functionaries, the peasants, and the elected representatives becoming disempowered in respect to their legitimate constitutional rights and responsibilities. The general pattern of gaining access to public lands became ad hoc and largely illegal. As a result, even when lands were vested in local bodies such as panchayats, these lands were privatized through encroachments. Panchayats, or for that matter other traditional

community institutions, were not able to safeguard these lands for common use. The weakness of traditional institutions in respect to land management should also not come as a surprise. Feudal rule, which was all encompassing in the region, did not encourage local communities to play a proactive role in the management of common property resources. Besides providing some minimal rights to forest use, the feudal approach to managing common lands was based on coercive power and the exploitation of forest resources for the benefit of the powerful.

The current dissonance between the provisions for participatory governance of land, on the one hand, and the lack of civil society capacity for sustainable effort, on the other hand, presents a profound challenge to those interested in making land productive and its use equitable. Seva Mandir's engagement in efforts to rehabilitate the resource base of the region has led it to concentrate on closing this institutional deficit. This deficit exists at the level of the state just as it exists at the level of civil society institutions. Despite the presence of many conscientious officers in the forest department, who react sympathetically to legitimate claims, there does not seem to be any systematic effort to democratize the culture of the department in keeping with its policies of promoting participatory forestry. As a result of the lack of effort to genuinely restructure the department's functioning, changes in policy seldom lead to changes in relations between the people and the bureaucracy. The constitution of forest protection committees is seldom seen as an exercise in deepening democracy. Their creation is but a target to be achieved and reported in government dispatches to satisfy the higher authorities. As for civil society institutions, notwithstanding their claims that community institutions are adequate to the task of sustainable land use given the dependence of rural people on natural resources, this is clearly not the case. People in rural areas are heavily embedded in relations of dependence with sundry power brokers and state functionaries.

K. Sivaramakrishnan observes in his book *Modern Forests: Statemaking and Environmental Change in Colonial Eastern India* that, 'State making is fundamentally about defining the forms and legitimation of government and governmentality. State making is simultaneously about making civil society.'[1] He endorses Anna

1 K. Sivaramakrishnan, *Modern Forests: Statemaking and Environmental Change in Colonial Eastern India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 5.

Lowenhaupt Tsing's view that 'village politics contribute to making the state; the categories of state rule are actualized in local politics'.[2] This statement captures Seva Mandir's experience. State rule in respect of forests in the post-Independence period has been derelict, and this is reflected in local politics. Whatever the inequities of feudal or colonial rule, there was a correspondence between its rules and practices. In the post-Independence period, the state and the forest department, while maintaining a custodial approach to land management, allowed their own rules to be systematically violated. This has led to the institutionalization of derelict forms of associational activity at the level of civil society. Cases like that of Suali, where people cooperate to protect their natural resource base, are rare. The normal situation is to find the more educated and better-placed individuals having appropriated community resources and being compromised in their relations to state authorities.

Seva Mandir's approach has been to change both state rules as well as local politics. The results of these efforts have been a mixed bag. Despite having worked on these issues for the last decade or so, the momentum for decolonizing the commons has been slow. The demonstration effect of successful work on the commons is becoming visible only gradually. There are, however, examples like Nayakheda where the local people successfully renegotiated their relationship to the land by reclaiming the sanctity of the commons. In doing so, they succeeded in creating strong community ties and countervailing state dereliction and landlord tyranny.

The case of the Van Utthan Sangh is more encouraging. The idea of village people gaining access to forest lands through the existing provisions of the state forest policy as reflected in the JFM guidelines has become institutionalized as a result of a deeply felt yearning for dignity and self-respect on the part of a significant group of village leaders. What is extremely encouraging is the fact that the forest department has responded positively to the efforts of the Sangh. It is difficult to gauge the depth of their positive response, but if this trend continues there is something to hope for in terms of transforming land and social relations consistent with the goal of sustainable and equitable land use. The process of getting people to surrender their encroachments is both slow and deeply contested given that it requires people to give up resources that they have

2 Ibid.

effectively privatized. The fact that a constituency for this process has been created suggests that it can be made more broad-based with greater effort on the part of both state and civil society agencies. More tangibly, what this means is creating institutions and social processes that can help resolve disputes over land matters. Once this is done, there is a need to evolve fair arrangements for developing and benefiting from common property resources. At present, no initiative exists at the level of the state to resolve settlement disputes and construct a basis for the fair use of common property resources.

The experience of Seva Mandir suggests that this can be done, but for it to happen on a meaningful scale a great deal more effort is required. It is clear from the case studies that while the state has an important role to play in adjudicating land disputes, civil society activists also need to help the peasant community to arrive at arrangements that are not only fair but that are also upheld in practice by the people themselves.

Glossary

Abadi	Habitation
Abadi zameen	Land under habitation or intented for habitation
Adivasi Sangh	Tribal Federation
Aghat	Two-thirds or half of the crop paid as revenue to the state by an agriculturist in the erstwhile state of Mewar
Bans	Bamboo
Bapi	Land cleared of vegetation for the purpose of cultivation, and hence the peasant who undertook this task would get title to it
Batala	Name of a fruit
Bedakhila	Uncultivated land
Beed	Grassland reserved for the use of the state and its army in the state of Mewar
Bhakt	Devotee or follower of a religious sect, who abstains from the consumption of meat, liquor, and other intoxicants
Bhandar	Storehouse
Bhog	A system in which tribal and other lower caste communities used to pay part of their crops or forest products to the state as a tax
Bhum	Land given as gift or grant by the state
Bhumiya	Same as bapi, see above
Bilanami zameen	Revenue wasteland
Biya	Name of a tree
Butea	Name of a tree
Chakri	Land to which state staff, craftsmen, and other individuals were entitled for their services to the state

Charnotta	Pastureland
Charnot	Pastureland
Chauthia	Tax paid by poor agriculturists and craftsmen
Choki	Palanquin used by high-ranking state officials for moving from one place to another
Dakhila kaccha	Wasteland converted into agriculture land
Devsthan	Land maintained for religious purposes and managed by a government department also with the same name
Damar	Traditional head of a village in a tribal society
Dhapa	Bride price, paid by the groom's family to the bride's family
Dhavra	Name of a tree
Dolma	Seed of the mahua tree
Doondh	Ceremony performed at the birth of a child
Gotra	Clan
Goyala	Name of a tree
Grad	Name of a tree
Gram sabha	Meeting of the village called by the panchayat
Gram vikas kosh	Village development fund
Guru	Religious teacher
Haldu	Name of a tree
Havan	Name of a tree
Hela para	To call for a meeting
Helot	Herald of the village
Herjiya	Tax collector at the village level
Inam	Land awarded for good services/acts
Jagir	Area under a jagirdar, see below
Jagirdar	Person responsible for collection of revenue and maintenance of law and order in his area on behalf of the state
Jati panchayat	Caste council
Kaccha	A category of residential land in new villages
Khair	Name of a tree
Kakri	Name of a fruit
Kakrot ka jungle	Name of a forest patch
Kaliya	Name of a tree
Karmela	Name of a tree
Kattha	Extract of the khair tree used for medicinal and other purposes

Kesar chidkav	A system of forest protection in which holy saffron is sprinkled around the forest; thereafter nobody cuts wood from that forest due to the fear of provoking the wrath of the gods
Khakhra	Name of a tree
Khalisa	Fertile land located in plain areas, which was directly under the control of the ruler of Mewar state
Kham	Agriculture land, which if cultivated for some generations by a family, became its titled property
Khatedari chak	Private pastureland where more than one villager pool their wasteland and develop it with the help of Seva Mandir
Kheda	Name of a tree
Khera	Name of a tree
Khunti	Stick
Khunti ghumna	A method of forest protection in which a stick is passed from one house to another in a village, and the family which has the stick becomes responsible for the protection of the forest for a fixed period
Kikar	Name of a tree
Kolyalakdi	A system of punishment developed by villagers for forest officials
Maharana	Ruler of Mewar state
Maka	Name of a tree
Mal	A minor millet
Mandali	A group of people
Mokhi	Same as damar, see above
Numberdar	Same as damar, see above
Napra	Name of a fruit
Nazrana	Gift to the state
Padyatra	Procession
Pakka	Wasteland converted into cultivable land and on which a well was dug subsequently
Palka	Name of a fruit
Panch	Elected member of a panchayat
Panchayat	Elected village council

Panchayat samiti	Elected institution under the panchayati raj system, generally administering an area similar to a tehsil or block
Panth	Sect
Patta	Land used for meeting state expenses
Patwar mandal	Area demarcated on the basis of revenue collection
Patwari	Local revenue official
Prem se	With love
Pshatdarshan	Land awarded for the upkeep of religious entities such as temples or mosques
Rana	Same as maharana, see above
Ravla	House of the regional ruler or 'rao' of the area
Ravla	Land used for the upkeep of the rana's family and princes
Ron	Name of a tree
Sabha	Gathering of people
Safed jowar	Type of grain
Safed musli	A medicinal herb
Sagwan	Name of a tree
Samiti	Committee
Samla	Type of grain
Samuh	Village group
Sarpanch	Head of the panchayat
Shasnik	Land allotted to priests for their livelihood
Shramdan	Voluntary labour
Siras	Name of a tree
Sisam	Name of a tree
Suiya	Stick
Tahda	Name of a tree
Tehsil	Sub-district, a smaller administrative unit of a district
Tehsildar	Tehsil-level revenue officer responsible for collection of revenue and management of revenue lands in his area
Tendu	Name of a tree
Thekedari	Contractor system
Upsarpanch	Deputy head of a panchayat
Van suraksha samiti	Forest protection committee
Van Utthan Sangh	Federation of forest protection committees

Vanpal	Village-level forestry paraworker
Vet	A system in which tribals were allowed to settle on land belonging to the state and in return they would cultivate the land of the rulers and serve them
Vet-baith	Same as vet, see above
Vet-vegar	Same as vet, see above
Wada	Temporary settlement in forest
Walra	System of shifting/-and-burn cultivation

Contributors

Pankaj Ballabh, volume editor and author of Sections I to IV, has many years of experience working with a range of initiatives associated with land management and rural development. He is at present working with a large multinational corporation as its manager of sustainability development.

Ajay S. Mehta, author of the concluding chapter, is executive director of the National Foundation for India, New Delhi and president of Seva Mandir, Udaipur.

Narayan Ameta, author of the Nayakheda case study (translated from the Hindi by Pankaj Ballabh) and co-author of the Viyal case study, is the coordinator of Seva Mandir's work in Badgaon block.

Pinaki Roy, co-author of the Viyal case study, was part of the Badgaon block team at the time of compiling this volume.

Ashish Aggarwal, author of the Suali and Badlipada case studies, *Prakash Kaswan*, author of the Kojon ka Guda case study, and *Mamta Vardhan* and *Suresh Sharma*, authors of the chapter on the Van Utthan Sangh, were part of the natural resource management programme of Seva Mandir at the time of compiling this volume.

Rukmini Datta and *Malini Sood*, copy editors of the volume. Rukmini is a development media consultant and editor of a monthly magazine, *Humanscape*, a Mumbai-based journal, and Malini is a freelance editor based in New Delhi.

These studies embody some of the fruits of the substantial work being done by Seva Mandir among rural communities in the tribal areas of Udaipur. The Indian village is no longer eternal or unchanging, and we get vivid insights into the forces at work in the rural communities described here. The work of Seva Mandir is based on the view that social regeneration cannot be successfully achieved without patient and careful attention to the social reality. It is informed by a strong social commitment without being utopian.

Andrè Betèille
One of India's best-known sociologists

The three volumes, *Land, Community and Governance, Decolonizing the Commons*, and *The Waste Land: Making of grass-roots leaders* brought out by Seva Mandir, will have a very valuable impact on the social science discourse in India in at least three different ways. First, they will bring back a concern with the internal dynamics and external drivers of the Indian village. Since the big debate between Ambedkar and the Gandhians on the character of the Indian village, understanding the village, and how it is changing, has become a major challenge for the social sciences in India. These volumes offer many insights on the village that will problematize these understandings. Second, the studies provide detailed documentation of the locus of power within both state and society that must be taken into account by any development discourse in India. These ethnographic insights, given through village narratives, undermine not just conventional academic wisdom on the state's role in development but also highlight the potential of civil society in this field. The facts presented in this collection need theorizing since they may seem personalized, but they are not insignificant and will not go away. Third, the books underline the value of personal narratives as an important source of data on the workings of the social processes. This form has often been treated as too subjective, but is, in actual fact, a great source of insights into the calculus of the agents who make and respond to the world. These are insights that are invaluable for any initiatives that seek to build a better India.

Peter Ronald deSouza
Professor of Political Science and Senior Fellow
Centre for the Study of Developing Societies

Land, Community and Governance, Decolonizing the Commons and The Waste Land: Making of grass-roots leaders form a part of a series of books co-published by Seva Mandir and National Foundation for India to capture the experience of Seva Mandir to make land serve the economic and political interests of the rural poor.

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