

Reinventing Gandhian ideas and practice of Consensual Democracy, Satyagraha, and Village Socialism in today's context: the case of Village Mendha Lekha, India

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Abstract

This is the story of Mendha Lekha, an adivasi (indigenous people) village, in Gadchiroli District, Maharashtra state, India. Since 1987 this village embarked on a remarkable journey to translate Gandhi's vision of a good society – 'Swaraj' into action through 'Satyagraha' (the philosophy of non-violent, active resistance with an intention to win over the adversary). This involved a) strengthening their consensual participatory democracy practices - all decisions at the village level are made by consensus and not by majority voting, b) building strong village level self-government institutions to govern the use of their own natural resources c) evolving an empowered and informed village level institution called study circles (*Abhyas Gats*), d) carving their legitimate sphere of autonomy from the State by acquiring their community rights over Forests from the Government, and e) applying the Gandhian idea of village socialism in 2013 by abolishing all individual property rights over cultivable land and handing it over to the village assembly.

Some of these radical ideas outlined above and practiced by Mendha Lekha (Mendha for short) have been adopted by other villages and from 2018 hundreds of villages in Maharashtra have started a similar journey. In this paper, we reflect on Mendha's story using the Gandhian Framework of **Swaraj and Satyagraha** and argue that what Mendha has evolved in terms of applied Gandhian thought is very relevant today not only in India, but in other parts of the world.

Introduction

Gandhi, Swaraj, and Industrialism

In his seminal writing in 1909-- Hind Swaraj -- Gandhi outlined his vision of a good society which he termed as 'Swaraj'. 'Swa'- 'Raj'. Literally translated as Rule over oneself by overcoming the cardinal sins such as greed, fear, envy, pride, lust, hatred, anger. Swaraj, in one way is the essence of all of World's great religions. Gandhi's vision of attaining Swaraj meant being opposed to and creating alternatives to **Industrialism** that Gandhi termed as an evil force trapping humanity into the vortex of **perpetual material growth**. Till one of his last writings¹, Gandhi asserted that Industrialism fueled by strong centralized Nation States with some form of representative democracy and **aided by nature conquering Science and technology will** inevitably result in mutual envy, rivalry, hatred, violence, inequality, and unhappiness.

By mid-20th century in newly independent countries like India, the Industrialism juggernaut began to roll, extracting more and more, faster and faster, from land, from forests, from rivers to maximize material wealth. This 'loot' was driven by the democratically elected Nation State that

¹ Gandhi's letter to Nehru, Oct . 5, 1945 retrieved from <https://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/selected-letters-of-mahatma/gandhi-letter-to-jawaharlal-nehru3.php>

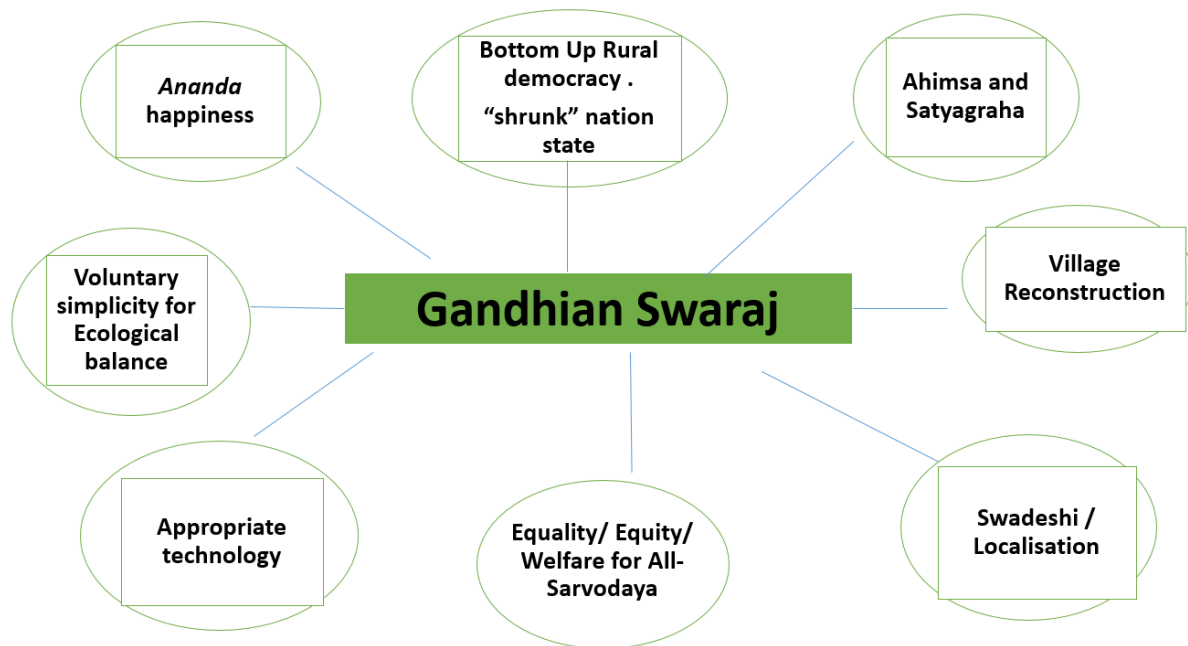
invariably found itself fueling the values of lies and violence in direct contrast to Gandhi's two supreme values –Truth (Satya) and Non Violence (Ahimsa). This was true even for the socialist nations in the 20th century who although made attempts to divide this “loot” equitably held close the notion of progress being tied to unlimited material growth . By the 1990s with the collapse of Socialist states and victory of Neo Liberalism even these post loot attempts towards resource distribution halted and the juggernaut of Industrialism accelerated towards the various crises that we find ourselves in today.

There is therefore no better time than now to return to Gandhi's formulation of Swaraj and its accompanying political vision of self-governing villages with bottom up democracy that is based on active dialogue and negotiation within their community and with the State.

In August 1946, Gandhi outlines his faith in village republics over strong centralized nation states; informed and empowered direct participation over tokenistic representation; in this quote published in his mouthpiece, the Harijan: *“Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus, every village will be a republic or panchayat having full powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world. It will be trained and prepared to perish in the attempt to defend itself against any onslaught from without. Thus, ultimately, it is the individual who is the unit. This does not exclude dependence on and willing help from neighbours or from the world. It will be free and voluntary play of mutual forces. Such a society is necessarily highly cultured in which every man and woman knows what he or she wants and, what is more, knows that no one should want anything that others cannot have with equal labour ...In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever-widening, never-ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.”*²

² Harijan, 28-7-1946, p. 236. Retrieved from <https://mettacenter.org/definitions/gloss-concepts/oceanic-circle/>

Gandhi's Swaraj can be depicted by the following schema:



Satyagraha for Swaraj

But what would be the means to achieve Swaraj- the seemingly utopian vision of a frugal, prosperous, self-governing, independent, and empowered village republic?

All his political and public life Gandhi had refined and demonstrated his means to achieve an end which he termed as 'Satyagraha'. It literally means striving for truth. For Gandhi and any Gandhian inspired social and political movement, violence/ deceit/ dishonesty even in thoughts leave alone action would defeat the whole purpose of the vision of Swaraj. It had to be done in a non-violent manner with persuasion of your arguments, courage of your action, and integrity of your resistance. Satyagraha was about not attacking but winning over the adversary. It was always about a change of heart and the use of love as a principle! Martin Luther King has distilled the following lessons of what the Satyagraha philosophy is (that shaped the Black civil rights movement in USA) :

1. Not a method for cowards
2. Not defeat or humiliate the opponent , but to win his friendship and understanding
3. Directed against forces of evil rather than the evil doer
4. Willingness to accept suffering without retaliation
5. Not only no physical violence , but also no internal violence of spirit
6. Conviction that universe is on the side of justice ³

Mendha's struggle for Swaraj can be defined as a kind of Gandhian Satyagraha in today's times. It has influenced their strategies, organization and articulation of their struggle and constructive

³ King, M. L (1969), Gandhi: The Prophet of the Power of Love. Bhavan's journal. Volume XVI (5)

action. It a) prevented them from even thinking of “violence” as a possible means to achieve their goal, and b) enabled them to evolve an honorable way of negotiating with the State while extracting its “legitimate” share from the State.

India: Industrialism, Forests and Adivasis, pre and post-independence

The rapid push of Industrialism in the nineteenth century meant a rapid linking of the whole world through railways. India under the British rule joined this race. Massive amount of timber was required, and laws were made to make forests “crown” property through the enactment of the Indian Forest Act in 1865. The dwellers of forests who were mostly adivasis were quickly deprived of their customary rights over their habitat as they were a threat to the commercial and extractive interests of the colonial state. Adivasi movements to preserve their life, livelihood and culture resulted in myriad revolts but just a few concessions.

In British India the pace of Industrialism was deliberately slow as the British saw India as a supplier of cheap raw materials and as a market for Britain’s industrial products. Indian nationalists from late 19th century kept on appealing to their British masters for faster industrialization, and would cite the example of Japan which was “galloping ahead” as it was a free country. On hindsight we can claim that slower Industrialism meant that the onslaught on adivasis, on natural resources, and on nature was limited.

But post independent India quickly went into high gear of industrialization. Steel mills, cement factories, coal, petroleum, mines, dams, chemicals, universities, advanced technical institutes, transport infrastructure ---India aspired to modernize and industrialize quickly. The Government of India through its Forest department tightened its control over forests. Adivasis and other forest dweller’s situation became much worse compared to what it was when India was under the British. The idea of “development” gripped the world and India had to catch up. And within countries like India the backward farmers and even more backward adivasis had even more “catching up” to do. In India, Nehru warned that we should not make adivasis “second rate copies of ourselves”⁴. But the horse of Industrialism had started picking up speed. And as mentioned before, from 1990 this turned into a furious gallop. As Industrialism’s hunger increased by leaps and bounds, its tolerance for any opposition decreased. The Nation State became more brutal and more cunning in quashing any opposition to Industrialism.

At the same time from the 1970s the apprehensions of limits to growth, concerns over environmental pollution, and fears of destroying nature’s balance started mounting. Ideas like small is beautiful, definitions of sustainability, ecological economics also started growing. More and more people started questioning the logic of this madly rushing horse of Industrialism. In 1980s and more so in 1990s, adivasis in many parts of the world, who had been totally marginalized, started stirring and interrogating their so called “backwardness”.

The violence of Industrialism and counter-violence in India

In India right after independence there were violent movements led by Communists for land distribution and rights of landless farm laborers in mainstream villages. In 1950s these were quashed. But they again sprang up in the state of West Bengal in late 1960s as Maoist armed

⁴ Guha, R. (2007). India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy. p. XIV

rebellion with lot of urban guerillas joining in. The Indian state suppressed it brutally in early 1970s. In the last 30 years armed Maoist rebels have fanned out into adivasi areas of central India; and there have been continuous brutal fights among these rebels with the special armed forces of the Indian state. Large number of adivasi villages and people are caught in the crossfire. And there seems to be no end to this violence and counter violence. Districts where the Maoist insurgency is high have been identified by the state as “red zones”. The district Gadchiroli where Mendha village is located is one of those red districts. We know that such violence over land and forests and conflict of indigenous people with forces of Industrialism is a worldwide phenomenon and is still going in many places.

So how does Mendha find a space to operate within this violence and counter-violence?

The start of Mendha story in 1980s

In 1980s Mohanlal Hirabai Hiralal (Mohanbhai) and his wife, Savita, deeply influenced by the writings of two of Gandhi’s radical co-travelers namely Vinoba Bhave and Jayprakash Narayan decided to do an action research around “**consensual direct democracy**” in an adivasi village. Through actively participating in a successful anti dam movement in that area in early 1980s⁵ Mohanbhai had come to know quite a few villages of Gadchiroli district. He spent a year exploring many possible villages that can be a site for such an experiment and finally selected the village Mendha partly because of its dynamic leadership in the form of a young adivasi leader Devaji Tofa with potential for developing into an excellent Gandhian worker and partly because there was already a practice of consensus democracy in the village. In 1987 with the consent of villagers, Mohan Bhai settled down in that village with his wife Savita. This is the situation they found:

- (a) Although there was a consensual traditional adivasi decision making in the form of village general meetings , there was no participation of women
- (b) The village suffered from rampant alcoholism among men ; alcohol was being brewed in several houses and sold; and there were high levels of domestic violence due to alcoholism
- (c) There was poverty and food shortage and malnutrition in the village
- (d) The 80 family village was situated next to a large forest of 1800 hectares; but this “belonged’ to the forest department and villagers had no “rights” over it
- (e) The villagers had no knowledge about laws, government schemes, their legal rights and endowments, and relevant documents.

⁵ In the mid-1980s, the government announced a number of “development” activities for Gadchiroli region-including an extensive network of 17-18 hydro-electric dams, mainly over the River Indravati, which flows through the southern region of the district, but also on other rivers. The plan, if accomplished, would have resulted in the relocation of large populations from Southern Gadchiroli and Bastar District in Madhya Pradesh – both largely inhabited by forest-dwelling *adivasi* communities. A massive people’s gathering was organized in Gadchiroli district headquarters in 1984, with hundreds of tribal villages participating in the rally. This was followed by a series of village-level meetings, as well as meetings at the *Ilaka* (erstwhile feudal administrative division for a cluster of villages) level. The Gadchiroli Movement raised many questions about the model of development that was being proposed and came to be called *Jungle Bachao Manav Bachao Andolan* (Save Forest Save Humanity Movement). Ref: Pathak Broome, Neema. (2018). Mendha Lekha: Forest Rights and Self-Empowerment.p. 143

- (f) Even to collect grass, leaves, branches, fruits –what are called Non Timber Forest Produce , they had to give bribes to the forest guards; and had to supply grains - alcohol-cash to these forest lords at harvest time and whenever demanded
- (g) Whenever anyone with “trousers”, usually a government official, forest official or police came to the village, people would run away into the forest or hide in their houses.

In general there was a lack of self respect and self- confidence and hardly any sign of “people strength or courage” which was necessary to build an internal vibrant democracy. And without building “internal strength”, how could one tackle the world?⁶

Mendha applies Satyagraha for building internal strength

As part of his action research on strengthening consensus based participatory democracy at the village level, Mohanbhai wanted the villagers to be empowered through knowledge and discussions. He wanted to nurture the ability of villagers to know, discuss ideas, understand, and if acceptable, to take suitable informed actions.

Since he lived in the village, people would come to talk and gossip, and soon these became quite intense discussions. These ranged from non-participation of women in the village general meeting (*gram sabha*) to not having any say or rights over the forests that surrounded them.

The first test of applying the principles of **Satyagraha** began when women reasoned that the alcoholism amongst village men and the resultant domestic abuse prevented them to meaningfully participate in the village meetings. “What is the point of coming to these meetings when drink men speak incoherently? they exclaimed. The village men accepted in principle that unless the women joined, the village cannot work as a collective and would remain too weak to confront anyone in power.

An intense round of discussion started around alcohol which lasted almost one year. And it involved everyone. The atmosphere was that all kinds of views could be expressed fearlessly and debated. Who makes alcohol and sells? How much is their “profit”? Who are these women claiming they are losing in various ways? What is their “loss”? What is the balance for the whole village taking into account these profits and losses? If the community losses are much higher, then the makers of alcohol will have to stop, but what about “our” livelihoods, they said? What did the families who do alcohol business do before? What happened to those livelihoods? What can be alternatives? Is the claim that it is the traditional custom and right of adivasis to drink valid?

Only after discussing various pros and cons did the villagers unanimously make “Alcohol Rules” one of which banned the making of alcohol except by permission of the village assembly for ceremonial occasions. This was the year 1987. To this day in the year 2020 these rules are followed in Mendha. *No one was “defeated” or “humiliated”*. This resulted in women joining the village assembly meetings and the incidence of Domestic violence has declined. These critical reflection and action around the participation of women and rules regarding alcohol was the first lesson that Mendha taught itself in Satyagraha. It was a crucial starting point towards building self confidence that they too can do something about their village in a positive manner without resorting to violence or taking help of an outside agency.

⁶ Key note speech by MohanBhai (April, 2019). Kesla, Madhya Pradesh, Adaptive Skilling Action Research (ASAR) conference organized by PRADAN and Azim Premji University.

In contrast, in the same last 30 years, the scenario in many adivasi and non-advasi villages in India is dramatically different- the sale of commercial alcohol and the resultant debt from alcoholism along with increase in domestic violence is a common occurrence.

Evolving Democratic Forums and Institutions in Mendha

Gradually Mendha village evolved two forums. The general village assembly (*Gram Sabha*) was given a new shape. It is now mandatory for at least one man and one woman from every family to attend. This is held every month on a day decided in the previous meeting. If necessary the Gram Sabha meets more than once in a month.

All decisions are taken in this village assembly by **consensus**. Outsiders are not allowed in this assembly meeting. There is no voting ever. **Majority vote is considered to be inherently violent.** What happens if people do not agree, or even one person disagrees? Decision is postponed. Gradually most villagers started appreciating the persons who raise objections. They learnt to respect such contrary opinions. There was one particular decision which took two years for everyone to agree. Then only the village proceeded towards action.

Very early on the village assembly initiated two other things which empowered village governance further – One was the Community Fund from which villagers could take interest free loans and two was setting up a Community Grain Bank for emergencies. This gave confidence to the village that they can have their own social safety net for the weaker members of the village society.

The second forum arose out of the initial intensive discussions which took a slightly formal shape and is called “Abhyas Gat” or “Study circle”. Here people voluntarily get together to learn, to discuss and debate issues relevant to the village. Here “outside experts” are invited as necessary. Sometime “study circles” can be more formal. Sessions are planned, dates, timings, durations fixed by the participants. Often such “study circles” are proposed in the general assembly so that a voluntary smaller group can learn some complex issue or law in great depth to facilitate the general assembly to take a decision. But the important point is the “Study circle” is not a decision making forum; they are completely free from that “tension”, leading to much more vibrant discussions. Mohanbhai claims that this “Study circle” is his most important contribution to Democracy in Mendha.⁷ The general assembly over the years has formed various committees to carry out specific functions as mandated by the assembly. Starting in late 1980s, these two forums continue to function even today.

Mendha uses Satyagraha with outsiders, mainly the State

Now the issue was how might Satyagraha help them to gain strength viz a viz powerful outsiders who exploited them?

They decided on some strategies to deal with outsiders

- i) Never to use physical violence or threats or even harsh or angry words
- ii) Not to pay any kind of bribes

⁷ Personal interview with Mohanbhai , December 2019

- iii) Always invite officials to come to the village for discussions. Avoid having discussions or engagements outside the villages in block or district towns where villagers will always feel disadvantaged
- iv) When officials come to village meetings , make arrangements for them to sit on the ground just like villagers instead of offering them a chair which has become the usual custom and expected by officials
- v) In such meetings, only one villager will act as interpreter. Officials who speak the state language Marathi will be asked to stop every so often so that their words are translated into adivasi language Gondi. And vice versa. This was to offset the issue of Language being a great source of inferiority complex among adivasis when dealing with powerful outsiders.
- vi) Always know the relevant laws and rules (learnt thoroughly through study circles when dealing with officials.
- vii) Always inform officials from before about action to be taken if it's a contentious issue. Never do any action on the sly or devious manner.

Starting from 1987, the people of Mendha applied these above principles, and gradually kept on becoming stronger and more confident. Here is a sample of such episodes

- They learnt the history of Forest Laws and about their own entitlements through Study circles. Armed with this knowledge, they were able to persist and get official documents regarding their village boundaries and legal rights. They made a small village office and kept these documents there for anyone to access.
- The above led them in their own village assembly to make their own rules regarding the use of the forests , a set of dos and don'ts, and entitlements per family , fines for violations, *guard duty by rotation by all families of the village*. This became their own way of reclaiming their forests.
- When the Forest department was doing its annual tree cutting with outside labour, they insisted that Forest department cannot do it without the village assembly's permission and used the *chipko*⁸ (*hug the tree*) technique to stop the work.
- Villagers learnt through their study circles about a traditional educational system called Ghotul which had gradually vanished. Ghotul was a spacious tribal [hut](#) that served as a place for an independent and autonomous youth republic. The Mendha Gram Sabha discussed and decided to revive it. They also decided to make the home using teak wood from forest as they felt it was their customary right. The Forest department was scandalized at this audacity. There were a series of incidents with Forest department threatening, villagers going and cutting trees, police coming to village and taking away the wood, villagers again informing the officials, and again cutting trees, women playing a key role in talking to police and explaining the law as they understood, also willing to go to jail, neighboring villages who were in solidarity and wanted to do agitation led actions persuaded by Mendha to do similar action of informing various officials of a date and then going and cutting trees. Persuaded by the courteous, open, non- violent behavior of the villagers, the police refused to answer the pleas of Forest department. Finally forest

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chipko_movement

officials decided to accept Mendha's action fearing that this would spread to hundreds of villages. This incident was a huge morale booster for Mendha, especially for its women.

- A stone quarry in their forest was annually auctioned off by government to some outsiders. In 1990s the women formed a group and persuaded the officials (at multiple levels) to allow them to bid for it. Since then and till today the quarry is operated by the Mendha village women.
- There were more such instances i) getting included in a government program called Joint Forest Management which required a lot of persistence as Gadchiroli district was not part of this scheme ii) preventing the auctioning of bamboos by the forest department to a paper mill iii) getting national bank (NABARD) funds for carrying out water harvesting work iv) persuading government to give specific scheme funds (for housing , for toilets) in the village account and then the gram sabha deciding how to carry out that work – a feat unheard of in the universe of trickle down government schemes with no autonomy exercised by the beneficiaries . ⁹
- The most significant moment of this journey was when the progressive Forest Rights Act became a law in 2008 (after many years of efforts and movements) , Mendha became the first village in India to get “community forest rights” over its 1800 hectares of forest.

The relationship between Mendha village and the State: Summary of outcomes

The Gandhian Satyagraha works on the premise that one can persuade the opposition to change and be sympathetic towards the cause of the satyagrahis. Mendha also set about influencing the ‘adversary’ i.e. the state through non- violent ethical means. If one were to summarise what this has resulted for Mendha, its people, and helped its cause of Swaraj, it would be as follows:

1. The government officials at every level know that no person of Mendha will pay any bribes for any service or resource that is rightfully theirs. This includes access to bamboo and timber. Mendha's village assembly passed a rule that if bribe is paid then the villagers must collect an official receipt or else be prepared to pay an equal amount as fine to the village assembly! (Tofa and Hiralal, 2004, pp 37)
2. Within the forest department and the district level bureaucracy and all the way to the top(i.e. within the Ministry of Environment and Forests) , there have been sympathetic government officials advocating for Mendha and supporting them on various issues (Neema Pathak Broome, 2018, pp 163)
3. Many among forest department despite being in direct conflict have a grudging admiration for the way Mendha has preserved the quality of their forest and cite this as a model to others.
4. *Mendha believes that India over the years has had progressive laws and rules which bring in a degree of justice. Firstly villagers do not know them, or do not know them properly, or have forgotten. **According to Mendha --understanding them, persuading government officials, implementing them, learning from that process, and then teaching others is also an application of Satyagraha.***

⁹ Pathak Broome, Neema. (2018). Mendha Lekha: Forest Rights and Self Empowerment, pp.136-177

It is important to point out here that unlike other such examples of self-governance in the world, especially the Zapatistas, Mendha has not taken the stand of isolating themselves from the Nation State. Their argument is that the larger representative governments at the state level (in their case Maharashtra) and the national government with its capital in Delhi also belongs to them. However imperfect representative democracy might be, it is their representative. Whatever resources the representative government at state and central level accumulates, it also has Mendha's share which they have to give to Mendha through various means. It is Mendha's by right. But what exactly to do with those resources and how to do it, that representative governments sitting in Delhi and Mumbai do not decide. That will be decided by Mendha villagers through consensual direct democracy in the village assembly. And that of course meant the management of their own natural resources. This ideology is represented in the slogan that Mendha village adopted very early on in their Satyagraha in the 1990s:

"In Delhi and Mumbai, it is our government. In our village WE are the government."

Mendha and Village Socialism

While Mendha was preparing to apply for Community Forest Rights under the newly notified Forest Rights Act in mid-2008, the village came to know about an old but forgotten law called the "Gramdan Act" (literally meaning Village Donation Act).

In their Study Circle they learnt about 'Bhoodan' – a voluntary land reform movement in India in the 1950s led by Gandhi's successor Vinoba Bhave. However, there was a more radical movement of village donation called Gramdan with an existing legal structure that they got to know about.

Under the Gramdan Act, if at least 75% of the landowners in a village hand over their ownership rights of cultivable land to the village assembly; and if that donated land is at least 51% of the total cultivable land of the village, then the village will be declared a Gramdan village. This would mean the village will be considered autonomous and not part of any Panchayat (village cluster level representative government)

Mendha found out that the Maharashtra state along with many others had passed a Gramdan Act in 1964. And the last such village registered under this act in Maharashtra was in early 1960s. Since the villagers were anyway acting more and more like a "single family", they decided that they will apply for registration under this Act. But there was a catch. Mendha never took any decision with even a 75% household majority agreeing to it. The decision is taken where all hundred percent are on board. And so they decided that the decision to register as a Gramdan village should meet the approval of every village household. Initially there was a strong opposition from some families because handing over "ancestral" land rights to the general village assembly seemed to be going too far. The Mendha village assembly debated and discussed the pros and cons until every family agreed. This process took **five** years! But in 2013 Mendha became the first village in India (after 1978) to apply for such a status.

Mendha feels that being a Gramdan village provides them with more than just a legal standing of acting as a single body with respect to State and National schemes and resources. It provides them with greater psychological strength to act like a "joint family", loosening of the idea of

*family property, and fighting the forces of Individualism, which is ravaging the otherwise communitarian adivasi societies in India.*¹⁰

Mendha catalyses other villages and leads to next level of democracy

From the 1990s Mendha's unique achievements have attracted the interest of many village leaders, civil society organizations, students, and volunteers. They visit to understand how a participatory village assembly works and how can a community collectively manage and govern their own forest resources. After 2009, when Mendha won the Community Forest Rights (CFR), many neighboring villages learnt from its success and embarked on their own journey for obtaining CFRs. Today Gadchiroli district has by far the highest number of villages of any district in India to have obtained CFR¹¹. Some of these villages are now trying to evolve Mendha like participatory governance and strengthen their village assemblies to make it more inclusive.

In 2018, 90 neighbouring villages decided to form a regional forum where they can come together for collective deliberations and actions. And since Nov 2018, representatives of 90 village assemblies have met biannually in what is termed as a 'Maha Gram Sabha' (A big village assembly). To ensure women are equally involved in this process they have formed a rule that each village must be represented by two women and two men.

The next few years will show how this bottom up representative government takes shape and spreads at the regional level and its interactions with the brutality of a dying Industrialism.

Conclusion

There are about 150,000 villages in India which have Forest Lands where Community Forest Rights (CFR) are applicable with approximately half of them being adivasi majority villages but only a dismal three percent of these villages have been granted these rights. In many places there is a growing atmosphere of conflict -- the conflict between Maoists and State forces continues to simmer; corporates and the State which together constitute industrialism, are moving ahead to take over the forests and displace the villagers.¹²

Mendha's Gandhian Satyagraha strategies - of using nonviolent principles to win over the state- which is a (potentially violent) driver of Industrialism coupled with its focus on consensus democracy has enabled the village to build an atmosphere of mutual trust and equality. Mendha serves an example therefore of what an alternative and Gandhian vision of a good society looks like---a just, equitable, healthy, happy, peaceful, creative, self- sufficient, and a self-governing rural community!

This paper is shaped by numerous conversations with Mohanbhai over a span of one year -- 2019-2020.

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¹⁰ Personal interview with MohanBhai , December 2018

¹¹ <https://scroll.in/article/843046/ten-years-of-forest-rights-act-maharashtra-tops-in-implementation-but-credit-goes-to-one-district>

¹² <https://india.mongabay.com/2020/05/despite-covid-lockdown-environment-ministrys-expert-panels-race-to-clear-projects/>

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