

**Gaon Ganrajya (Village Republic) Movement in Rajasthan:
Asserting Traditional Rights of Tribes over Community
Resources**

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Abstract

The Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas Act (PESA) 1996 provides a legal framework for decentralized management of community resources by tribal communities in scheduled v areas in India. The process of its implementation is varied and slow across the nine scheduled v area states. The spirit of strengthening Gram Sabha (village assembly) for managing community resources through the act is totally absent in all these states. Meanwhile organizations like *Jan Chetana Sansthan(JCS)* and *Astha* working in tribal areas of Rajasthan helping the communities to establish what is known as "village republics" or "*Gaon Ganrajya*" taking the cue from the provisions of PESA. Many villages declared self rule by installing stone slab with new constitution inscribing on it (Down to Earth, August 31, 2002).

To what extent these organizations facilitate the implementation of article 4.d. of PESA i.e every *Gram Sabha* (village assembly) shall be competent to safeguard traditions and customs of the people, community resources and customary mode of dispute resolutions. What is their role in ensuring implementation of PESA i.e., related to ownership of minor forest produce, prevention of alienation of land, power over institutions and functionaries and over local plans and resources over such plans?

To find out about the *Gaon Ganrajya* movement and its interface with PESA, a study was conducted recently in the five scheduled area districts of Rajasthan. Many villages in these areas declared themselves "village republics" with the active involvement of JCS and *Astha* and started asserting their rights over community resources like water, land and forest (*Jal, Jammen and Jungle*). *Manathgaon* village in Dungarpur district is one of the earliest to declare itself as village republic in the late 1990s. It formed forest protection committee consisting of the members of the village assembly. They operate based on rules and regulations to protect and use the adjacent forest which is considered as their community resource until forest department took over. After almost more than ten years of its control and effective access and sustainable use, the traditional forest species is getting renewed giving hope of future to the forest and the communities depending on it.

Keywords: Community resources-Legal framework-forest-tribes-india

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INTRODUCTION

The process of its implementation the Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas Act (PESA) 1996 is varied and slow across the nine PESA states viz., Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa and Rajasthan. PESA provides a legal framework for decentralized management of community resources by tribal communities in scheduled v areas in India. The spirit of strengthening Gram Sabha (village assembly) for managing community resources through the act is totally absent in all these states. Mean while, there have been many efforts by organizations working among tribes helping them to establish what is known as “village republics” or “Gaon Ganrajya” (Down to Earth, August 31, 2002) (See annexure) taking the cue from the provisions of PESA in several parts of the scheduled V areas.

Recently Jan Chetan Sansthan(JCS) is one of the organizations spearheading Gaon Ganrajya movement in Rajasthan. It has initiated long term work on Tribal Self Rule in south Rajasthan. The initiative seeks building tribal assertion for basic rights through the use of provisions under PESA act 1996. The organization feels that to avail the powers of PESA that Gaon Ganrajya should be announced i.e. the village should declare itself as republic whereby the works in particular village decided by the villagers. It creates awareness about PESA among tribes and help them in establishing tribal self-rule in their villages (www.janchetna.org). The organisation also works in partnership in the matters of implementation of PESA in scheduled V areas of Rajasthan with other organisations like Astha.

Why some villages agree to declare themselves as village republics? How much JCS and other organization working in these areas facilitate implementation of PESA? How do they ensure the spirit of PESA like participation of the community for enabling community to arrive at decisions? How do they facilitate article 4.d. of PESA that is every Gram Sabha shall be competent to safeguard traditions and customs of the people, community resources and customary mode of dispute resolutions. What is their role in ensuring implementation of 4.m of PESA i.e. related to prohibition, ownership of minor forest produce, prevention of alienation of land, village markets, money lending, power over institutions and functionaries and over local plans and resources over such plans.

The paper is based on the study of the emergence of Gaon Ganrajya movement and its anchoring and adoption among the tribes, the scheduled V areas of Rajasthan viz., Banswara, Dungarpur, Chittaurgarh, Sirohi and Udaipur.

GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK IN SCHEDULED V AREAS

With advent of British rule, 'tribes' were incorporated into the colonial state structure through war, conquest and annexation. This was followed by the introduction of new and uniform civil and criminal laws as well as administrative structures that were imposed on 'tribal' traditions and ethos. Further, the notion of private property was introduced and in many parts of 'tribal' India landlordism replaced a lineage or community based landownership. The intrusion of colonial rule and administration into the 'tribal' areas led to a large scale movement of 'non-tribal' people from the plains to these 'tribal areas.' This resulted in large scale eviction of 'tribes' from their land through force, fraud, deceit and so on. Over and above, the colonial state made claims to forest land, thereby denying the rights 'tribes' had so far enjoyed over the forest (Singh 2002; Bosu Mullick 1993). All these developments gave rise to widespread discontent and restlessness, leading to a series of 'tribal' revolts and rebellions all through the late 18th and 19th centuries (Raghavaiah 1979).

In response to these colonial 'tribal' movements, the British administration coined the idea of an administrative structure that would be, to a certain extent, consistent with 'tribal' tradition. Accordingly, after much experimenting, a governmental system for 'tribal' areas as created that, in certain respects, differed from the general Indian administration. The distinct legislative and executive measures adopted were primarily aimed at protecting and safeguarding the interests and welfare of the 'tribes.' From 1874 onwards, 'tribes' or 'tribal areas' were governed by the Scheduled District Act. This term applied to districts that had a majority 'tribal' population, and were taken up by the government in a schedule, hence 'Scheduled Districts.' As per this Act, the Government was required to specify what laws were to be enforced in the Scheduled Areas or Districts while laws implemented elsewhere in India did not necessarily apply to the Scheduled Areas or Districts. Thus one of the ways the British dealt with rebellious tribal was to treat their area as excluded or partially excluded area thereby leaving them to their own self governance.

After independence, Nehruvian policy of *panchasheel* guided tribal policy includes tribal should develop along the lines of their own genius and avoid impose anything on them; tribal rights in land and forest should be respected; should try to train and build up a team of their own people: should not over administer their areas and to develop the quality of human character.

The arrangements of the administration of the 'tribal' areas during the British period were by and large continued in the post-independence era. Provisions have been made for the administration of areas inhabited by the 'tribes' were specified in the Indian constitution (Verma 1990). In addition to emphasising the fundamental rights of 'tribal' people, similar to those of other citizens, the constitution of India contains many special provisions for the 'tribes, like their statutory recognition (article 342) as the 'Scheduled Tribes,' so that special administrative measures could be addressed to them.

There are other provisions like proportionate share (quota) in state employment and proportionate representation (quota) in the national parliament and in the state legislative assemblies (articles 16 (4), 330 and 332). The constitution also ensures protection of the 'tribal' languages, dialects and culture so that their distinct identity and tradition can be maintained (article 29).

Further, the constitution acknowledges the post colonial continuation of a special administration of 'tribal areas' in the form of 5th and 6th Schedule Areas. The 5th Schedule Area provides for the establishment of Tribal Advisory Councils in 'tribal' dominated areas of mainland India and the 6th Schedule Area provides for the Autonomous District Councils which operate in the North Eastern Region of India. Tribal Advisory Councils consist of members of which three quarters are to be representatives of the Scheduled Tribes in the Legislative Assembly of the respective federal state. The function of the council is to advise the federal government on matters pertaining to welfare and interests of the 'tribes' in the state. Thus, there is a clear and strong legal framework exists, anchored in the constitution of India, within which the national state's agenda for the social, economic and political 'upliftment' of 'tribal' people has to be understood (Pradip Prabhu,2008)

Fifth schedule area is considered as constitution within the constitution. Governor and tribal advisory council have become important instruments of administration. All Legislatures were excluded from the scheme of legislation and as also financial allocation for the scheduled areas and scheduled tribes. The 73rd amendment to the constitution sought to introduce new framework of governance in tribal areas keeping in view of the recommendations of Bhuria Committee. The Ministry of Rural Development Government of India constituted this committee of select members of Parliament and experts to make recommendations on the salient features of the law for extending provisions of Part XI of the Constitution to the Scheduled Areas. The committee was constituted in response to the necessity of the provision of article 243 M of the 73rd amendment.

MAJOR FEATURES OF BHURIA COMMITTEE

Bhuria committee felt that customary law, traditional practices, community ethos should pervade whatever politico- legal-administrative structures are brought into being in Scheduled and Tribal Areas. The institutions proposed for the Scheduled and Tribal Areas should be vested with adequate competence to deal with emerging problems among tribal people like growing indebtedness, land alienation, deforestation, ecological degradation, displacement on account of industrialization and modernization, excise policy, alcohol and drug addiction, hydel resources etc. Another important aspect scheduled and tribal areas relate to their structure and strength to enable the people in these areas to have access to and command over natural resources considering people have been having control over them. It is also to be recognized that many tribal communities are 'face-to-face' communities and they have been

regulating their political social and legal affairs on the basis of principles, procedures, practices, norms, conventions, traditions, precedents etc as a result of indigenous growth over decades and centuries. It is desirable that the traditional arrangements should not be disturbed and traditional systems of the Gram Sabha accepted to the extent possible.

The Committee spelt out a few basic premises, which it considered them as important before setting out legal framework: These are as follows--

- i. the scheme should pre-eminently be related to participative democracy**, particularly at the grass-root tiers. Autonomy for institutions under contemplation at the grass-root and district levels should **bear a living relationship with the self –management practices which have been in vogue in tribal areas. The autonomy should be non-manipulable**
- ii. The Gaon Sabha or the Gram Sabha at the hamlet/village level should exercise the different functions as traditionally prescribed. **More specifically, management of land, forest, water, air etc. resources should be vested with it.**
- iii. The land acquisition act, which enables the states to take over any land for “a public purpose” being based on **the principle of individual land ownership, does not take cognizance of the customary regulation of common property resources in tribal areas.**
- iv. Tribal areas are rich in mineral, forest, water, hydel energy, and other resources, as a result of which they are becoming the hub of growth of industries. However the tribal people have been marginalized in the process of industrialization and urbanization, leading to strong resentment among them. The committee felt that the tribal community should be regarded as the one in command of the economic resources.

Based on the recommendations of the committee, Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas Act (PESA) was passed in 1996. However, PESA has not been able to incorporate all the suggestions made by the committee. It appears to be the watered version of the spirit and commitment of the committee.

PESA – MOVE TOWARDS TRIBAL SELF–GOVERNANCE?

The following provisions in PESA Act of 1996 changes the way the panchayats in non-scheduled area conceived and operated. Section 4 of PESA is firm in saying that the Legislature of a State shall not make any law under that Part which is inconsistent with any of the following features, namely:-

- (a) State legislation on the Panchayats that may be made shall be in consonance with the customary law, social and religious practices and traditional management practices of community resources;

- (b) a village shall ordinarily consist of habitation or a group of habitations or a hamlet or a group of hamlets comprising a community and managing its affairs in accordance with traditions and customs;
- (c) every village shall have a Gram Sabha consisting of persons whose names are included in the electoral rolls for the panchayat at the village level;
- (d) every Gram Sabha shall be competent to safeguard and preserve the traditions and customs of the people, their cultural identity, community resources and the customary mode of dispute resolution;
- (e) every Gram Sabha shall –
 - i) approve the plans, programmes and projects for social and economic development before such plans, programmes and projects are taken up for implementation by the Panchayat at the village level;
 - ii) be responsible for the identification or selection of persons as beneficiaries under the poverty alleviation and other programmes;
- (f) every Panchayat at the village level shall be required to obtain from the Gram Sabha a certification of utilization of funds by that Panchayat for the plans, programmes and projects referred to in clause (e);
- (g) the reservation of seats in the Scheduled Areas at every Panchayat shall be in proportion to the population of the communities in that Panchayat for whom reservation is sought to be given under Part IX of the Constitution;

Provided that the reservation for the Scheduled Tribes shall not be less than one-half of the total number of seats;

Provided further that all seats of Chairpersons of Panchayats at all levels shall be reserved for the Scheduled Tribes;

- (h) the State Government may nominate persons belonging to such Scheduled Tribes as have to representation in the Panchayat at the intermediate level or the Panchayat at the district level;

Provided that such nomination shall not exceed one-tenth of the total members to be elected in that Panchayat;

- (i) the Gram Sabha or the Panchayats at the appropriate level shall be consulted before making the acquisition of land in the Scheduled Areas for development projects and before re-settling or rehabilitating persons affected by such projects in the Scheduled Areas; the actual planning and implementation of the projects in the Scheduled Areas shall be coordinated at the State level;

- (j) planning and management of minor water bodies in the Scheduled Areas shall be entrusted to Panchayats at the appropriate level;
- (k) the recommendations of the Gram Sabha or the Panchayats at the appropriate level shall be made mandatory prior to grant of prospecting license or mining lease for minor minerals in the Scheduled Areas;
- (l) the prior recommendation of the Gram Sabha or the Panchayats at the appropriate level shall be made mandatory for grant of concession for the exploitation of minor minerals by auction;

PESA directs the states to endow Panchayats in the Scheduled Areas with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self-government. Further state legislature shall ensure that the Panchayats at the appropriate level and the Gram Sabha are endowed specifically with-

- i) the power to enforce prohibition or to regulate or restrict the sale and consumption of any intoxicant;
- ii) the ownership of minor forest produce;
- iii) the power to prevent alienation of land in the Scheduled Areas and to take appropriate action to restore any unlawfully alienated land of a Scheduled Tribe;
- iv) the power to manage village markets by whatever name called;
- v) the power to exercise control over money lending to the Scheduled Tribes;
- vi) the power to exercise control over institutions and functionaries in all social sectors;
- vii) the power to control over local plans and resources for such plans including tribal sub-plans;

It is categorical that the powers which can be exercised by Gram Sabha or village panchayats should not be given to higher tiers. To be sensitive to tribal, state legislature should endeavour to follow the pattern of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution while designing the administrative arrangements in the Panchayats at district levels in the Scheduled Areas.

PESA however failed to keep up with this spirit. It has provisions which allowed the state governments to allocate on matters to higher tiers of panchayats which should have been done by the gram sabha-essentially by community. The good opportunity of developing the community for managing their natural resources like minor forest produce, dealing with money lending, land alienation and commercial vending of

liquor through law is undermined. These can be used as instruments of peaceful changes in tribal areas which affect them the most. The most affected issues of tribal are land alienation, money lending, having access to forest for MFP, affecting their livelihood through mining etc. Few states have given primary role to gram sabha which would have developed the strength of tribes for self-governance. Only state like Madhya Pradesh stated in its act *jal, jamin* and *jungle* will be under the control of Gram Sabha.

PESA may have its limitations of not having lived up to the spirit of Bhuria Committee. However changes in state acts and rules framed thereunder still possible through state legislatures. Further there is a need for appreciation of PESA as an instrument of peaceful changes. While PESA uses framing and enforcing of rule and regulations for achieving the objectives of the act, organisations at local level started mobilizing tribes in PESA areas for achieving self rule. One such effort is the Gaon Ganrajya (village Republic) movement across all these states.

EMERGENCE OF GAON GANRAJYA (VILLAGE REPUBLIC) MOVEMENT

According to 'Down to Earth' (2002) nearly 1,500 villages have declared themselves village republics. In these villages, residents control their natural resources — forest, land, minerals and water sources. They have also formed effective institutions to manage these resources. They plan, execute and resolve all affairs inside the village. Government officials and programmes are accepted only when the gram sabha approves them. In many such villages, the forest department, the police and other officials are just restricted to executing programmes chalked out in village meetings.

Taking cue from the Constitution's Fifth Schedule — specified tribal-dominated areas in nine states which give local communities administrative power over local resources like minor forest produce, water and minerals — in certain areas, these villages are adopting their own constitution and implementing it through the gram sabha. In Rajasthan's Dungarpur and Banswara districts, villages are taking control over forest and mining after declaring self-rule. A movement called *gramganaraj* (village self-rule) is spreading throughout the state's tribal dominated areas. The first *gram ganaraj*, village Talaiya in Gugunda *tehsil*, declared self-rule in 1997 to take control over a pond, which was located in the protected forest under the Forest Department. The villagers wrote to the Forest Department that either they allow residents to use the pond or they would forcibly take over. When the department did not act, the residents grabbed the pond. Today, the gram sabha manages the pond and the forest. "A special feature of these villages is that after declaring *gram ganaraj*, a *shilalekh* (stone inscription) is placed inside the village with the new constitution inscribed on it," says Bhanwar Singh of Udaipur-based Astha, an NGO working with tribal communities.

GAON GANRAJYA MOVEMENT IN RAJASTHAN

Profile of the study area

Located in northwest India, Rajasthan borders Punjab in the north, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh in the northeast, Madhya Pradesh in the east and Gujarat in the south. On the western side, it shares a long stretch of border with the neighboring country Pakistan. Rajasthan is diagonally divided into the hilly and rugged southeastern region and the barren Thar Desert, which extends across the border into Pakistan. Within these divisions however, it is a storehouse of varied physical feature or topographical diversity. The arid Thar also boasts of Mount Abu the only hill station in the state famous for its flora and fauna. While the Aravali hills provide the much-needed relief to this arid land, the wide spread sand dunes of the desert and arid region make it one of the toughest terrains in the world. Rajasthan is one of the driest regions in India. Except in the hills of the Aravali range, temperature in most other parts of the state reaches the 40°C mark during the summer months. Winters are mild in Rajasthan with the temperatures ranging between 22°C and 8°C. The climate of Rajasthan is characterized by dry and hot winds. The rainfall, which is characteristically scanty, comes during the month of July and September. However rainfall is comparatively high in the hilly Aravalli range. The southwest region of the state, being on the tropical region is considerably humid.

The study district Dungarpur is named after 'the town of hillocks' and the capital of the former princely state of Dungarpur. It is located in the southern part of Rajasthan. The town of Dungarpur itself is said to have been a Bhil 'Pal' or a hamlet of '*Dungaria*', a Bhil Chieftain whom *Rawal Veer Singh* Dev caused to be assassinated in the fourteenth century. Dungarpur district located at the end of the Aravali Range situated in southern most part of Rajasthan. In East and North its borders on Banswara and Udaipur District respectively while it adjoins the State of Gujrat in South & West. Dungarpur District is the smallest district of the state covering 385592 hectares only, which is 1.13% of the total area of Rajasthan. The most of the part of District is hilly. The overall land productivity is rated to be low for the whole district with somewhat better conditions found in its southern & western corners.

The climate of the district is dry & temperature peak in May with mean daily maximum of + 41.50 c and absolute maximum +450c. The coldest month is January with temperatures falling to around +50c during night but with day temperatures still well above +200c. The average rainfall of district is 710mm. There are great variations from year to year and drought situation is normal condition. It receives rainfall is not too low compared to the rest of the state, The rainfall, mainly received during the southwest monsoon is higher in the southern portions compared to the others with average of 761mm.

The terrain in the district is highly undulating, characterised by low-lying hills of Aravali range, and interspersed with sparsely wooded valleys

and rocky plains. Semi-perennial Mahi and Som rivers drain the region. Ephemeral rivers flowing in the district are Jakham, Moran, Vatrak, Bhader, Gangli, Sapan, Veriganaga and Donadi. Beside these, a number of streams and rivulets originate from the hills during monsoon months. The valleys of these rivers have rich soils in which a number of crops including rice are grown. The soil quality is not very deep as there is considerable soil erosion. The eastern part of the district slopes down towards the basin of the Mahi River. There is hardly any pasture land. The cultivated area is almost confined to valleys and low-lying lands between the hills where the soil is rich and alluvial, and there is irrigation potential.

The terrain of Dungarpur is interspersed with stony hills covered with a jungle of cactus, joba trees and salar (a gum producing tree), together with several other varieties of shrubs and trees not requiring deep soil or moisture. This terrain is not typically an agricultural area, since a large part of the district here consists of hills, valleys and rocky surfaces. While some lands permit normal sedentary agriculture, in large parts crops are grown on hilly and undulating slopes, yielding low crop yields.

Dungarpur is predominantly a scheduled tribe (ST) inhabited area; ST population constitutes about 65 per cent of the total as per the census of India 2001. Typical of a (central Indian) Bhil tribal way of life, the rural populations have traditionally depended on at least three sources of subsistence: forest produce (flora and fauna), animal husbandry and seasonal agriculture. Since the populations in the yester-era were not large, people would carve out land plots by felling trees (and clearing the bush) and the wood would then be used for making both houses and agricultural implements- this practice, to an extent still prevails. Distinctive of an expansive form of agriculture, the land use has until so far not been intense. Next women have an important role in growing crops and tending domesticated animals. The large work participation of women even today despite vast changes in the recent years stands evidence to this. (Dungarpur, District Human Development Report, 2009).

Until the 1960s, this district was thickly wooded with forests covering up to 50 per cent of the total geographic area. Excessive felling of trees during the decades of 1960s, 1970s and 1980s has reduced the forest area to less than 15 per cent of the geographic area; with it, there has been a narrowing of the occupational base of the tribal communities. This forms an important component of the genesis of the problem of livelihoods today. Adding to the woes is the rapid population growth: at present the population density is 294 persons per square kilometer, among the highest in a rural context in the state.

Tribes of Dungarpur

The district has a high concentration of people belonging to the ST groups: the average (including rural and urban areas) was 65 per cent as per the 2001 census; the highest concentration is in the south (i.e. the tehsils of Sagwara and Simalwara). However, social structure

of the population appears to be changing since 1981. The decadal growth rate of the non-SC/ST population observes an increase from below 20 per cent during 1961-71 to over 32 per cent during 1991-2001. The SC/ST population, particularly predominantly ST population, on the other hand register a decline in growth rate; from 38 per cent to 25 per cent during the same period. The proportion of ST labour population to total agricultural labour population in rural areas was recorded at about 77 percent (in 2001)- higher than their proportion in the population. Implicitly, ST population is poorer than the rest casual as casual labourers are among the economically weakest sections in the Indian society

The Mina, and the Bhils, along with their sub-groups, Damor, Garasia and Seharua constitute the major tribal groups of the district. They are major because they have a numerical strength and their concentration is in a definite pocket. As a matter of fact, racially and historically there are two major stocks of tribals, namely, the Minas and the Bhils. If some hierarchy of the tribal groups in the district were made in terms of socio-cultural and demographic variables, the Bhils would occupy the first rank among tribal groups.

Tribal communities have traditionally relied upon agriculture, animal husbandry and forests for their livelihoods. Agricultural production on own farms, on average, meets the consumption needs for no more than three months in a year. Degradation of the forest and commons has created an insecure livelihood, forcing workers from these communities to out-migrate on wage labour. Migration streams accentuate during drought periods, which is natural.

Tribes in this area live in huts either set up on a hillocks, overlooking their fields or where hunting and fishing is possible. A Tribal living in a hilly country is called Palwi Bhil. The Tribal houses have low roofs, hardly six feet high, mostly thatched, or, in some cases, tiled, supported by four mud walls with no windows' holes or apertures for light and air. They are walled with bamboo matting.

The Tribes are politically quite awakened. There are instances of their participating in the freedom movement initiated by Praja Mandal in the erstwhile princely states. They also involved themselves in agrarian movement led by *Motilal Tejawat* of the former *Mewar* state. The movement was against the *jagirdars* and *thikanedars*. At that time the tribes refused to pay land tax and other taxes.

After independence, Baleshwar Dayal, popularly known among the Tribals as Mama created political awakening. He mobilized the Bhils to rise against exploitation, give up excessive habit of drinking liquor and part with superstitions, polygamy and bride-price. In the beginning, the Tribals were oriented to the socialist party led by Mama Baleshwar Dayal.

The tribes, like in other scheduled areas, are intimately linked with the forest in many ways. Tribal communities can be broadly divided into four groups, according to Pradip Prabhu, on the basis of their relationship with the forest and wider economy. Tribal communities living in isolated inaccessible forest areas e.g. Bonda of Orissa, Birhor of Bihar, Cholanikan of Kerala, Chenchu of Andhra Pradesh, Onge, Jarawa and Sentilese of Andaman Islands, who are still in the food gathering stage and are generally self-sustaining as hunting-gathering is done for consumption only. They are totally dependent on forest. Next is the slightly advanced communities practicing 'slash and burn' cultivation like the Khonds of Orissa and Maria of Bastar. As of now 2.5 million tribals living in virtually all the states fall in this category. Their dependence on the forest is still vital and a disruption in this relationship with the forest makes survival precarious. There are other tribal communities settled, but largely depend on subsistence agriculture, whose dependence on the forest is significant, find survival difficult with the disruption of their dependence on the forest. The large proportion of the tribal people would fall in this category. Finally, tribal communities, pushed out of the forest and of their land, live on the fringes of degraded forests and forced to eke out a sub-human existence in the absence of the forests as a survival mechanism.

This forest tribal interface has been shaped by policies of British, who viewed the extensive forested areas in the country as a major opportunity both for timber and for revenue. Through the enactment of numerous laws and regulations, the British acquired vast forested tracts as state forests without much respect for the rule of law. The first fundamental change which was effected in the process, was the de-recognition of the tribal frame of symbiosis, exercised in real life as survival and stewardship, and its substitution of a formal system monopolistic control of the state (Pradip Prabhu, 2008). The biggest irony of this change was that the forest-dwelling tribal who had a life-long relationship with the forests, which are their homes, religion, culture and their everything, was conspicuous by its absence in that frame (Sharma, 1989). The tribals, hitherto the unquestioned 'owners' were granted some 'rights and privileges' in what was their homelands. Having established their 'title' to the forest tracts, the British began a process of ruthless exploitation and cutting for commercial purposes in the name of 'scientific forestry'. The destruction of forests for commercial and industrial purposes continued unabated even after independence due to policies and practices of the government. Tribal people resisted the intrusion of the colonizers into their homelands. The earliest uprisings against the British, in the closing decades of the 18th century, were triggered by colonial expansion into the forests.

The British forest policy was mainly based on commercial interests and it aimed at supplying and other resources to colonial forest based industries. The commercial exploitation of the forests was encouraged at the cost of forest-dwellers (adivasis). The government gradually increased its control over the forests and the Forest Department

was strengthened with a view to regulating peoples's rights over forest lands and produce in the Indian Forest Act of 1927. Most tribals looked forward to independence as freedom from slavery both of the forest and its people. The Debhar Commission noted that full control of tribal communities over forest resources was changed into merely some rights and concessions by the 1894 Forest Policy. To make matters worse, the National Forest Policy of independent India not only was just an extension of the old policy followed during the colonial period, but it went a step further. Viewing the rights of the tribals in the forests as a burden on the forests and an impediment in the scientific and economic exploitation of the forest resources; the rights and privileges of the tribal forest dwellers were converted into concessions. Hence rigid restrictions were also imposed on the forest dwellers and others on exploiting the forest resources on which their economy and culture largely depend. The regulations were imposed on the ground that the forest dwellers (adivasis) were solely responsible for the destruction of forest and forest resources (Pradip Pabhu, 2008).

The commercial orientation of the colonial forest policy was continued in independent India and created massive destruction of the forest and forest resources. More tribal habitats fell victim to the contractors axe. In Andhra Pradesh, *podu* was banned in Utnur taluka of Adilabad District in 1950. This inflicted misery on the Kolams and Naikpods by dislocating their traditional economy. The hasty banning of shifting cultivation before a viable alternative has been introduced caused misery to tribes as it has happened among the Hill Marias of Chanda District of Maharashtra in 1978. In spite of this, the Government of Maharashtra completely banned shifting cultivation among the most accessible Hill Maria villages in the Abujmar Hills, while discouraging it in the rest of the hill villages. As a result, the Hill Marias of that area have lost their self confidence and their independent way of life and have instead become dependent on the government. The National Commission on Agriculture in 1976, suggested a combination of two different strategies for forest development. One was to develop production forestry with forest-based industry to tap forest wealth. The second was social forestry, which was primarily aimed at fulfilling the basic needs of rural communities. For production forestry, the Forest Development Corporations were established in different states in India. Ultimately natural forests would be replaced by a monoculture of man-made plantations, upsetting delicate ecological balance of the natural forests.

Introduction of PESA and conformity stare act in Rajasthan has enabled few organizations like JCS and Astha to take issues related to *Jal, jammeen and Jungle* in tribal areas. They have adopted various approaches and strategies to achieve tribal self governance framework envisaged by PESA. As part of the strategy to achieve this, the organizations working in these areas persuaded the tribal villages to declare themselves as "Village Republics" or popularly known as "Gaon Ganrajya" like many villages in other scheduled v areas.

Jan Chetna Sansthan: Profile and Its activities

Jan Chetna Sansthan (JCS) is an organization working for generating awareness among the people, leading to their empowerment. It was formed, in 1989, by a group of social activists and development professionals. The constituency of JCS is the tribals and women who constitute the most marginalized, disadvantaged and exploited section of the society in the South Rajasthan. It works primarily with the tribes of this area on issues like Jangal Jameen Jan Andolan, Single Women, Health and Nutrition, non-formal education, tribal self-rule, women empowerment and water conservation.

JCS formed about 400 Self Help Groups, strong CBO (Bhakhari Bhitrot Adivasi Vikas Manch), Adivasi Bachat Avam Saakh Sahkari Samiti Ltd and Adivasi Tendupatta Sangrahan Sahkari Samiti. Organization also provides trainings for development and capacity building of tribals and staff. There Village groups are formed in 60 villages, which take collective decisions on village matters. Block Level Forum is already formed at the Block level for taking up village developmental activities, but attempts are made to extend it with appropriate representations from 60 tribal villages.

At present, there are 425 saving and credit groups of men and women. Efforts are being made to strengthen their activities with NABARD schemes. The tribal people used to pawn their gold and silver jewelry for small loans from the money-lenders at a very high rate of interest ranging from 60 to 120 % rate. From 1990 to 1993, the organization helped the people retrieve ornaments worth Rs. 6,50,000. The system of getting the tribal bonded, as laborer in return of small loans was very common here. Through sustained efforts and moral support, JCS succeeded in getting 42 families released from the bondage.

In 1992, JCS started working on the issue of procuring better remuneration for the tendu leaf collectors by organizing the workers to stop the collection pending better remuneration. The collective force has succeeded in getting a better price every year. Tendu leaf collectors' Cooperative Society was formed and registered in 1993 which has been bidding and procuring contracts for the sale of the tendu leaves which has proved to be beneficial to the tribal people. Regarding right over the forest Land, the struggle is going on for obtaining the right of occupancy for 1600 families in Abu Road who are in danger of getting evicted from the forest land on which they have been residing for many generations. The Tribal Commissioner has given order not to disturb the tribal until proofs are obtained that the families have indeed been staying there prior to 1981.

In addition to these activities, JCS also started Non Formal Primary Education (NFPE) centers in 1997 in the villages with no educational facilities within a radius of 4-5 kms. As part of drought proofing, to provide safe drinking water in the areas JCS have deepened 20 wells with the help of CAPART where there are no water resources. Since Jan Chetna Sansthan has a right-based approach in its work, so it ensures that all the SHG members take active part in dharnas and rallies to strongly advocate their rights on a higher platform. Jan Chetna Sansthan has initiated long-

term work on Tribal Self Rule Initiative (hereafter referred to as TSRI) in South Rajasthan. JCS views this as this initiative seeks building tribal assertion for basic rights through the use of provisions under "The Panchayati Raj Extension to Scheduled Areas Act 1996" (PESA Act). The TSRI seeks to encompass all the Scheduled Areas of Rajasthan through extensive capacity building and networking activities. TSRI involves taking up intensive work on community mobilization and organization building in selected blocks of Sirohi, Udaipur, Chittorgarh, Dungarpur and Banswara and provide networking and capacity building support.

Advocacy and lobbying for policy intervention is the integral part of this programme. It enthusiastically acts upon the issues, which has vital affects on the life of tribals. PESA Act passed by the central government in the year 1996 gives all the power to the Gaon Sabha (Village Assembly). And in order to avail all the powers, Gaon Ganrajya should be announced i.e. the village should declare itself as republic whereby the works in a particular village be decided by the villagers and not by the government bodies. Jan Chetna Sansthan is actively involved in making the villagers aware about this Act and helps them in establishing Tribal Self Rule in their villages and thus declaring it as republic. The rationale behind establishing self-rule or self-governance in tribal village is to stop any intervention from the outside world in their otherwise peaceful and just governance of the village as per PESA.

As part of this initiative, Gaon Ganrajya Sammelan (Abu Road) was held at the end of the year 2009 where around 3500 tribals from 60 villages of Abu Road congregated at Akra Bhatta to show a support for the establishment of village republics (Gaon Ganrajya). This sammelan was a combination of Mukhiya Sammelan and Mahila Sammelan. Several tribal leaders and BBAVM members addressed the gathering about Gaon Ganrajya, BBAVM, Tendupatta Cooperative Society, Ekal Naari Shakti Sangthan, Employment Guarantee Act, Right to Information Act and Jangal Jameen. Zila Pramukh (Sirohi), Pradhan (Abu Road) and CMHO (Sirohi) came to address the gathering and were taken away by the overwhelming response of the tribals on establishing self-rule in their villages. All the three guests told that they would extend all possible support to the villagers in this regard. Legal aspects of Tribal Self Rule were told in detail in the meeting. A cultural team also gave their performance laying emphasis on attending Gram Sabhas.

Another organization Astha also works with the similar objectives and its profile and activities are given below.

Astha: Profile and its activities

Astha is a Hindi word, and means "Faith". We have Faith in the people, in their abilities, strengths and knowledge. Astha believes that these capabilities are being suppressed by the dominant forces, and the result is that people themselves don't recognize their inherent capabilities. With this "deep faith" and "conviction" in the strength of the people and their capacities, Astha was formed in 1986 and was registered as a Society, under Society Registration Act. (<http://www.astha.org> dated March 20, 2010)

The founder members have many years of experience in the field of adult education, rural development, organizing women's group, drought management and agriculture development. The work area of Astha has been primarily Rajasthan, but the national issues and larger forces and policies affect the conditions in Rajasthan, and at the local level. Astha always has made an attempt to ensure the Right to Justice, Peace, Development, no caste, class, gender based discrimination; we have worked for a society in which the poor have control on their natural as well as livelihood resources, people co-exist with nature, equality prevails in the society, and the citizens of India have strong moral values. The Astha feels that the role of the NGO is to strengthen the citizens to become aware of their rights, their responsibilities and the government's responsibilities, and together, to make the mass resources of the government available to the masses. Awareness about and use of laws is also a role of NGOs. Of course, there are other legitimate NGO roles, in relation to social development and social change – caste and community customs are often expensive and/or cruel, counseling and mediation in problem-solving situations is often needed, people's leadership development, and special interventions at times of crises (drought, flood, disaster).

Approach of Astha

1. An Organizational Approach – we help those living under economic marginalization, feudal traditions, gender stereotypes and inequalities, environmental degradation, etc. to get organized into community and issue-oriented groups and networks, and to support those already formed. Unorganized, nothing will happen.
2. Rights Based Approach – we work with the people to claim, and re-claim, their human rights i.e. right to life, to work, to a life with dignity, to food, to land and livelihood.
3. An Educational Approach – in which “praxis” (action-reflection-action), learning from experience, learning from analysis, learning from each other, training events, awareness raising camps/exposure visits and tours, learning from “people's knowledge”, all play major roles.
4. A Developmental Approach – in which we attempt to initiate processes, make linkages, set in motion problem solving actions...and yet an approach which questions the dominant paradigm of “Development”. We, with The People, are in search of a new definition of “Development” which would respect and take seriously sustainable lifestyles for sustainable development, indigenous people's social and survival patterns, people's knowledge, and so on.

The following issues have been emphasised by Astha: Organizing the Un-organised, Community Organisation Training, Analysis, Strategy Planning, Women's Empowerment and Organisation, Livelihood – Resources for Livelihood, Unemployment, Migration, Minor Forest Produce and Non-Timber Forest Produce Collection and Sale, Tribal Self Rule, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Credit Including Problems with Banks, Cooperatives, Money-Lenders, Tribal Policy, Tribal Issues, Displacement from Land and Livelihood, Widows and Separated Women fight for their

rights, Forest Issues, of Game Sanctuaries, Forest Land Occupation, Urban Environmental Sanitation, Vermi-culture, Drought Relief and Migration Strategies, Communal Harmony, Violence Against Women, Cases, Anti-Liquor Campaigns and Rajasthan State Budget Analysis.

The tribal people of Rajasthan are mainly of two tribes – the Bhils and the Meenas. The Bhils are almost entirely excluded in taking advantage of the reservations in education and in jobs. Tribal Rights Resource Unit is working with tribal group of Bhils - Bhils, Gametis, Bhil-Meenas, Garasias. Astha also works with other primitive tribes of Rajasthan i.e. Saharia, Kathodia. Astha also works for the cause of tribes through various forums as follows:

Tribal Development Forum: The Tribal Development Forum (TDF) was the first People's Organization to be formed in 1992 by Astha Sansthan. Between 1986 and 1990, organization and training, awareness raising, struggle action, reflection-on-action, took place. In 1990, the various village and gram panchayat (village council areas) groups came together struggle for higher payment for the collection and sale of *tendu* leaves. From the struggle they went on to form a Tendu Leaf Collectors' Cooperative. This struggle and constructive action was empowering, and led the Astha team & the group leaders, to the decision to form a Block-wide People's Organization to work together and share the analysis about the variety of issues confronting the people. Over the years, the men and women of the Tribal Development Forum have continued to work together on both struggle and constructive action, and have expanded their Forum to the neighbouring Block of Jhadol in Udaipur District, and to now four Blocks in neighbouring Sirohi District. They have worked on soil and water conservation projects, Tribal Self Rule at the village level, networked widely in the state, and even in the country, on issues of livelihood affecting their lives.

Tribal Women's Awareness Society: The Tribal Women's Awareness Society has been working in Jhadol and Girwa Blocks of Udaipur District, for the last 14 years, and they have been working on the issues of gender equality, violence against women, women's empowerment. The Awareness Society started a "Women's Court" to bring quick and just decisions in matters brought to it, by tribal women in the area. The Women's Court operates as part of the work of the Social Reform Committee, and also, the members meet to plan for needed changes in social customs like reducing expenditure of marriages, and reducing the amounts of "bride price" (*dappa*). The various issues that the Tribal Women Awareness Society has been working on recently, include: Community Grazing Land Management, income-generating activities for women, natural resource management, claiming homestead land rights for homesteads on Forest Department land, the implementation of the Employment Guarantee Scheme, Tribal Self Rule.

Jarga Area Development Society: The Society was established in 1997, with the objective to help the adivasis/ tribals in Kumbalgarh Block of Rajasmand District to improve their conditions and to ensure the rights of unorganized tribals. The tribals of the area are cut off from the mainstream of development, because of lack of education and

awareness. Working area of the society is 139 Villages, in 27 Village Council Areas in Kumbalgarh Block of Rajsamand District, and in addition, there are 6 Villages in 3 Village Council areas associated in the Saira area in Gogunda Block of Udaipur District.

Gordwad Tribal Organization: The Gordwad area of Rajasthan is located around Pali District, in what is the Marwar cultural area of Rajasthan. The Gordwad Tribal Association was formed in 1998, and its members reside in Bali and Desuri Blocks of Pali District. The tribals of the area are mostly Garasias, a member of the Bhil tribal group. With the focus on the Forest Land homesteads struggle and proper payment of wages in drought relief, the image of the Association was one of struggle and confrontation.

Vagad Labourers and Farmers Association: The Association was established in 1997 in Dungarpur District, and at present it is working in four Blocks of Dungarpur and two Blocks of Banswara Districts. The Vagad area is a Bhil tribal area, and comes under the Schedule V Areas. While formulating the objectives of the Association, it was felt by the organizers that the Association would work basically on issues of adivasi/tribal labourers and farmers, and would establish Tribal Self Rule in the area, under the PESA Act. The new Association is meant to work for widespread awareness among people, to strengthen the Village Assemblies/ Gram Sabhas. 192 villages declared their villages as Village Republics due to awareness generation by the Association. These Village Republics have started to establish clusters of Village Republics, called Village Republic Federation. The village Assemblies works on the issues of solving disputes and exercising control over natural resources. The Association is working in 480 villages and having 16,282 members.

The discussion with Ms Richa and Mr Mahesh of JCS revealed that there are a few villages in Abu Road declared Gaon Ganrajya where JCS is working. They have taken up few issues related to PESA like mining, forest, etc. These are all moving towards this goal. JCS has realised that mere declaration of Gaon Ganrajya is not enough. They need to build the strength of the community for ultimate declaration of Gaon Ganrajya. Apart from community mobilisation and awareness building, it has taken up issues arising out of the implementation of RD programmes like MGNREGs. The scheme has link between Gram Sabha and natural resource management. While PESA talks of Jal(water), Jameen (land) and Jungle(forest) in terms of community control over these resources, NREGS talks of strengthening of productive resources mainly natural resources. In scheduled v areas, this adds significance to the governance of resources. It gives powers to GS to plan and approve the shelf of projects related to natural resources.

According to PESA provision under section 4d, Gram Sabhas are competent to manage their community resources. It does not need any delegation of power by state legislation and they are competent to manage themselves. But how will the community know they can act based on certain provisions of PESA particularly on GS. There are central dynamics of PESA vis one it depends on state legislation to develop state

PESA act and frame rules keeping in tune and spirit of central act of 40 and secondly, that there should be awareness among tribal community in Scheduled V areas demanding for implementation PESA and asserting the right of GS as provided in PESA.

According to Richa, the assertion and awareness among the community is found wanting and hence mere declaration of the GAON GANRAJYA is not sufficient to take advantage of PESA provisions. One needs to build up the consciousness of traditional rights tribes and their assertion over these resources in the context of decentralized natural resource management framework by PESA. These ideas are still in the formative and evolutionary stage. Meanwhile, according to Richa, tribal communities are need to strengthened in the context of PESA and other resource use challenges emerging in the tribal areas before making declaration of a village as Gaon Ganrajya or village republic. This is in contravention with the many villages declaring themselves as Gaon Ganrajya in Dongarpur district. While there seems be to different approach adopted by JCS and Astha in the matter of Gaon Ganrajya, they work through various forums including the annual **Milan Mela** of tribes of southern Rajasthan

Milan Mela- is an important meeting conducted annually in Kotada Block headquarters in Udaipur district for several years by the tribes from the five districts having scheduled v area in Rajasthan. The meeting is an arrangement done annually where members and office bearers of Adivasi Vikas Manch meet in Kotada town. This meeting is important for tribes of southern Rajasthan in several ways. It is basically to keep the issues and problems related to tribes in the current focus and also to decide about future course of action. One of the activists of described the Kotada block is hotbed of tribal activities. It is addressed by the by the leading advocate of the area, who appears on for cases of tribes in the high court of Rajasthan. He had given elaborate address about PESA in the meeting. He felt that the administration is slow in implementing PESA despite so much pressure built up by tribes and their organisations.

The meeting is not exclusive to tribes. It is supposed to an interface meeting between government agencies, civil society organisations including tribal advocacy organisations like JCS and Astha. It is all most one whole day affair where the government agencies put up their stall explaining their activities among tribes, like health, education, agriculture and animal husbandry. NGOs also put up their stalls explaining about their activities among the tribes. In the night tribes and other people occupy the whole venue. The meeting was attended by Chief Justice of the Rajasthan High Court and Sub-Divisional magistrate along with the tribal leaders from Adivasi Vikas Manch. There are series of awareness songs, cultural programmes related to tribal issues including PESA and NREGS. In between the meeting was addressed by many officials, Lawyers and local tribal leaders and activists. The meeting goes on the whole night and comes to an end in the next day morning after deciding about the future course of action among the members of Adivasis Vikas Manch. The agenda for the next year is carried forward to all the villages of tribes to all the scheduled areas in Rajasthan

Thus, Gaon Ganrajya declaration in many places is symbolic assertion of tribal rights over community resources, PESA provides legal framework for the interface between tribes and their community resources. While the implementation of PESA is very poor, the Gaon Ganrajya movement will put pressure on the administration to implement it seriously. Meanwhile, many tribal villages have started asserting their rights over forest, minor minerals, minor water bodies. One such village is Manath gaon in Chundawara Gram Panchayat in Dungarpur district. It declared village self rule more than a decade back with much discussion among the tribes of the village and other villages falling under the GP. It has been protecting adjacent to its village. Similarly, another five villages in the same GP also declared Gaon Ganrajya and also part of the chain of villages protecting and accessing the forest and its resources with *Gaon Wagdani Rakwale* committee. Many miles for forests, one could see green cover getting regenerated.

In Dungarpur district also, there are many villages declared themselves as “village republics” or “Gaon Ganrajya”. These villages also installed stone slabs inscribing new constitution for their villages. According to Devi Lal, the President of Adivasi Vikas Manch, Manath Gaon, in his village, even the struggle to install it is a long drawn one. He said that there were many physical threats to him and to the members of Adivasi Vikas Manch.

Manath gaon is one of the hamlets of Chundawara Gram Panchayat in Dungarpur district, It consists of 16 hamlets. Out of these six hamlets declared themselves as village republics. Interestingly all the six are have borders with the forest (see the map in annexure 4). The others are in the process of declaring or may be not having direct link with the nearby forest area. Devil Lal told the researcher that they might be also join once they see the reason for joining the movement.

Manath Gaon consist mainly Bhil tribes with 120 families and their houses scattered all around the area. The spoken language of Bhils is *Wagdi*. Typically each tribal family lives on the upper side of the hills surrounded by their farms. They have origins from Chittoor place near Udaipur, though they could not fix the time or year migration to this area. Most of them now own lands. The rain-fed agriculture is fragile which is capable of supporting two crops per year. Their cattle population is very low. Only a very few can afford bore-wells. Recently electric pump-sets have been installed. In summer season, the area looks barren and only few trees protect the people with their shades. Only few have kitchen gardens. The houses of the tribes generally are located on top of the hills overlooking their lands. Mud roads generally connect these hamlets and most of the tribes reach the market by walk or cycle or motorcycle. Travelling of people, in a packed jeep is common sight in the tribal areas of southern Rajasthan. Only few buses ply in important routes.

After declaring itself as village republic, the first work taken up by Manath Gaon is that of restoring its traditional use and access to Sularveyya forest range bordering the village

The forest range also has borders with many adjacent villages. Traditionally, the adjacent forest is the source for many of the needs of the villages like fodder for their animals, firewood for their homes, wood for

building houses, source for firewood for making tiles for their houses, providing herbs for their medicinal needs, supplying of woods for ploughs and levelers of land. It still has nearly more than thirty species of trees as evident from the identification of the trees done by the local peoples' knowledge. They have noted down not only its name in Hindi/English but in Wagdi language.

Elderly villagers still vividly remember that the forest was under the control of the community before 1962. For them forest is part of their village and their consciousness and life. Even up to 1985, according to locals this forest dependent community had access to forest for all the needs until government took over the forest. In 1985, Forest department objected for cutting trees and grazing of the cattle by the local people. It also started constructing boundary walls between forest area and village boundaries. According to local tribes that destruction of forest started since then and lasted up to the middle of 1990s.

With the active encouragement from the organisations like Astha and JCS, Manath Gaon was the first one to declare Gaon Ganrajya and installed stone slab with its constitution. After the village has decided to declare GAON GANRAJYA, it formed the committee called *Gaon Wagdani Rakwale* to protect and conserve the forest. It consists of six members out of which three are women. Rules and regulations have been framed for use and conserve the forest and its products. The formation of the committee and its rules and regulations were informed to the Forest Department. The activities of the committee, is also being communicated to the Forest Department regularly. The activities include appointing of forest guard to monitor the activities including fire and report to the committee. Protection money of Rs 10 per month per family is given to the forest guard. Since then cutting of the trees and grazing of cattle is prohibited without the permission of Gram Sabha. At present the new trees have grown to a height of more 15 feet. The other side of the hill adjacent to Manath Gaon is not protected by any villages reveals the barren and dry landscape.

Manath Gaon, through discussion in Gram Sabha meetings, has evolved rules and regulations and over a period of time people have got used to them. Each year an assessment is made by the committee and discussed in Gram Sabha about the availability of dry firewood, potential wood for making two ploughs per family and the amount of grass available for the community. For collection of fuel wood only dry trees are marked for cutting. For ploughs only mature trees are allowed to cut. For cutting grass, usually harvested during September and October, 100 bundles per family only allowed for the cattle. Forest department does not intervene in any of these activities. It also has forest guard, who occasionally visits the area. Forest department planted acacia which is not native species but can withstand dry spells by drawing water from the surrounding atmosphere. According the local tribes these projects are only demonstration case for projection as successful forestry projects to some funding agencies and they serve no purpose for forest conservation and sustainability going by the types of species which are in tune with the forest growth.

CONCLUSION

Governance framework in scheduled v areas of Rajasthan through PESA is yet to be grounded. Even concerned acts are not amended in consonance with PESA and rules are also not framed. While there is this administrative vacuum, self-rule declaration by many villages through stone slabs is considered by Adivasi organisations as part of developing the framework for PESA. One of the provisions declares that Gram Sabhas is empowered to manage its customs, tradition and community resources. Gaon Ganrajya movement is an effort towards participatory governance in scheduled v areas. The concept enables Gram Sabhas in tribal villages like Manath Gaon in Dungarpur District, with active encouragement from JCS, Astha and other organisations, to take control of customs, traditions and community resources, particularly forests on which they have long associations and dependence. Forest department was aware of the activities of the protection committees. It appears that Forest Department will not intervene as long the tribes protect the forest which show visible signs of regeneration, assess and use of resources are regulated by Gram Sabha and ownership is not claimed by tribes. Ownership and partly control is still under the forest department, but people have limited access to forest resources and use it within the rules and regulations keeping in view of the needs of the community and sustainability of forests. In the absence of PESA, Gaon Ganrajya movement helps tribal communities in accessing and using what was once considered as their forest.

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