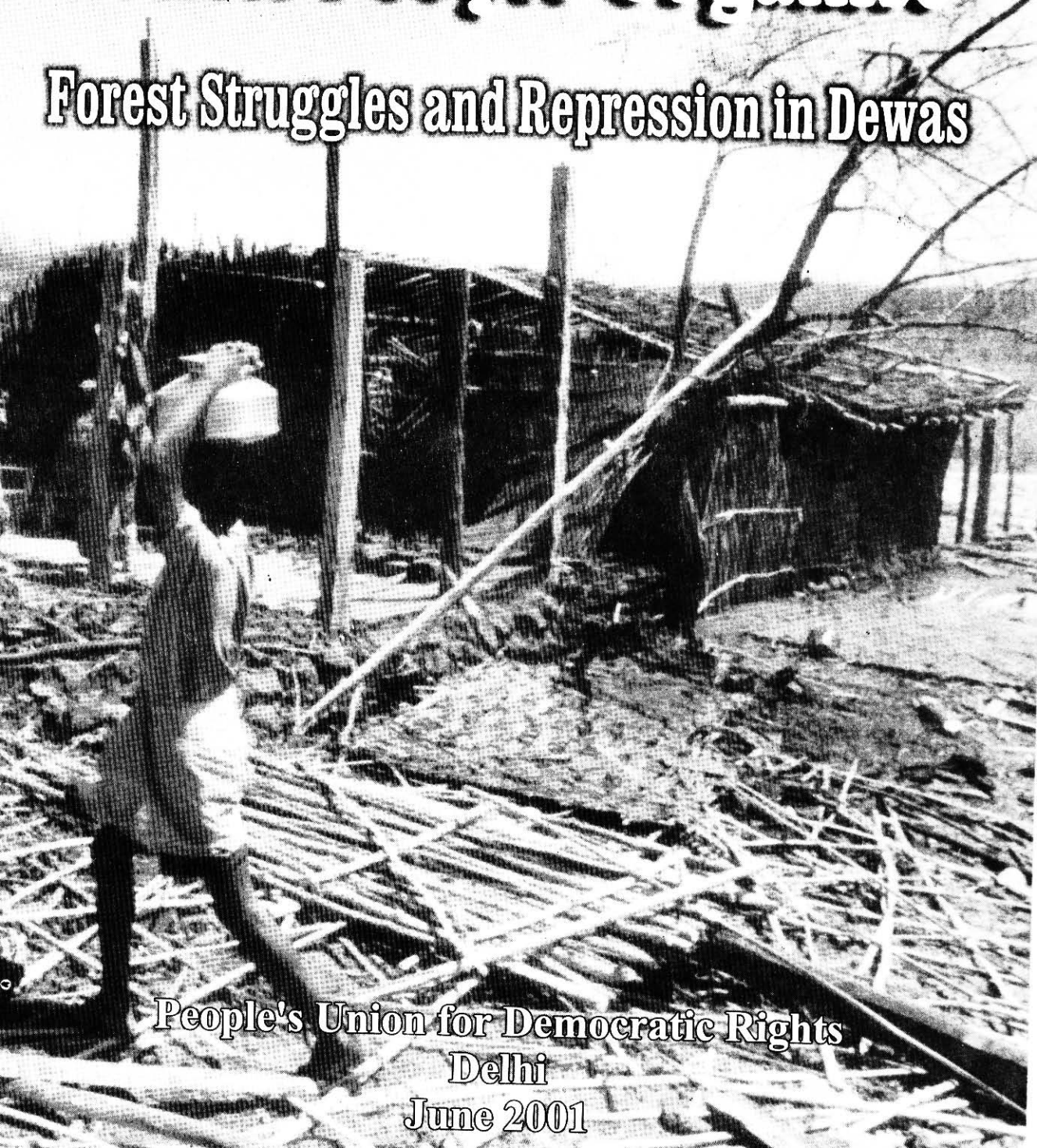


(V.30) June 2001

When People Organise

Forest Struggles and Repression in Dewas



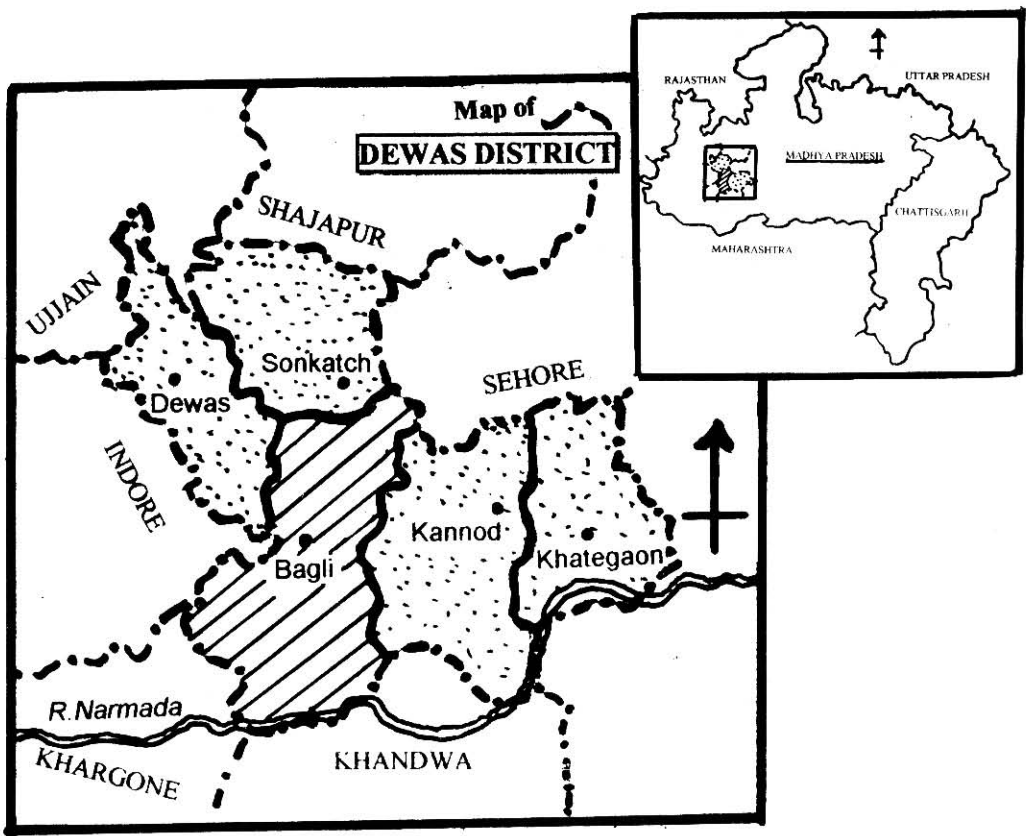
People's Union for Democratic Rights

Delhi

June 2001

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While taking the land from the campesinos of Morelos and wrecking their villages, President Carranza talks about agrarian reform. While applying state terror against the poor, he grants them the right to vote for the rich and offers illiterates freedom of the press.

Eduardo Galeano, Century of the Wind (1988: 47)

"Where should we live? Where do we cook? Will they come again?" This was the typical refrain we encountered in village after village in Dewas district from people sitting under make-shift shelters or in the shade of a tree pointing to their devastated and ransacked homes. These villages had been subjected to an armed operation by the district and forest administration to confiscate wood 'stolen' from the forest. This operation, referred to in the press as 'Operation Clean', involved a convoy of vehicles comprising some 100-150 people, descending on a village, demolishing houses, looting, and in some cases beating villagers. This happened on a daily basis from the 28 March to 3 April, and affected some sixteen villages. On 2 April the operation culminated in a firing on an unarmed crowd at Mehndikhera village in which four people were killed.

Even as it reported the incident, the press gave credence to police claims that the tribals had collected and used firearms and explosives. The state government had not ordered any probe. No cases were registered concerning the killing of tribals. There was concerted propaganda that the Adivasi Morcha Sangathan (AMS) was organizing tribals to challenge the administration by destroying the forests. In this situation, the People's Union for Democratic Rights sent a four-member fact-finding team to Dewas on 13 April. The team visited the villages of Potla, Katukiya, Mehndikhera, Jamasindh, Sabalgarh, Chandupura, Pathaar in Dewas and Katkut in Khargone district. We also met Rahul Banerjee, an alleged leader of the AMS, who is currently in Bagli jail and a number of people from Dewas and Indore. The team also met the forest range officers of Udainagar and Punjapura, the police in-charge at Udainagar and the DFO, M.S. Dhakad, at Dewas.

The roots of the problem, as we see it, lie in the contradiction between two meanings of the forest — subsistence and shelter on the one hand, and commercial and administrative exploitation on the other. While people depend on the forests for their everyday needs, this forest is owned and controlled by the government, which exploits it for its own ends. It is this contradiction which has given rise to mass organisations in this entire region, organisations which the state sees as a challenge to its own authority and wants to suppress. The demolitions at Dewas are fundamentally attacks on the right of people to organize to solve their own problems.

I.

Region and People

Dewas district is situated in western central Madhya Pradesh bordered by the districts of Sehore in the east, Shajapur and Ujjain in the north, Indore and Khargone in the west, East Nimar and Hoshangabad in the south. Geographically the district can be divided into two broad regions separated by the Vindhyan range passing through the middle. The northern part comprises of the Malwa plateau and the basin of the Kali Sindh river, the most agriculturally productive area in the district. The southern part forms part of the Narmada basin and contains the entire forested area of the district. Thus, while 35 percent of the district is under forest cover, these forest lands comprise 56 percent of the area of the southern tehsils of Bagli, Kannod and Khategaon. 74 percent of the forests are reserved forests and 82 percent of them are primarily teak. Bagli tehsil lies at the junction of the two regions, its northern half in the Vindhyan range and the plateau, locally referred to as *ghat upar*, and the southern part stretching all the way to the Narmada river called *ghat neeche*.

The social landscape corresponds roughly to the physical landscape. As the flat fields with black cotton soil and cattle with gay painted horns that characterize Malwa give way to the hills, forests and stony ground below the ghats, the population changes accordingly. Compared to the highly stratified Malwa villages dominated by Sendho Rajputs practising a form of bonded labour with the Chamars, Malwis and Bhopas, the areas below the ghats contain several predominantly adivasi villages. Of the 15 percent of people belonging to scheduled tribes in Dewas, 91 percent reside in the three southern tehsils. Bagli tehsil alone accounts for 40 percent of the ST population concentrated in the southern half of the tehsil. The adivasis belong to the three communities of Bhil, Bhilala, and Barela. In the villages which we visited, over 80 percent of the population is adivasi. The few non-adivasi families belong to some scheduled castes and some upper castes. Roads are few and most of them are *kuchha* which become wholly unusable in the monsoon months. Literacy among men is approximately 30 percent

and 15 percent among women.

Most of the adivasis operate landholdings ranging from 1 to 4 *bighas* (0.75 to 2.75 acres). Major crops are wheat, jowar and maize along with some oilseeds and more recently soyabean. Most people get one crop a year on an average, while those with some irrigated lands get two crops. Wells are the primary source of irrigation and thus 73 percent of the cultivated land is unirrigated. Some of the non-tribal families especially *banias* own larger holdings, in some cases up to 100-200 acres.

Apart from running the few shops in the village, the Bania/Jain families are the only source of credit for the tribals. The rate of interest is approximately 5 percent per month which works out to nearly 80 percent per year. Most families taking loans of small sums of Rs. 100 are unable to repay for many years and find themselves perpetually indebted. Many tribal families have lost their lands through this route.

The major source of employment for the villagers is agriculture, either as cultivators or as agricultural labour. 56 percent of the workers in Bagli tehsil are cultivators, while another 34% who own meagre amounts of land or are landless are forced to sell their labour. Agricultural wages are approximately Rs. 25 for men and Rs. 15-20 for women. Other employment is obtained from tendu collection, and forestry operations of the forest department. In the summer months some employment is also obtained from Employment Generation Schemes and developmental works run by the government. People depend upon the forests not just for house building materials, but for subsistence items like mahua, honey, firewood and fodder. It is this dependence on the forest which brings the tribals into contradiction with the state which owns and controls the use of forest resources and whose functionaries maintain an exploitative relationship with the people. The rise of mass organisations is a direct response by attempting to create a countervailing power to protect the lives and livelihood of the people.

II.

The Adivasi Morcha Sangathan

In the last twenty years or so, a number of mass based adivasi organizations have come up in Western Madhya Pradesh, such as the Narmada Bachao Andolan, the Adivasi Ekta Parishad, the Adivasi Khedut Mazdoor Chetna Sangh in Jhabua, the Adivasi Mukti Sangathan in Sendhwa, the Adivasi Shakti Sangathan in Khargone, the Kisan Adivasi Sangathan in Hoshangabad, and the Shramik Adivasi Sangathan in Betul and Harda, the most recent being the Adivasi Morcha Sangathan (AMS) in Dewas. Many of these organizations are part of a loose federation called the Jan Sangharsh Morcha. These organizations have predominantly taken up issues of rights to land and forest, in particular the granting of land titles to 'encroachers', and opposed the corrupt practices of the forest department and other government officials. Other issues concern the demand for developmental works including provision of health services, education and infrastructure. The methods of this struggle include petitioning authorities, organising dharnas and other forms of public mobilisation. Some of these organisations have taken up works such as watershed development, setting up of a fishing co-operative of displaced persons, and providing for education and health.

The Adivasi Morcha Sangathan began with tribal mobilisation in village Katkut in Khargone district close to the border of Bagli tehsil. As the organisation spread into Dewas district, it took the name Adivasi Morcha Sangathan (AMS) some five years ago. Today, the AMS has popular support in a significant number of villages in the *ghat neeche* portion of Bagli tehsil – being strong in around 20 villages and a presence in another 50 villages.

Local developmental issues have been at the core of the AMS agenda right from its inception. In 1996 the AMS had started conducting awareness camps on women's reproductive health, an issue which had been completely unaddressed till then. To this were added issues related to livelihood, and access to forests and clean drinking water. The organisation petitioned the government on a variety of issues such as the provision of a hospital at Udainagar,

availability of nurse/midwife (ANM) in each village. None of these demands have been met.

The activities of the AMS that irked the district and forest administration were those that directly affected the illegal incomes of state functionaries. Foremost among these were the bribes demanded by the forest officials to allow adivasis access to forest produce. This seems to be a well-entrenched system with uniform rates across villages: Rs. 50 for grazing a buffalo, Rs. 25 for a cow and Rs. 10 for a goat. For firewood, the rates range from Rs. 50 to Rs. 100 for a cartload and Rs. 10 for a headload. Mahua flowers are gathered for which the guard takes a payment of Rs. 10 per tree per season. Under the law, not only do villagers have a right to obtain such produce from the forest, but the forest policy actively encourages the collection and use of non-timber forest produce (NTFP). Timber for house construction or for making agricultural implements, like yokes, ploughs or bullock carts is, however, not included in peoples' rights from the forest and must be bought from forest department depots, which are often too far and too expensive for adivasis. Since houses are made primarily of wood, the repairs require timber after every 10-15 years. As a rule throughout the region and indeed, throughout the country where forests exist, villagers obtain this wood directly from the forest. Although they have to pay heavy bribes for this, the rate is lower than the depot. For constructing a house, for each *chashma* (a portion 6 ft by 10 ft), the forest guard would demand a payment of Rs. 1000. For a single log the payment is Rs. 500. Additional payments take the forms of a chicken or a bottle of liquor. The AMS put a stop to this system of bribes. According to Ranibai of village Potla, at meetings of the Sangathan the discussion often centered around how to get fuelwood for their everyday requirements, without giving bribes to the *nakedar* (forest guard). The presence of the AMS also perhaps meant that people who earlier could not afford to pay the bribes and hence suffered from poor quality housing, now felt emboldened to make or repair their houses by taking wood directly from the forests.

In a couple of cases, the Sangathan members caught those selling wood illicitly, such as the heads of the Forest Protection Committees (FPC) [see Box: *Fights Over the Forest*] of Tatukhedi, Birjakhal and Patakhal who were taking wood on a tractor. They were handed over to the Udainagar Range office by AMS activists. On another occasion, Sangathan members stopped the Forest Department Flying Squad from selling wood it had confiscated, rather than handing it over to the forest depot. South Dewas, particularly Panigaon and Bagli ranges are areas of high smuggling because of the proximity to the Indore market, and to main roads. While in Bagli, trucks smuggle away wood directly, in Udainagar, the smuggled wood is carried by shoulders or bullock carts to the main road, and from there on trucks to the market. This smuggling would not be possible without the complicity of at least some forest officials.

Finally, in what must have seemed the greatest affront to their authority, the AMS questioned the coupe cutting being carried out by the forest department. Commercial exploitation of the forests, both by contractors who paid royalty to the forest department, and by the forest department itself has led to major loss of tree cover. According to the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Dewas' own figures, the annual production of timber in Dewas is approximately 25,000 cu.m., with Udainagar and Punjapura, two of the better stocked ranges (out of eight ranges in Dewas division) where the operation took place, alone yielding approximately 5000 cu.m. In contrast, all the wood that the forest department had seized in its week long demolition amounted to a mere 450 cu.m. Again, going just by the DFO's estimate all the houses in the area put together would amount only to 2500 cu.m. It does not take much to see who puts greater pressure on the forests.

While the forest department may claim that its extraction is done 'sustainably', in the past it has been responsible for destroying natural biodiversity through its introduction of monocultures like teak. In Bagli, the many roadside stands of teak that are visible are all forest department plantations. Since the 1970s, organizations and even some forest department staff, across the country are questioning the

Protection Denied

With the passage of the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, Act 40 of 1996, the Gram Sabhas in Fifth Schedule Areas were granted the right to manage their own resources and disputes. But not so for the adivasi areas of Dewas and neighbouring districts. The large predominantly adivasi belt is administratively divided into the three districts of Dewas, Khargone and Dhar. By including large non-advasi populations, adivasis have been rendered a minority in each of these districts. Administrative and constituency boundaries need rearrangement to ensure fair representation for adivasis.

forest department's management models which focus largely on producing timber and arguing for a more people-centred silviculture which will meet a diversity of needs, including but not only, timber. With the 1988 forest policy and the introduction of Joint Forest Management in the 1990s (see Box: *Fights Over the Forest*), the idea of local needs taking first priority has even been given official sanction. Although the AMS did not stop the department from coupe cutting, the fact that it questioned their right to do so even as villagers were stopped from using the forests, was perceived by the forest department as a major problem.

The AMS also upset the police by telling villagers not to give them bribes, and by insisting that small disputes be settled in the village itself. Earlier, the police would demand Rs. 500 for dropping a petty case. If the case was registered, much larger payments would have to be made to lawyers and as security deposit in courts for bail. All of this was related to the AMS's campaign for the establishment of village self-rule epitomised in their slogan *Hamare gaon mein hamara Raj* (our rule in our village). This includes the right to manage forest resources and disputes without recourse to the administration. Although this is a right granted to adivasis in 5th Schedule Areas, it is being denied to the adivasis of Bagli and moreover, being made a subject for state repression. (see Box: *Protection denied*).

III.

Background to the Attacks

Almost all the adivasi mass organizations in MP have faced state attacks at one time or the other. Legal cases have been filed against the leaders in a variety of instances. However, in the last couple of years, the scale of state intolerance has magnified. This is related both to the state's growing desire to attract multinational and donor funds for large 'development' or industrial projects and the opposition to such schemes by the adivasi organizations who fear displacement. It is also related to the Chief Minister Digvijay Singh's self-promotion as a champion of 'decentralisation' and 'grass roots empowerment.'

Another method of attacking the adivasi organisations has been the setting up of counter organisations controlled by the state. One such organisation is the Adivasi Samaj Sudhar Shanti Sena, which was used to attack activists of the Adivasi Mukti Sangathan in Sendhwa, in 1999. Similar is the case of the Forest Protection Committees in Dewas. The DFO informed the PUDR team that he told villagers that if they left the AMS and joined the Forest Protection Committees, the cases against them under Section 26 of the Forest Act would be substituted with a token fine. In Sivanpani village, AMS members were told that they would be given employment in forestry works only if they left their organisation. Perhaps there is no better example than Dewas of the manner in which buzz words like decentralization, devolution, empowerment and participation can be used to introduce measures that are entirely their opposite. (see Box: *Fights over the Forest*)

The immediate backdrop to the police offensive is the meeting convened by the Chief Secretary at Bhopal on 19 February at which the issue of the Adivasi Morcha Sangathan was taken up. Those attending included the Director General of Police, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF), Principal Secretary Forests, the Conservator of Forests of Ujjain, as well as the Collector, Superintendent of Police (SP) and DFO of Dewas. The minutes of this meeting handed over to us

by the DFO, state that the Cabinet evaluated the Gram Sampark 2000 during the meeting. Gram Sampark is a programme whereby senior officials or politicians meet villagers and ask them their problems. A decision was taken that strict action should be initiated against mass organisations in the districts of Khandwa, Khargone and Dewas which have become a hurdle to the aforesaid programme. The meeting discussed the issue of encroachment and how it had been encouraged by mainstream political parties in the past, but it advocated action only against adivasis. The PCCF advocated the destruction of standing crops in encroached fields. The IG Police suggested that different departments (revenue, police, forest) bury their internal differences and jointly use force against such organizations. The Collector, Dewas complained that the AMS was leading the villagers to believe that the forest was theirs, and argued that the might of the State needed to be reasserted. Local adivasis, he said, needed to be mobilized against the AMS and the leaders of the Sangathan separated from the movement. (page 1-2 of minutes). The meeting concluded with the following major decisions being taken:

- A joint force of all departments (forest, police and revenue) be created with a plan to end encroachments and stop the activities of the AMS. Women police be taken along.
- Once action begins it should be taken to its logical end.
- Appropriate security forces be provided to the district administration.
- The operation should take place in the presence of senior officials, and firing should be avoided.
- A watch should be kept on the activities of the AMS leaders, and preparations initiated to extern them and/or apply the National Security Act.
- Development activities should be initiated in the affected regions, but this should in no way be allowed to interfere with the use of force.

The DFO admitted to us that the AMS members were not engaged in selling wood, and that there is a mafia which engages in illicit felling. He also admitted that it was not just AMS members who built houses with wood taken directly from the forests, but that all the tribals obtained wood in this manner. And wherever this was done, it was in connivance with the forest guards who received bribes for the purpose. However, "the real issue", according to him was "not to demolish houses or kill people but to finish extremism.... The demolitions were merely symbolic and were meant to create fear among people." As evidence of what he called a high level conspiracy, the DFO noted that "poor adivasis were now organized enough even to fight with the Collector and the SP". In short, the administration had decided that it would teach the Sangathan a lesson, even if this meant opening fire.

The protest activities of the AMS were at a high level from the beginning of this year. Several dharnas and rallies were organised at various places in the district including Dewas town demanding the starting of employment programmes to sustain people in this drought year. After one such dharna at Chapra, the SP had promised that employment schemes would start in 17 or 18 days, but a month or more later, nothing had happened. Around this time the present Collector took over, and rather than addressing the issues raised by the AMS, he organised three large meetings in Pipri (31.1.01), Udainagar (13.2.01) and Katkut (Khargone district) (8.3.01), in which he is

widely reported to have said that the AMS would be crushed within a month (Dainik Bhaskar, 6.4.01). On 28 March a violent operation was initiated against the AMS which finally led to the killing of four people on 2 April.

More Dangers Ahead

The plan of attacking the adivasi organisation included the use of every undemocratic legislation that the government had in its arsenal. The suggestions of top officials included the use of National Security Act (NSA) and use of externment proceedings. Wiser opinion seems to have prevailed since externment proceedings require existing criminal cases, of which there were none. NSA too provides its victim at least a judicial hearing within three months.

Not so with the new law already passed by the Assembly and awaiting presidential assent. The Madhya Pradesh (Special Areas) Security Act, 2000 empowers the state government to declare any organisation as 'contrary to law', ban it, seal its offices and arrest members and sympathisers. As a new version of TADA, the law provides the accused little legal redress. While the justification of the law hinges on controlling organised crime and anti-social activities, the history of such legislations points to their active use in attacking peoples movements. Mass organisations throughout Madhya Pradesh fear that it will be used against them. Given the tone of the minutes of the official meetings, mentioned earlier, their fears are not unwarranted.

IV. Operations in Dewas

The operations in Dewas district cannot be divorced from the operations in Katkut village, just across the border in Khargone district, where the Adivasi Shakti Sangathan, a sister organisation of the AMS is active in four out of five *phaliyas*, (adivasi settlements). The main *phaliya* consists mostly of the larger landowning non-adivasi families, who formed a Forest Protection Committee(FPC) in 2000. These families used the FPC to prevent adivasis from going into the forest, and inevitably, the Sangathan has had several small confrontations

with the FPC. In July 2000, 400-500 people including the police, forest department and members of the newly formed FPC broke the house of one Sangathan member, which the Sangathan subsequently rebuilt. On 18 March 2001, the forest department came (again in full force with the police and FPC members) and demolished a Sangathan member's house in Okhla village and also broke the grain storage bin. After the demolitions in Okhla, the forest department reached Gulabsingh *phaliya*, which is considered a stronghold of the Sangathan.

Firing started as soon they reached, and at least three people were hit with bullets, including one woman who was hit in the arm as she was cradling her child and running away. Most people were away at this time, having gone to Okhla when they got the news of the demolition and only some women and old people were there. Sangathan members point out that FPC members have built many new houses, far more than the Sangathan members, and that as part of the demolitions they were beaten by the FPC members rather than by the forest department staff. Katkut is a clear example of a village where local class contradictions have translated into a conflict between the FPC and the Sangathan. Through the FPC, the state has created a force to attack and counter the growing popularity of the Sangathan.

In Dewas itself, the process of house demolitions began on 28 March and continued till 3 April 2001. The sequence of happenings is as follows:

- 28 March: Demolitions at Kadudiya village
- 29 March: Demolitions and looting of 11 houses in Potla village
- 30 March: Demolitions of 12 houses in Patpadi village
- 31 March: Attempt to arrest Jhanjhad Bhargav, AMS leader at village Jamasindh
- 1 April: Demolitions and looting of 22 houses at village Katukiya
- 2 April: Demolitions/looting of 7 houses, followed by firing at Village Mehendikheda, in which four people died
- 3 April: Pump sets broken, houses looted in Jamasindh, Mehndikhera and neighbouring villages.

In order to conduct this operation a Special Task Force (STF) was constituted consisting of 125 men of the State Armed Force sanctioned by the State Government, along with 30-40 people each from the district police and the forest department. The STF was accompanied by 40-50 labourers drawn from the leadership of FPCs in the block. This STF party travelling

in 40-45 vehicles, led by the Collector, Superintendent of Police and the DFO would arrive at a village in the morning, and without any warning, proceed to mark out houses and demolish them. In Potla village, people tried to resist by throwing stones, but had to retreat because of the sheer numbers of the STF. The police opened fire in which one person was injured. When he went to the Bagli hospital for treatment, he was told that a police case needed to be registered before treatment could begin. Fearing arrest, he came back to the village. No resistance was encountered during subsequent raids till 2 April when people from a number of villages gathered at Mehndikhera to prevent demolition of the houses. Here again police opened fire, this time to kill four people.

In most other villages, people just ran away to the forests when they saw the force approaching. In Patpadi, only women were left in the village, all the men fled. In Katukiya, even women ran away. The women we spoke to said they were just starting to cook when they heard the STF had arrived. Leaving their *rotis* on the *tava*, they fled with their children. Two men, Bhura Narsingh and Bacchu Gulab, who came back to the village to water the cattle were beaten by the STF. In Mehndikhera village, after the firing, the entire village as well as families from neighbouring villages like Kanaad spent three days and nights in the forests on the hills. Food and water were in scarce supply, and children and babies suffered enormously. An old man of about 70, Narsingh, who was unable to run away with the rest, was badly beaten and was still bedridden when we visited ten days later.

That the operation induced sheer terror is evident from an incident concerning 30 year old Sadu of Patakhali, Nimanpur Panchayat. On seeing a truck coming to his village the day after the attack on neighbouring Katukiya, he was so terrified that he loaded all his goods into a bullock cart and tried to flee. His wheel got stuck. While trying to take it out, he started vomiting blood and died a couple of days later.

House demolitions: We examined 6 out of 11 demolished houses in Potla, all 22 demolished houses in Katukiya, 3 demolished houses in Mehndikhera and 2 in Jamasindh, one of which (belonging to Man Singh) was built un-

Fights over the forest

Although confrontations over the use of the forest and other natural resources were not unknown before colonial rule, the scale and frequency of such conflicts has intensified since the 19th century. Many of the issues that dog the forests today find their roots in notions of property introduced by the British — whether it be the notion of state right over forests to the exclusion of peasant users, or peasant rights over village grazing lands to the exclusion of nomadic pastoralists. Peasant and adivasi struggles in the colonial period - both major and minor - often centred around the reservation of forests, bans on shifting cultivation, restrictions on access to forest produce, the imposition of grazing dues, etc.. These were met with both repression and some concessions. The history of forests in post-independence India has been equally fraught, with movements like Chipko and Appiko against the felling of local forests by contractors for commercial uses; the agitations against the leasing of wastelands to private industries like Harihar Polyfibres in Karnataka; the uprooting of Forest Department eucalyptus plantations in Karnataka by farmers incensed by the depletion of their water table; the tensions between the exclusion mandated by rules regarding national parks and sanctuaries and the needs of fringe villages; the everyday confrontations between headloaders and forest guards, and the constant struggle across central India for the regularization of cultivation in forest land. Successive policies such as social forestry, farm forestry and now Joint Forest Management (JFM) have each generated their own set of conflicts. In the following section, we provide a brief history of forest policies in India, before coming back to the manner in which JFM has initiated a fresh set of problems for forest users.

The Forest Act of 1878 classified forests into three types: Reserved, Protected and Village forests. This was the first time that 'public interest' was formulated as a category in opposition to the interests of forest dwellers, and prominence given to the former. 'Public interest' here was generally used as a euphemism for the commercial and revenue-maximising interests of the colonial state. During the colonial period, the main use of timber was for the shipbuilding industry and railways. In the post-colonial period this role has been taken by forest-based industries. These include packaging, pulp and paper mills, housing, plywood and veneer, matchbox industries, furniture and panelling, fibre board and particle factories. Even as villagers were excluded from the forests or made to pay heavy prices, industries received large subsidies. For instance, bamboo prices for the paper industry were Rs. 600 per tonne in the 1980s, when the market rate was ten times that.

The 1878 Act allowed the state to usurp the right to close off certain categories of forests, created certain classes of offences, and gave forest officials magisterial powers to arrest a person without warrant merely on grounds of suspicion. Little changed after independence. For instance, the 1952 forest policy famously asserted that "the accident of a village being situated close to a forest does not prejudice the right of a country as a whole to receive benefits of a national asset".

This situation changed somewhat in the 1970s, when the government started social forestry programs to meet people's needs for fuelwood and fodder. Social forestry was targetted especially at wastelands, village commons, panchayat lands, the sides of national and state highways, canals, railway lines etc. The program included both farm forestry where farmers were given free or subsidised seedlings to plant on their own land, and village woodlots which were to be communally managed, mainly through panchayats. However, both social forestry and farm forestry had their own problems. Farm forestry benefitted mainly larger farmers who could afford to divert some of their land to long term crops; it reduced their need for labour thus destroying the prospects of agricultural labour. Rather than satisfying local needs for fuelwood and fodder, farm forestry encouraged the plantation of quick growing commercial timber, especially eucalyptus, that was aimed at urban and industrial markets. Village woodlots also failed to satisfy local needs for fodder and fuelwood because of the unavailability of common land and the fact that many panchayats preferred cash generating trees to fuel and fodder bearing ones. Although meant to be run by panchayats, in practice the forest department retained tight control over the procedures.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s there was a further shift in formal policy, partly in response to growing degradation and inability to meet commercial needs, and partly in response to longstanding activist and environmentalist pressure for a more people-friendly forest policy. The forest policy of 1988

made people's needs the first charge on forests. In 1990, the Ministry of Environment and Forests passed the first Joint Forest Management resolution, which invited 'people's participation in the management of degraded lands'. In contrast to all earlier forest policy which reserved forest land for industrial needs, and required villagers to go elsewhere, joint forest management involves villagers in managing forest land and gives them a stake in it. The policy is based on the formation of village level committees who are assigned a patch of reserved forest land close to them. If they protect it successfully, they are entitled to a share of the trees that have grown after five or ten years. Each state has passed its own resolution stipulating the membership of these committees, what shares they will get in the final harvest, whether they can fine offenders etc. Although the 1990 resolution envisaged parting with degraded forest land, in 2000 the guidelines have been revised to include all sorts of forest land, including land with good tree cover.

MP passed its JFM order in 1991 titled: 'Community participation in preventing illicit felling and rehabilitation of the forests'. This was revised in 1995 to coincide with a large World Bank-funded project covering two phases, with a total outlay of Rs 795 crores. The order was further revised in 2000 after the first phase of the project had ended. As of now the second phase of World Bank funding has been stalled because of protests by MP tribal organizations against displacement in national parks and sanctuaries, and against the corruption and conflict caused by the JFM program.

MP was one of the few states which provided for well stocked forest under JFM, not just degraded land, right from the beginning. In MP, forests have been divided into three zones and different types of committees are envisaged for villages within 5 km of each zone: eco-development committees for national parks and sanctuaries, Forest Protection Committees (FPCs) for good forest land, and Village Forest Committees (VFCs) for degraded land. The model being followed is one that was developed in Harda forest division of MP: where some villages with large amounts of forest land are selected and given money for development work such as building sources of drinking water supply, approach roads, schools, check dams and other facilities. The idea is that this will lead to increased trust between villagers and the forest department, and the employment given under these works will divert them from dependence on the forests. The schemes are variously known as Ecodevelopment (for villages on the periphery of protected areas) and Village Resource Development Program (VRDP) in VFCs. In Eco-development, there is also a provision for 'voluntary relocation' from the 'core' to the 'peripheries'. In plain language, this means a plan to displace villages from inside national parks to the surrounding areas outside the park or sanctuary.

The MP 2000 order notes that all voters in villages where committees exist should be a member of the committee, and that the executive committee should consist of at least two women, and two landless persons, in addition to the Sarpanch and Panch. In practice, most committees seem to consist of only a few persons, and the chairperson is selected by the forest department on the basis of his proximity to them. The forest guard, as ex-officio secretary, keeps tight control over the records, and the amount of money that comes in. In many villages, people have no idea how much money has been allocated to their FPC, or what it is being used for, and JFM has just become a major avenue of corruption for the forest department. Names of women are entered in the registers as members even if they have never attended a single meeting. The FPC is collectively meant to decide how it will protect the forests – by hiring a guard, or through patrols drawn from each household in turn. In general, this decision too is made by the forest department. In many cases, the allotment of a forest plot - on which many villages depended - to one village, has created conflicts between villages. Nowhere has any effort been made to consult all the villages in a region (e.g. a range) collectively. While villagers who are organized into committees are supposed to get various kinds of benefits – including free nistar (fuelwood, bamboo and small poles), and a share of the timber when it is finally felled, there is no provision under JFM to meet people's needs for timber on an ongoing basis. In addition, they continue to have to give bribes even to take what they are legally allowed. In the meantime, operations by the forest department continue to log large quantities of timber.

It is not strange that faced with the JFM policies, organisations engaged in fighting corrupt practices of forest officials, attempting to develop organisations based on equality and democracy, and struggling to establish self-rule in the villages reject the JFM and its organisational forms such as the FPC and VFC being thrust as part of that package. The attempt of the state to use the JFM committees to launch attacks on the Adivasi organisations can only make the rejection of this policy more total. Or is the policy designed to achieve the same goals for which it faces rejection?

der the Indira Awas Yojana, and had just been completed a month before. Houses in this area are made of wood pillars with twigs and branches for the walls, sometimes with separate enclosures for animals. The houses consist of 4 to 5 compartments or *chashmas*. The roof is covered with baked tiles (*kevelu*), either locally made or factory made. The factory made tiles for a house of 5 *chashmas* cost around Rs. 8000. Major repairs are required every 12-15 years. When a new house is constructed, materials from the older house are used, and invariably the new house is built on the site of the old. Thus it is difficult to make a distinction between old and new houses. All the houses we saw show clear signs of being lived in.

During the demolitions, an effort was made to inflict maximum financial damage – roof tiles, which do not come from the forest, and have to be purchased, were invariably broken. Almost all the houses that have been demolished belong to adivasis who are members of the AMS. In one of the rare exceptions, the house of a Gawli man Mahesh, s/o Nathu of village Potla, was also demolished, as it was in the process of being renovated. The forest department took away half a truckload of wood from the house. Half the wood being used for construction, according to Mahesh, had been purchased from the forest department depot, some came from the old house and some from the forest.

In Katukiya at least two recognizably old houses, belonging to Sangathan workers, Lal Singh and Gopal Singh were demolished. Lal Singh's brother Roop Singh had been killed by the forest department in a dawn raid a year ago. Lal Singh's old mother, who was in the house at the time of the demolition pleaded with the STF to leave a corner so that she could lie there on her cot. However, the STF put her along with the cot on the street outside and proceeded to demolish the entire house. The DFO admitted that these were 'mistakes' but failed to explain how such mistakes came to occur under his supervision. This seems therefore to be a clear case of sheer vindictiveness against the AMS.

Some houses in Katukiya were looted but not demolished. Neerubai, of Katukiya, who suffered extensive theft (see box: Looting: An instance) noted that her house had been saved

only because they paid the nakedar Rs. 4000 for timber some five years ago. Her neighbour, Reshmibai had paid Rs. 1500 for two large beams. In other places, however, this did not necessarily work. In Patpadi, the house of the sarpanch was demolished, despite the fact that he had paid a bribe of Rs. 12,000 to the Ranger to construct it. Some villages, like Nimanpur, Bijakhal, Patakhali and Chunadhar, apprehending similar attacks, decided that it was safer to break some beams themselves and surrender timber to the forest department rather than have their houses looted and demolished. The forest department were able to collect 150 cu.m. of wood in this manner.

It is interesting to note that no notices were served to the villagers prior to the demolition. The DFO justified such conduct arguing that the Forest Act does not require any prior notice except for vacating encroachments. Yet notices were served during demolitions in Sendhwa in 1999. And the villages in Dewas where demolitions were carried out are revenue villages not forest villages, which is the reason that the DM, not the DFO, led the operations. Even in the matter of the demolition of an illegal construction in Indore city, the MP high court ruled that prior to demolishing structures, the administration had to give a show cause notice. There is therefore no legal sanction to demolitions without prior notice.

Looting and the attack on food security: As part of the demolitions, there was a deliberate attempt to destroy all the grain available and to hit at the sources of economic livelihood. Attacks on food security are an important part of the attempt to destroy the AMS and to ensure that the cost of being a member is just too high for an ordinary person to sustain.

Grain bins have been broken, which has resulted in the grain being mixed with mud, and being eaten by cattle. Kusumbai (whose daughter Sairi was arrested) said that the one quintal of mahua they had managed to collect and keep on the roof to dry, had fallen on the ground when the roof was demolished. In this case too, cattle ate the mahua before the family could salvage anything. Makka, the only thing they manage to grow on the stony 3 bighas of land they owned, suffered a similar fate.

Kusumbai has eleven children, of which the smallest is five months old.

Often grain was stolen – for example, Sursingh of village Potla lost 50 kg corn. Neerubai of Katukiya came back from hiding in the forest to find that though her house was not demolished, all the edible items and grain in the house had been cooked and consumed, with chickens from the neighbouring houses to add to the feast. The only thing the Task Force had left was some *atta* she had mixed with *haldi* and was just about to cook when the police arrived. She said they probably only left this because they thought it had got spoiled. In another house, they even ate the watery *dalia* that had been made for the children. The women were forced to laugh as they wondered what kind of monsters the raiding party consisted of.

In at least three houses, in Katukiya and Mehndikhera, pesticides had been mixed with water and grain to make them unusable. One house in Mehndikhera lost 5 quintal of grain in this manner. In Katukiya, Belabai showed us flour in which the raiding party had mixed *Rustaf* (Acephate 75% SP), a cotton pesticide.

Some houses which escaped demolition were looted, including the anganwadi and a grocery shop in Katukiya which lost goods worth Rs. 2-3000, 1 quintal of wheat and Rs. 4000 in cash. Silver, cooking and eating vessels, and clothes (including children's clothes) were also

stolen from several houses.

Sickles and other agricultural implements were prominent among the items looted. In Jamasindh, after the firing, at least 5 pump sets were thrown into wells. The loss of their means of irrigation or tools make it difficult for people to carry on agricultural activity or obtain employment in the employment generation programmes. The average landholding in this area is 1-2 acres per family and everyone we spoke to relied on daily labour, either solely or in large part. Since there has been drought this year, there is very little agricultural employment available and whatever drought relief works the government is carrying on (such as tank deepening) are closed to these villagers since they lack the necessary tools. Food scarcity due to drought and the absence of relief makes the loss of existing grain and household belongings even more serious.

The Firing and after: In protest against the destruction and looting of the houses, the AMS organized a dharna and blocked the road near Jamasindh village on 30 March, 2001. Despite being informed of this, the administration turned a blind eye and rejected any opportunity for talks while continuing raids on the villages. Attempting to explain why they made no effort to address the demands of the chakka jam, the DFO gave the flimsy excuse that the road being blocked was not much travelled. On 2nd April a police party raided Mehndikhera village, barely 3 km. from the dharna site. According to the DFO, they had earlier planned to raid Jamasindh, but changed their mind because they feared being encircled, and went to Mehndikhera instead.

Mehndikhera village is topographically saucer shaped with a large plain in the middle and four settlements along the periphery. The STF party entered the village in 40 to 50 vehicles and soon divided itself over the four settlements of the village. While the STF was preparing to start the demolitions, approximately about 600 people came running from the *dharna* site to prevent the demolitions. Stone pelting started from both sides using catapults. According to the DFO, the villagers and the STF were at least 200 mts. apart throughout, and this was confirmed by the villagers when they stated

Looting: An Instance

Neerubai's husband and his two brothers jointly own 3 bighas of land in Katukiya village.

While Neerubai's house was spared, it did not escape looting.

The STF booty included:

2 big matkas of corn *atta*

30 kg scrap iron

2 silver anklets

1 kurhadu (axe)

1 new saree

1 iron plough

60 kg chana

½ kg wheat

½ kg butter

that the distance was too large for arrows to cover. The DFO stated that the STF fired tear gas shells to disperse the crowd, but this failed since villagers were 'professionally trained' to deal with such eventualities. The STF then resorted to firing plastic bullets, which the DFO said proved ineffective since they have a short range, i.e. less than 150-200 mts. According to the DFO, the Collector gave the order for "effective firing – aim to shoot" only when they were surrounded and the STF started panicking.

The official account that the police was cornered and opened fire in self defence is untenable. Given the vastness of the Mehndikhera plain it would take thousands of people to surround the STF party. Far from being surrounded, the armed STF party was well matched in numbers with unarmed villagers. Not only did it have sufficient avenues of retreat, no such situation could arise that it needed to retreat. The firing could have easily been averted if the administration was willing to talk to the protestors.

According to some eyewitnesses, the first to be hit was Nemichand Jaiswal, a shopkeeper in neighbouring Bisali village. After him, Balram of Semli was hit in the head. Pathan of Kanaad, and Bhal Singh also fell. By this time, people had started running away. The police took away the dead body of Bhal Singh, aka Bhulu, and did not hand it back to his family. Two other bodies were taken by AMS members to Indore for a post mortem.

But the killing of people did not deter the district administration. The operations continued the next day when the STF raided Jamasindh village, at 6.15 am and chased villagers out of their houses. The raiding party did not limit itself to Jamasindh village. They chased villagers from a number of surrounding villages. The terror created by this action forced the entire population of the area to abandon their villages and seek refuge in forests in the hills. Men, women, aged and infants roamed these forests for the next three days with little food and water.

According to the DFO, the raid on Jamasindh was prompted by information that a landmine had been planted on the road near Jamasindh. They claim to have found a con-

traption in two L shaped pits, but when they cut the wires, found no bomb attached but found 15 gelatine sticks, 15 detonators and fuse wires in a neighbouring cotton field. A local NGO Samaj Pragati Sahyog which is known for its work on watershed management, has pointed out that these pits were mere contour trenches used to increase water retention in the ground and not trenches for laying mines. In a curious twist, two policemen who were involved in the operations and who were subsequently suspended for some personal misconduct, have threatened to 'reveal the truth about the bombs' if their suspension orders are not revoked (*Dewas Bhraman*, 25.04.2001) Quite evidently, the theory that the AMS had planted landmines and possessed weapons, and that their members were trained in combat with the police is a creation of the administration's active imagination, to explain an unjustifiable opening of fire.

Arrests: During the demolitions, the STF arrested 3 women from Potla and charged them under Sec 151 Cr.P.C. Although this section refers to preventive custody not exceeding 24 hours, they were detained for 11 days. They were released on bail, only after their families had given a lawyer Rs. 5000 each. One of the women arrested was Sairi, a young girl of about 19. Sairi worked as a labourer under a contractor accompanying a road laying machine (somewhere near Harda), getting Rs. 100-150 a week. She had come home to Potla because she was to get married in two months. As her mother, Kusumbai told us sadly, "we thought she needed some rest before her marriage, some time just to be a daughter at home, before she starts her hard life again in her in-laws house." Sairi said that when the force came to demolish the house, she also protested and cried. One policeman sent her to fetch water, and when she came back from the pump, she was dragged by her plait to a neem tree. She was beaten by the nakedar and two women police officials before being bundled into the jeep and taken away by the police. The police told Kusumbai that if they stayed with the Sangathan they would come and break her house again.

Others arrested include Vinu from Sewanpani village who was charged under S. 26 Forest Act and S. 3 Damage to Public Prop-

erty Act. The sarpanch of Patpadi village, Narayan, has also been charged under the same sections. Narayan had stayed back in the village when the STF party raided it on 30 March. He provided water for the STF party through the day and was arrested at the time the party was leaving.

People were also arrested after the raids were over. First among these was Rahul Banerjee, once a leader of the AMS, who now lives in Indore. After the firing when the villagers brought the dead bodies to Indore for post mortem, Rahul arranged vehicles for them to

take the bodies back. He was then arrested from the hospital and charged for criminal conspiracy to attempt murder. He is still in Bagli jail two months later. Despite the apparent hollowness of the police claim to have discovered a landmine, the police continued further on that thesis to discover 200 ultra modern landmines and 150 guns from Mehndikhera village (*Nav Bharat*, 14 April). More cases have been registered on this basis against AMS leaders and '200 unknown persons' which serves as an excuse to arbitrarily arrest any AMS sympathiser.

V. Institutional Responses

The firing at Mehndikhera was first reported on 3 April in local newspapers. There was little more to it than the police version that firing was resorted to in self-defence since adivasis opened fire upon the STF party that was conducting an operation to confiscate stolen wood. The arrival of villagers with two dead bodies in Indore brought into the open the account of unwarranted firing on unarmed protesters. Till then there had been no attempt on the part of the administration to even institute an enquiry into the happenings. More details were brought to notice by Samaj Pragati Sahyog (SPS) active in the area. SPS workers visited the site and took a video footage of the damage inflicted, which was then shown to the Chief Minister and other senior officials on 4 April at Bhopal. While the Chief Minister claimed that orders had been given for the demolitions to be peaceful, he did not initiate any independent enquiry into the incident or order compensation. A magisterial enquiry was ordered on 3 April, to be conducted by an ADM, who was himself present as part of the operations. The ADM being subordinate to the Collector who led the operation is not likely to order action against his superior. A team of three officials from Bhopal was sent to visit the site and report directly to the Chief Minister. However, according to newspaper reports, this team did not visit the affected villages, since the district administration gave them a trumped up story of an impending security threat.

While several politicians have visited the

area, their contacts with ordinary villagers have been apathetic, and they have generally accepted the official line. The Deputy Chief Minister, Jamuna Devi & Dr. Vijay Lakshmi Sadho, Minister for Welfare of the Scheduled Tribes who is also the Minister-in-charge of the district both visited Mehndikhera on 5 April. Newspaper reports state that during this visit, the villagers agreed to cooperate with the government to stop illegal felling of trees. Our investigations revealed that the villagers were forced to take this line fearing further demolitions and looting. The government also announced its intention to begin development programs in the area at this point.

As for opposition party politicians, they have been mainly interested in gaining mileage for their own party. For instance, former Chief Minister and BJP MP Kailash Joshi issued a statement saying that the police had killed innocent adivasis, while no action was being taken against the outsiders who were actually responsible for illegal felling of trees. While calling for an independent inquiry into the incident he blamed the district administration for failing to check the forest mafia. Union Minister Uma Bharti who also toured the area, blamed the Chief Minister for the incident, and as is inevitable with her, insisted on dragging in Christian missionaries. She is reported to have said that Christian missionaries in the area were instigating the adivasis and the state government had been unable to put a stop to this. She also blamed the 'leftist forces' in the region for insti-

WITHOUT COMMENT

The policy to be followed as per the MP government decision at the meeting called by the Chief Secretary on 19.02.2001 was well articulated by Mr. Dhakar, the Divisional Forest Officer, Dewas: "Let us be very clear on this. . . The action was to crush the Adivasi Morcha Sangathan. . . We singled out hardcore Sangathan villages for the operation. . . People had no fear even of the Collector and SP. . . The demolitions were merely symbolic and were meant to create fear among people. . . THE MIGHT OF THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD PREVAIL."

The following is excerpted from the talk with the DFO, Dewas.

State Accusations and Chargesheet:

- ☞ The innate nature of Bhilalas and Barelals is to take possession of land.
- ☞ The adivasis are cutting trees and building huge studios.
- ☞ They produce ten children each.
- ☞ They are ready to fight the government even the S.P. and Collector.
- ☞ They do not let government enter their villages, even forest department officials were driven away.
- ☞ The activities of Adivasi Sangathans have led to total deforestation in Jhabua, Dhar, Khargone and Badwani. Forest is only left in Dewas and Khandwa.
- ☞ The Sangathan says that the government has not done anything for the past 50 years and is corrupt.
- ☞ The Sangathan preaches: the forest land and water belongs to the tribals; the government has not grown the forests. If the government can take timber, so can the tribals take wood for a house.
- ☞ There is a high level conspiracy to create tension between the government and adivasis.
- ☞ There is a larger conspiracy to destroy the forests.

Action Taken:

- ✓ S.P.s, Collectors, DFOs posted earlier did not do anything and got promoted.
- ✓ We held seminars and tried to win the confidence of the people. We explained that if you destroy forests you will suffer.
- ✓ Our efforts brought no results, the destruction of forests continued.
- ✓ We decided on initiating strict action and taking it to its logical end and started operations on 28 March.
- ✓ We have selected about 30 villages and made a list of about 600 houses of Sangathan members which are to be targeted.
- ✓ Now that there is fear, we will again try to win the confidence of the people.

gating the adivasis. Far from addressing the issue, she wanted the state government to investigate the activities of missionaries in the area. The missionaries, she is referring to, the Sevagram Ashram of the Indore Christian Diocese Society which works in some 35 villages in this area, are involved merely in forming self help groups or thrift societies of women. According to the Pastor, these groups have both Sanghatan members and others.

The response of constitutional bodies has been mixed. The Chairperson, National SC & ST Commission, visited the area on 6 April. His investigations resulted in pronouncing the district administration guilty. He demanded the arrest of the District Collector, Superintendent of Police, DFO and the forest officials under the SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 and suggested a compensation of at least Rs. 2 lakh each to the next of kin of those killed. Refuting the claim that the AMS was a Naxalite organisation, or that they had laid land mines, he stated that they were spreading awareness amongst the people, which is no crime. The Chairperson of the State Human Rights Commission of Madhya Pradesh, on the other hand, did not care to send an investigation team. He told the press that the State Commission was 'confused' over whether it should take cognisance of the matter.

The role of the Press has gone little beyond reporting whatever various authorities, and later different investigation teams, said at press conferences and through their communiqués. Except for the rare investigative reporting, the press remained by and large ambivalent. Thus it would seriously report both the official falsities of 'unearthing of minefields' as well as statements decrying the incident as an atrocity on the people. The impact is that some parts of the official account have escaped criticism and are masquerading as truth. Prominent among these is a belief that adivasis have been responsible for large scale felling of wood, and were responsible for large scale forest destruction, and that they were arming in order to challenge the state. Connecting all of this is a conspiracy thesis of 'outsiders' and 'Naxalites' instigating the tribals for some ulterior ends.

The Chief Minister visited the affected vil-

lages twenty days after the firing, and announced a compensation of Rs. 1 lakh each to the family of those killed. Given the widespread criticism of the magisterial enquiry, the Chief Minister converted this into an administrative enquiry by a senior state government official but declined to order an judicial probe. Another high level team of officials has been constituted to visit Dewas and the affected villages and prepare an action plan for the development of the area. The team is to include officers from police, forest and revenue departments and it will work in consultation with members of the Zilla Panchayat and local MLA. There has been some talk of transferring officials who have been in the district for over five years to prevent entrenched corruption, but so far no transfer has taken place.

Five investigation teams, including the PUDR team, visited the area since the firing and each of them has demanded an independent judicial enquiry, adequate compensation to those who have lost family members and had their houses demolished, the immediate release of arrested activists, and action against the officials who ordered the firing. These include the Jan Sangarsh Morcha, a network of adivasi Sanghathans in Madhya Pradesh; a team comprising independent Supreme Court lawyers, members of the People's Science Forum and the Chhatisgarh Mukti Morcha; and members of the Rajasthan Kisan Sanghatan, CPI (ML) and Prayas, a voluntary organisation from Rajasthan. Petitions reiterating these demands have also been made by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and Madhya Pradesh Kisan Sabha, Sandarbh Sansthan, Manasi Sanghathan, and Ekalavya. The Amnesty International has also written to the Central and State Government condemning the incident. Despite this overwhelming body of evidence from diverse sources, however, no action has yet been taken against the district and forest officials.

The required response from the state government has been lacking. There is an attempt to sideline and obfuscate the issue today: the need for a fair and unbiased investigation, compensation to the victims, withdrawal of false cases, and criminal pros-

ecution of the guilty officials. Instead the Chief Minister has called a meeting of other Chief Ministers to review the Forest Conservation Act, and has directed the district administration to build confidence among the people by seeking the co-operation of FPCs and representatives of political parties and organising conventions of FPCs. (Note that in two such conventions held in January and February, the Collector had issued dire threats to finish the AMS. This surely did not lead to building confidence among people.) By portraying the incident as only concerned with development, forest protection, or building confidence, rather than the right of

people to organize and resist giving bribes, and by sidestepping the issue of punishing officers, the government is avoiding responsibility.

Meanwhile the administration continues to flex its muscles. The Punjabura Ranger told our team that they had identified some 600 houses in 30 villages and would proceed with demolitions if they got orders from above. In Jamasindh village, about 14 vehicles had come again on 12 April and took photographs of newly built houses and threatened to come again to demolish houses. As mentioned before, arrests of AMS activists continue.

VI.

Conclusion

Neglected by the state, denied basic educational and health facilities, and fired upon when they try to organize – that seems to be the situation of adivasis in Dewas district today. While forest conservation is important – it is clear that under the existing system, with the amount of smuggling that goes on and the system of bribe taking by the forest department, the department is doing nothing to save the forests.

The fact that the crux of the issue was not the forests at all, but the challenge to state venality, is clear from all the statements made by the DFO and the minutes of the February meeting. It is also clear from the MP Special Areas Act, which has dangerous implications for all such organisations which are trying to challenge the arbitrary nature of state action. Even as governments and bodies like the World Bank use the language of 'participatory development' and 'empowerment', they employ every tool possible to ensure that people are never

allowed to mobilize for their rights. In fact, the programmes that they institute for this purpose – such as forest protection committees under JFM – themselves become instruments to deny people their fundamental rights. For the government to illegally demolish the houses of members of the Sanghantani or deny them employment unless they join FPCs, is patently illegal. The right to organize in the form of a Morcha or Sangathan is a fundamental right. People can be prosecuted for committing illegal crimes, not simply for being members of an organisation.

In a situation where government schemes are so dominated by the rich or by government officials that they do not address people's needs, and where people are denied the right to organize outside these schemes, how are people to fulfill their legitimate aspirations? A roof over their heads, and some food to eat is not much to ask for, one would think. Yet for this state, even this little is too much.

Some Available P.U.D.R reports

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