

The Story of Hadmatiya

Adivasi Struggles in South Rajasthan

People's Union for Democratic Rights

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CONTENTS

I	Hadmatiya Village	4
II	The Land and the People	7
III	The Attacks on Hadmatiya	16
IV	Conclusion	20

PREFACE

On 2nd April, 1990, the tribal village of Hadmatiya in south Udaipur district was subjected to a brutal police assault. 35 people were injured in the firing.

Nearly a year later, on 3rd March, 1991, this village was attacked yet again, this time by an armed mob of about 500 persons. 75 dwellings were razed to the ground and 365 persons were rendered homeless.

These two incidents of organised attacks on the village have been engendered in the same exploitative processes that have systematically eroded the livelihood of the Hadmatiya adivasis. They reflect the social tensions generated in the course of a process of development that perpetuated conditions of deprivation and dependence for large sections of tribals in this region. The cumulative impact of the state's developmental imperatives and of its interventions to diffuse these tensions through protective legislations, tribal welfare programmes and electoral representation, failed to protect the interests of tribals to any significant extent. The more recent history of resistance and assertion of a right to livelihood under the banner of Rajasthan Kisan Sangathan has upset and challenged the hegemony of established vested interests. These vested interests themselves were established in the course of the development of this region. The experience of the adivasis of Hadmatiya, a year after they first began voicing their protest, bears witness to the violence of the response to the organised attempts of the adivasis to fight for their democratic rights. The wider dimension of these tensions is revealed in the range of forces that seem to have rallied against the Sangathan, especially in the aftermath of the second attack on Hadmatiya.

The PUDR sent a three-member team to Udaipur district (28 March -1 April). The team visited Hadmatiya. Apart from talking to villagers of Hadmatiya the team was able to meet adivasis from the adjoining villages of Dhavda, Ghatet, Dolpura, Sanjela, Malasula and Hadmatiya. In Udaipur the team interviewed district authorities, (the Superintendent Police and the Collector, Udaipur) officials of the Forest Department and the Tribal Welfare Commission, and spokesmen of the various political parties (Congress, BJP, CPM, CPI and Janata Dal) and the Rajasthan Kisan Sangathan. In addition, the team met prominent individuals like the veteran freedom fighter Balwant Singh Mehla, and the former Commissioner of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, B.D. Sharma, who had visited Hadmatiya last year. The following is a report of the PUDR fact-finding in Udaipur.

Major State Legislative Provisions for Tribal Welfare

The Rajasthan Tenancy Act, 1955

Notification for concessions relating to forest produce, 1955

The Rajasthan Relief of Agriculturist Indebtedness Act, 1957

Sagari Abolition Act, 1961

Rajasthan Money Lenders Act, 1963

The Rajasthan Land Revenue (allotment of land for agricultural purposes) Rules, 1970

Rajasthan Scheduled Debtors (Liquidation of indebtedness) Act, 1976

Reservations for SC/ST: electoral constituencies, government service; housing plots; housing' licences for mine quarries.

Provisions for education, vocational training, self employment, credit and co-operatives under Tribal Sub Plan (TSP). The TSP covers tribal population of 41.83 lakhs in the state. From the second five year to 1990, Rs. 882.59 crores has been spent on TSP areas in the state under various schemes.

Hadmatiya Village

Hadmatiya is an adivasi village, situated in Salumbar tehsil of south Udaipur. The village was settled about two generations ago, when adivasis migrating down from the hills, cleared the open scrub forests and began cultivating the land.

A kuccha path leads into the village. The uneven rocky terrain is broken in patches where the fields are being prepared for cultivation. But most of the land is covered by dry scrubs and an occasional cluster of trees. Mud-houses are scattered in phallas (hamlets) across the village. At present there are about 200 households living in the village.

Rainfed agriculture is the basis of the village economy. Maize is the main crop but when the rains are good a second crop of wheat and gram can also be sown. The moist tankbed has traditionally been used for sowing winter crops in the dry season.

The profusion of surface rocks in the fields and a soil cover that can support only modest crop yields have restricted the scope of cultivation. Even though the individual holding of about seven bighas does not seem meagre, the cultivator is rarely able to eke out a subsistence from such a holding. The adivasi household, in normal years, has enough only for three four months subsistence. In better years the

household stocks could last for about seven-eight months. Thus for the adivasi dependent on a precarious subsistence off rainfed agriculture, deficit is permanent.

Only one-third of the cultivated area receives irrigation. The Madar-ka-nala is the main source of irrigation. A new tank was built after the last drought two years ago. The village well is used mainly for drinking water and the charas (persian wheel) is in a state of disrepair. A few years back large sums were sanctioned for tubewells under the jeewandhara scheme of the LIC. These sanctions were largely under false names. At present all four wells (costing between Rs 1500 to Rs 1800 each) are lying incomplete. In any case, tubewells are useless since the village has no electricity connections. Even so, the overriding need in this region is not additional expenditure on tubewells. The villagers felt that the Department of Rural Development should take up bunding and levelling operations (medhbandi) instead, since better land and water management are crucial for the development of agriculture in this dry, inhospitable tract. With little resources of their own, to speak of, the villagers are unable to invest in such operations themselves despite having enough under-employed labour at their disposal.

The forest provides some possibility of self-provisioning. While the village itself does not have any forest land the adjoining village of Ghatet has about 105 ha. of forest land. Timber that can be used for house-building, is not available in this forest, but the adivasis are able to collect upto eight to ten bundles of fuelwood, in a month. A headload of fuelwood can be sold in the adjoining vyapari qasba (market village) of Bhabrana for about Rs 10-12. But this source of income depends on the whims and vagaries of the forest officials. (The rajput trader-moneylenders of Bhabrana are also engaged in forest contracts and are closely linked to the forest officials). With the depletion of forests the tribals are forced to go longer and longer distances even for their own requirements of fuel-wood. Unlike the forests in the adjoining tehsils minor produce like gum and katha are not available in these forests.

The importance of animal husbandry, particularly the raising of goat and sheep, in regions of dry-land farming, cannot be underplayed. The cumulative impact of successive years of drought and the dearth of pastures and grazing land has, however, told on the livestock of the tribals. Ever since green fodder has become practically non-existent, milch-cattle have stopped yielding milk.

With the livelihood traditionally derived from land, forests and livestock becoming increasingly insecure, the adivasi is forced to seek employment elsewhere. The possibility of finding work as agricultural labour is limited. Further very few industries have been set up in the area. So the adivasi generally seeks casual employment, locally through contractors, in public works, construction sites or hotels and dhabas. Such casual labour is insecure, uncertain and grossly underpaid. Daily wages for both men and women, are about Rs 10-12 in the region. This is about half the legislated minimum daily wage of

Rs 22. The villagers also go to Aspur, Salumbar and Jhallara after the rains to cut grass, and to Udaipur for casual employment as construction workers. The Sanjela soapstone mines are not very popular but many have gone to Ahmedabad and even Vadod to seek employment as loaders, or in dhabas and hotels. Such migration is usually of 4-5 months duration, in the course of which they normally collect upto Rs 300-400.

Available employment opportunities are evidently inadequate to ensure adivasi families even a minimum subsistence. Over the years the adivasis of Hadmatiya have got indebted to a moneylending-trading family based in Salumbar. Starting with a small trade in cloth this family has grown to control bulk of the land in Hadmatiya. His usurious practices have bound the villagers in a cycle of perpetual debt. Jetiya and Nar-ayan's father had taken a loan of Rs 200 which now amounts to Rs 5000 even after transferring 6 bighas of land. Another loan of Rs 250, taken fifteen years back has Rs 2500 outstanding even after the debtor gave Rs 500 and a goat towards repayment of the loan.

Gradually this family gained control over bulk of the village land. At the time of the land reform settlement of the fifties, 278 bighas in the village were allotted to the moneylender (575 bighas if we include his land in the adjoining villages). After the implementation of Land Ceiling Act in the seventies, 90 bighas were transferred to the villagers. However, they were not aware, until recently, that the land belonged to them and have been paying a one-fifth share of their harvest as rent. Those whose fields have been mortgaged to the moneylender part with half their harvest. He has also taken over the cultivable land of the tank-bed which has traditionally been cultivated by nine adivasi families. A large number of the adivasis are hounded by the growing burden of debt to work as sagaris (bonded labour) on the moneylenders' fields. They are forced to borrow bullocks on the obligation of paying a bag of grain at harvest. (That is after a harvest of about six bags of grain from the mortgaged field, the adivasi is left with only two to subsist on, after paying the dues of four bags of grain to the money-lender).

Every bit of protective legislation that has been promulgated to safeguard the interests of the tribals against such exploitative practices has been flouted. Conditions in terms of infrastructure and community services in the village are abysmal. Drinking water is brought from the village well and hand-pumps. Electricity poles have been put up but wiring has not been completed for more than two years. There is a primary school three kms away but classes are rarely held despite the appointment of five teachers. The nearest primary health centre is at Matasula, nearly 10 kms away. The hospital is at Salumbar 35 kms away, but there is no public transport available from nearby to take a patient to the hospital. The States developmental and welfare efforts have apparently left the lives of the tribals untouched.

However, there is nothing remarkable in the story of this tribal village in Salumbar tehsil. The same processes are at work in different ways across the tribal belt in Udaipur, Dungarpur and Banswara districts of

South Rajasthan. But the experience of Hadmatiya is important in that it reveals with stark brutality the repercussions of the organised attempt of the villagers to resist these processes. Not only have they stopped paying the extortionate dues demanded by the moneylender, or working as sagaris on his fields, they have also asserted their right to cultivate the tank-bed in the village and prevented the illegal removal of timber from the forest. Their struggle is a demand for the actual implementation of the protective legislation that seeks to safeguard them from usurious exploitation. More importantly it signifies a questioning of the process of development that was instrumental in denying them their claim to a livelihood. To understand their struggles one has to first comprehend the manner in which this process of development affected the land and the people of this tribal belt.

The Land and the People

This region was originally part of the Mewar State under Sisodiya rule. The tribals had been pushed into the dense forests of the Aravallis with the onslaught of the rajput clans. They had, however, begun moving into the plains and cultivating land even before the nineteenth century. Since the better irrigated and more fertile lands had already been occupied by cultivating castes like gujars, dangis dhakkars and jats, tribal settlements were largely confined to the outlying portions of the Mewar state. Rajput power was wielded by the disposition of clans and lineages across the princely state. The outlying arcs were assigned to thikanedars of the first rank, like the Chundawat thikanedar of Salumbar. Under the relative autonomy afforded by the nature of state intervention under the thikanedars the traditional modes of social organisation of the tribal communities and their rights to occupy and subsist on land and forest resources was not interfered with. Some tribal chieftains were granted bhum tenures which left the communities internal organisation unaffected even while imposing the obligation of paying a tribute to the thikanedar. The beginnings of relations with merchants and moneylenders from the towns was established. However the conflicts between the Rana and the thikanedars of outlying areas like Salumbar were crucial in preserving the relative autonomy and insularity of the tribal regions from the modernising influences of the British administration.

But by 1880, the impact of these influences was beginning to make its presence felt in the State. The Udaipur Ohittor line was finally constructed. Three irrigation projects suggested by a British survey team were initiated. The first settlement operations under Wingate were started in some areas along with the first attempt to carry out a census in the state. Forest projects were initiated. The impact on the tribal regions was immediate. The tribals' right over forest produce was brought into question with the imposition of heavy levies on the collection of grass timber, fuel-wood and mahua, and the attempt to transfer the

liquor monopoly to outsiders. The collection of balawa and rakhwali (protection fees levied on travellers) by the tribals was banned. The cumulative response to all these infringements on the traditional rights of the tribal communities was the massive bhil uprising of 1881. Subsequently the tribals were allowed to retain most elements of control over forest resources. Encroachment of outside contractors was also stopped. However in 1885 there were instances of tribal chieftains themselves contracting out forestland.

The twenties witnessed a widespread movement against the prevailing revenue system. The bhils in the region were mobilised in large numbers under the leadership of Motilal Tcjawat. Their demand was for the equalisation of revenue rates in the tribal region. With the formation of the Praja Mandal in 1938, the movements in the State were brought into closer contact with the nationalist movement. Apart from demanding social and constitutional reform measures this organisation also took up the issue of sagari abolition and the economic uplift of tribals.

It is in this period that mines were opened up and the beginnings of industrial establishments in cotton ginning, sugar oil-milling and also ayurvedic medicine was made. In 1943 a department of industry was set up. But it was only after the princely state of Mewar was merged with the newly formed state of Rajasthan in post independence India that the real onslaught on the traditional rights of the tribal communities was launched, primarily through legislative interventions seeking to define and rationalise land tenures and forest laws. The history of how the tribal communities were pushed further and further to the edge of subsistence is the history of the systematic disruption of the communities traditional interactions with land and forest resources. These resources were progressively commandeered for developmental imperatives that transformed the life and livelihood of the tribal.

FORESTS

The teak forests in this region apart from being a rich source of timber and fuelwood also yielded mahua, gum, katha, tendu, and bamboo. Apart from providing a subsistence for adivasis these resources are used industrially and commercially. Adivasis also gathered honey, edible roots and fruits from these forests. Animals were grazed in such lands. Under the 1953 Rajasthan Forest Act, common lands and forests were brought under the direct control of the government which held the right to declare any part of such state property as reserved. Once a forest land has been declared reserved it cannot be released to the villagers. The right to settle transfer or commute the rights of communities was left to the discretion of the state (The forest settlement officer). Valra (shifting cultivation) was prohibited. The right of pasture, thoroughfare, watercourse and forest produce were within the jurisdiction of the forest settlement officer. Trespassing, grazing, clearing, stripping barks and leaves and removing any forest produce were punishable offences. Even in protected forests where the state had to record the rights of villagers the state had

the right to declare certain species or trees reserved. Over the decades the proportion of reserved forests in Udaipur district has increased from about one third to more than four-fifth of the total forest area. Along with the increasing appropriation of the forest resources by the state and private agencies to "reserve" them for commercial and industrial uses is the steady depletion of forest cover, from a quarter to less than one fifth of the districts area in the past four decades. The forested cover of the Aravallis declined from two-thirds to one-tenth its land area in the same period. All this has severely affected the ecological balance of the region. Even the procedure for notification of certain lands as forests was arbitrary. In Ratankakar village 14 sq kms of the village abadi (part of the village where the adivasis live) was declared to be forest land. While the nationalization of the private forests of the jagirdars allowed enough scope for them to undertake felling on a large scale and encash their assets, before handing over the land to the forest department, the rights of the tribal to commonly occupied forest land was not recognised. Further despite the stipulated regulation that the notification of forest boundaries be communicated to the villagers, if necessary by the beating of drums, at least three months before the actual demarcation as reserved forest areas, most villagers became aware of their loss of access only at the final stages of the operations, when fencing was started.

The Forest Act grants certain concessions to tribals, in place of (heir traditional community rights. Rich tribal is allowed upto 168 cubic feet of timber for building his house every third year, and 15 cubic feet for implements. However with the growing scarcity of the trees that yield timber the tribals have to move further and further in search of such wood. They are allowed to collect headloads of wood for fuel between November and April and use the forest for grazing from October to June. Even then, these concessions are available only after the forest officer issues the necessary permit to the tribal. The tribal also has to get a certificate from the sarpanch or patwari of the village. Needless to add that these procedures apart from allowing enough scope for corruption and collusion, are also too cumbersome to follow. The adivasi thus ends up committing cognizable offences while exercising a right to livelihood.

LAND

The nature of tribal tenures is such that the definitions adopted by the state could not bring them under its purview. The Land Reform and Resumption of Jagirdari Act (1952) was enacted to abolish the system of jagirdari. The jagirdar was to be compensated for the loss of property by as much as seven times the gross annual income from the jagir. Further, the jagirdar could be allotted land as khudkasht (land under self-cultivation) out of land deemed to be surrendered or abandoned by the tenants, land held by subtenants directly from the jagirdar and culturable unoccupied land in the vicinity of any village in the jagir. Effectively this allowed the jagirdar to retain control over most lands occupied by tribals (except that of the tribal

chieftains under the bhum tenure) and use coercive means to evict tenants. A large portion of the commonlands over which the adivasis enjoyed customary rights of usage were transferred to the Khatedari (occupancy) of the jagirdar.

DISTRICT AND TEHSIL PROFILE			
	Rajasthan	Udaipur	Salumbar
Population (a)	3426	235	70
Density	100	136	153
Female	919	977	997
Literates (b)	24.38	22.01	16.03
Urban (b)	21.05	15.07	13.05
ST (b)	12.21	34.33	47.71
SC (b)	17.04	8.21	5.71
Forest Area (c)		18.18	14.90
Net Sown Area (c)		8.02	26.35

a.b (a) Figures in thousands
 (b) Figures in % of total population
 (c) Figures as percentage of total area

Note: The former district of Udaipur comprised 17 tehsils. A new district, Rajnagar has been carved out of the northern tehsils of the district, subsequent to the PUDR visit on 7.4.91.

The fact that tenancy reform was taken up only after the abolition of jagirdari was attempted, undermines the efficacy of the former, especially when one takes into account the clauses for retention of jagir lands. These clauses presuppose well defined and protected tenurial rights on lands traditionally occupied by adivasi communities. The presupposition is totally invalid. The Rajasthan Tenancy Act (1955) did not make any attempt to acknowledge the occupancy rights that tribal communities have traditionally enjoyed with respect to commonlands. The land under valra (shifting cultivation), or the use of tank-beds for cultivation in the dry season, the right to graze animals or cultivate occasionally the unoccupied land around the village; are all integral to the social and economic organisation of tribals.

Commonlands available for community use were decreasing steadily as a consequence of state legislations. Some part of these commons had already been transferred to the private ownership of jagirdars. A large portion was subsequently taken over by the state after being designated as siwai chak (unoccupied lands). The remaining lands, where the rights of pasture had been established locally, were vested with the gram panchayats charagah (grazing lands). The process of recording right of usage delineating actual charagah was one where the proof of possessing private khatedari rights on village commons came to be more important than establishing the existence of customary rights of the adivasis. These rights exercised by the community, are not comprehensible through notions of private property rights. Land settlements attempted to graft categories of land-use (land under cultivation, cultivable wastes, pastures, groves, land not available for cultivation, etc) derived for revenue purposes onto the commonlands of villages.

Quite apart from the fact that the notion of property adopted in land legislation is alien to, and does not comprehend, the tribal unquestioned right to occupy and subsist off land and forest as a community is the absence of any form of records except for the bhumi tenures granted to tribal chieftains. Even though three settlement proceedings have been undertaken since the fifties, no records of tenants and sharecropping has been done in the past decade. So the formidable power of the written record invariably goes against those who do not have access to record making personnel or the courts of arbitration. Not only does this provide a basis of collusion of sections of the adivasis with the established vested interests but the process of differentiation set in motion by the courts and the market-place accentuates tensions within tribal communities.

In addition to these processes is the state-sponsored privatisation of traditional commonlands. Some of these lands had been settled as abadis or been granted to government and private agencies for industrial establishments or other non-agricultural uses. In the mid-seventies large amounts of the remaining siwai chak was allotted to adivasis. With the allotment of common grazing lands for individual cultivation the basis for subsistence through livestock rearing was undermined for large sections of the adivasi population. At the same time the process of internal differentiation within adivasi communities was taken one step further. Protective legislation seeking to prevent the alienation of tribal lands by non-tribals also facilitated such differentiation.

PROTECTIVE LEGISLATION AND WELFARE MEASURES

State interventions in acquiring common lands and forests dispossessed tribal communities of their traditional rights of occupancy and produce in these lands. It is an eloquent statement on the intention

of land legislations that it was deemed necessary to compensate the jagirdar for the loss of property but not the tribal for his loss of livelihood.

Even so the professed attempt to control the alienation of tribal lands through the provisions of the Tenancy Act (Sections 42b, 43a, 49a, 175, 184) that prohibited the transfer of tribal lands through sale, mortgage, sublease, gift or bequest were intrinsically doomed to failure. Firstly, both the parties to the transfer were subject to ejectment proceedings, so very few adivasis initiated law suits. Further, the fact that ejectment proceedings would be stalled on payment of cash compensation (Section 176) allowed the moneyed to continue acquiring lands. Finally, the fact that these provisions were not applicable to transfers that had taken place before 1956 and to lands where tenancies had already been acquired allowed enough scope for non-adivasis to acquire and retain adivasi land. It is hardly surprising that the legal machinery itself became instrumental in the alienation of tribal lands. In any case, as long as land rights were subject to the rule of the market no amount of protective legislation, however well intentioned, would be able to prevent land alienations.

Three sets of legislation, The Rajasthan Relief of Agricultural Indebtedness Act (1957), The Rajasthan Moneylenders Act (1961), and The Rajasthan Scheduled Debtors Act (1976), have been enacted to protect adivasis from usurious practises. Alternative institutional mechanisms for the provision of credit like the Large Agricultural Multi Purpose Societies (LAMPS) have been initiated by the government. Neither the legislation nor the alternative sources of credit have been able to make a dent on the hold of the moneylender over the adivasis.

DISTRICT UDAIPUR

Udaipur falls in the periphery of the Bhil tribal belt which extends from Dungarpur and Banswara to parts of Gujarat and Jhabua. It is also contiguous with the Mina territory which has its core in Jaipur and Sawai Madhopur. The tribal population of the district in 1981 was about one third the districts total population. Of this population nearly 50% are Bhils and 45% Minas. The social status accorded to Minas is higher than that accorded to Bhils. Many Bhil clans have consequently started designating themselves as Minas.

The Aravallis cuts across the tribal tract in Udaipur. This tract extends from the densely forested tehsil of Kotra on the western flank of the range, through Kherwara, Girwa, Jhadol and Dhariawad tehsils in the central Aravalli division of the district to Sarada and Salumbar in the forested uplands to the east of the Aravallis. Som, Jakham, Tidi, Mahi, Gomati and Godi rivers traverse the southern portions of this belt. Irrigation works have been constructed on the Jakham, Som-Kadgar and Daya. The Jaisamand reservoir also supplies water for irrigation.

Rainfall is heavier in this part of the district (relative to the northern tehsils of Deogarh and Bhim). With the depletion of the forest cover of the Aravallis, which was about 60% in the fifties and is only 10% currently, the recurrence of drought is more frequent and the pace of soil erosion has accelerated. Since 1957 this region has experienced drought in 19 years. More than two-fifths of the tribal population is dependent on rainfed agriculture for their livelihood.

(According to a survey done by the Tribal Research Institute, Udaipur, in the tribal area of Pratapgarh about 60% of the debt of adivasi households was incurred at the hands of moneylenders.)

The stranglehold of moneylenders derives from the conditions compelling adivasi families to take periodic recourse to credit even to tide over basic consumption needs. The cooperative societies are not attuned to the conditions that create the debt burden. The LAMPS do not demand any collateral other than personal security and have begun giving loans even for social expenditure. Even so the stipulation that all previous loans have to be cleared before any new sanctions are made restricts the scope of such societies. The adivasi family's need for credit is not only recurrent and cumulative it is also immediate, and the moneylender remains an indispensable source of credit.

Along with the burden of usurious exactions is the practice of using debt to compel labour. The Sagari Abolition Act (1961) was aimed at wiping out this practice. Strangely enough in this Act the practice of keeping sagaris was not a cognizable offence. The more stringent central legislation, The Bonded Labour Abolition Act (1976), however, amended this to make the practice a punishable crime. But the only effect of this legislation was to change the form in which underpaid labour was exacted. Sharecropping arrangements have become the more prevalent mode of debt bondage.

The mid-seventies had witnessed the initiation of a considerable movement, led by the CPI to abolish sagari, regularise settlements of adivasis in forestlands (at present there are 20,000 such cases) and to write off debt burdens. This was also the period in which the first Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) was launched in south Rajasthan, as part of the new Integrated Tribal Development Programme (ITDP). The initiation of the ITDP (which includes apart from the TSP, the Modified Area Development Approach for tribal clusters and scattered tribal households and the Sahariya scheme) signified a definite shift in the strategic understanding of tribal welfare programmes. Until then the tribal welfare programmes had focussed on the tribal development blocks of Dungarpur and Banswara, which had been identified under the Second Five Year Plan, with the specific view to the development of the tribal area. It was to this end that funds were channelised largely into schemes for minor irrigation and social and community services, in particular medical services, power and drinking water.

While the focus in the Tribal Development Block Programme was on the development of region and infrastructure, as indispensable to tribal development, under the Integrated Tribal Development Programme, the focus is now on identifying individual beneficiaries. Apart from the districts of Dungarpur and Banswara, the Tribal Sub Plan included in its purview seven panchayat samities of Udaipur.

The bulk of the TSP expenditure is allocated for the setting up Ashram Chattravas which provide free food and lodging to adivasi students. The hostels have not made much of an impact on

the educational opportunities available to the adivasis.

As far as the development of agriculture is concerned the schemes under the TSP have primarily to do with developing sericulture and horticulture, both of which are aimed at tribal beneficiaries who have irrigated land. This automatically excludes the majority of the adivasis of the region from its purview. Irrigation investment is largely for lift irrigation even though power is not available to most villages. No attempt has been made to undertake large scale bunding and levelling operations or to initiate schemes of afforestation which apart from involving the collective labour of large numbers of people, are also crucially necessary for the economy of the region.

The IRDP schemes in the region have been focussed on providing animals (mainly goats and sheep) to individual beneficiaries. The non availability of grazing grounds and fodder and the absence of necessary veterinary services undermines the usefulness of the schemes. Even if one discounts the leakage of all the funds that are being pumped into these programmes (1048 lakhs in 1990-1) the irrelevance of these schemes to the struggles of the tribal communities, attempting to wrest a meagre livelihood off land and forests is brutally apparent.

The problem for the adivasi is quite clearly not simply that of landlessness but one of tenurial status, indebtedness and nature of occupancy rights. These problems are not separate from those of the economy of the region. The depletion of forest cover, the increasing problems of soil erosion, the growing aridity of the region have further undermined the tenuous subsistence tribal communities derive from rainfed agriculture. With forest becoming national property, to be deployed for "public good" the possibility of self provisioning outside the market economy is no longer available. The takeover of common pastures and the depletion of green fodder have affected live-stock rearing. There has been apparently an all round assault on the material bases of the survival of tribal communities. At the same time no alternative sources of livelihood have emerged. Unable to eke a subsistence out of agriculture in this region the tribal joins the uncertain market for casual labour.

Under the new ITDP Schemes, the issues of economic and social uplift of tribals have been separated from those of regional development. One outcome of this distorted perspective, that removes the adivasis from their moorings in the natural economy of the region, is apparent in the contradictory perceptions of the forest department and the tribal welfare department to the issue of concessions in forest produce. The Forest Department officials are building a case attributing the depletion of forest cover to the concessions granted to the tribals. The estimated requirement of timber is about 70,000 metric tonnes while that of fuel wood is as much as 3 lakhs. But the existing forest cover can support only upto 90,000 tonnes of wood consumption without any adverse impact on forest cover. So for the Forest department the concessions granted to tribal communities is not only unsustainable but a major ecological hazard. (This view echoes the recommendations of the Bhanot

Commission, 1976, that recommends the restriction of the scope of such concessions only to small and marginal farmers and that too, only once in five years for house-building)

To officials in the tribal welfare department, however, this suggestion seems preposterous. This view recognises that deforestation has taken place mainly because of unsustainable levels of industrial and commercial exploitation of forest resources in the past four decades. Shifting the onus of responsibility for this process to the adivasis subsistence demands from the forests does not seem either fair or plausible. After all, as an official from the Tribal Welfare dept pointed out, "would any one destroy their own home"?

The need for a massive afforestation policy is definitely not in dispute. Forest policy while accepting the necessity of forests for industrial and commercial uses, and in ensuring the maintenance of the ecological balance, tends to relegate the needs and claims of communities subsisting and living off forests to the background. These forests, however continue to be an integral aspect of the livelihood of tribals. In Rajasthan farm forestry has been the main plank of afforestation efforts. Such afforestation projects do not have the employment potential of social forestry schemes. But like social forestry schemes (which largely subserve industrial and commercial ends), these projects are not targeted at adivasis, the main users. Forest development programmes relying largely on raising plants through farmers, have been initiated since 1977-8 in this region. The cultivators are given 30 paisa for each plant they raise. The absurdity of such attempts at coping with rapid deforestation in the region does not need much comment. Not only do such afforestation projects fail to effect a significant increase in forest cover, they also fail to involve the adivasis in large numbers. Such efforts to mobilise the labour of adivasis would undoubtedly be more in consonance with the needs of tribal communities

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and ecological considerations.

The state's developmental efforts have failed to provide a sustainable basis for the welfare of tribals. The new strategy of the seventies also sought to diffuse organised oppositions to the oppressive development strategies the state was pursuing, by focusing on individual beneficiaries within the adivasi community.

The Rajasthan Kisan Sangathan is a mass organisation that has been mobilising tribals in south Rajasthan since 1980. They are popularly believed to be associated with the Marxist-Leninist ideology. From organising adivasis in the district of Banswara the Sangathan's base has spread to Chittorgarh and Dungarpur. Their entry into south Udaipur is more recent. The issues taken up by the Sangathan range from those pertaining to usurious exploitation, corruption, unfair trading practices and hoarding to illegal tree felling by contractors and falsification of land records by the patwari. The Sangathan also took up the social problems facing tribal communities including liquor consumption, oppression of women and extravagant feasts during marriages and festivals. The movement was asserting the rights of adivasis to a better livelihood through the use of common property resources that had traditionally been the material basis of their communities. The usurpation of community rights

over land and forests is well chronicled. Another facet of miscontinual encroachment on traditional rights of tribal communities is revealed in the Bijwa Mala temple controversy. This temple at Aspur has belonged for centuries to the Aspur adivasis and has been attracting adivasis even from Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. The rajputs of Aspur have been attempting to take over this temple and the funds that are flowing into it. The case is still in the court and a receiver has been appointed to the temple. Strangely enough, the temple pujari and the villagers of Aspur were not initially deemed to be one of the parties in the dispute.

It is perhaps a reflection of the failure of both the administrative and juridical machinery and of the dominant political parties in the region, that the developmental process failed to protect the livelihood and dignity of the adivasi communities. While the social and economic cost of such a developmental strategy may seem to be offset by a barrage of legislative and welfare measures, these measures in fact reinforced the inequities bred by this strategy. In this sense the two are not in contradiction with each other but part of the same process. So too is the repression unleashed on the adivasis when they begin organising themselves to protect their constitutionally guaranteed rights. The collusion between protection and repression, between agencies of the state and dominant social groups, when adivasis organise is evident from the experience of Hadmatiya.

The Attacks on Hadmatiya

Tensions had been brewing in Hadmatiya with the continual harassment and extortion the villagers were facing at the hands of the Salumbar based moneylender, Tasdukh Hussain. Villagers from Hadmatiya contacted the activists of Rajasthan Kisan Sangathan, sometime in the beginning of 1990. The immediate issue was that of cultivation rights on the village tankbed traditionally with the adivasis.

On 2nd March, some villagers commenced the cultivation of moong in the tank-bed. By 5th March, 1990, they were threatened and the next day an FIR had been lodged by the money lender accusing 37 adivasis of theft and trespassing (The case is still pending). At 11.00 am the same morning the SHO Jhallara (Mohammad Sharii) and the SHO Salumbar (Narain Singh), along with 9 other constables reached the village. Some women were manhandled. The provoked villagers retaliated by throwing stones and a few policemen were beaten. The police retreated and promptly filed cases of assault and attempt to murder against the villagers. The police vendetta was, however, not limited to registering such cases. The Sangathan leaders had met the district administration and an impartial enquiry by the administration into money lending and land-ownership in Hadmatiya had been ordered. But the police went on a rampage even before this investigation, scheduled for 4th April, could commence.

On 2nd April, 14 jeeps, 4 trucks and a busload of policemen and some henchmen of the

moneylender arrived near the village temple. The village was surrounded and the villagers chased and herded forcibly to a field near Dhavda. Indiscriminate firing followed. Women were stripped and beaten. The team met Bhera whose leg had to be amputated because of bullet injuries. His wife was so severely beaten that her arms were fractured.

There was no authorisation for this firing which caused injury to thirty-five adivasis. The police claimed provocation and lodged cases of attempt to murder against 47 villagers. The case has been commuted to that of assault and is currently pending against 30 villagers. The false cases and the firing are part of the attempt to intimidate and terrorise the villagers who had begun organising against the exploitative practices of Tasdukh Hussain. Despite the fact that many of these practices should have come under the purview of the protective legislation for tribals, police assistance was made available to the money-lender and this brutal attack was launched.

After last year's firing the villagers of Hadmatiya refused to pay Tasdukh Hussain any rent and began resisting his extortionate demands. Even in the face of police reprisal cases were filed against the SHO Salambar and the SHO Jhallara. The activities of the Rajasthan Kisan Sangathan began antagonising a range of people. The patwari was forced to return bribe money and to explain to the villagers the status of their land rights. They opposed the unfair practices and hoarding activities of traders in Bhabrana and adjoining villages (including the Sahkari Samiti retailer Abhay Singh of Badatalab). The forest officials and the associated interests who had been getting rich of the fat of the land, found themselves increasingly unable to continue the illegal trade in forest produce. The activists of the Sangathan in Hadmatiya had put a virtual stop to illegal felling. Truckloads of wood were not allowed to be removed from the forest. The Sangathan even lodged a case against the forester Shambhu Singh and a trader from Bhabrana, Bhawarlal Somani, for assaulting tribals of the village. Worse than the loss of income was the fact that the tribals were somehow "being given the impression that the forest belongs to them".

Apart from taking on money lending and trading interests, the police and the forest mafia, the Sangathan also antagonised sections of the tribal population. They posed a challenge to the traditional leadership in the village communities. Tejiya, the gamethi of the nearby village of Jhadap was one such tribal chief who had begun feeling increasingly threatened by the growing base of the Sangathan in his village. About twenty families in Jhadap support the Sangathan. The gamethi traditionally has the absolute authority over the lives of the other adivasis. Tejiya had prescribed a code of conduct for the villagers. This had to do with ritual offerings at marriages and feasts apart from allowing him the right to levy fines for any disregard for the code.

It is therefore not entirely accidental that the recent attack on Hadmatiya was precipitated by an altercation between two of its villagers and an adivasi dumper driver from Jhadap on 28th February, 1991. The form in which these smoldering tensions manifested themselves subsequent to this skirmish has allowed the real issues to get obscured. On the day after this incident, some persons from Hadmatiya went to Jhadap to

settle the issue. They were attacked and two of the group were detained forcibly. A group of about 25- 30 persons had to rescue them. The next day two groups from the two adivasi villages congregated near Bhabrana in a tense confrontation, without any outbreak of clashes. By the time the police reached the spot the crowd had dispersed.

At eight the same evening four persons from Hadmatiya informed the Jhallara thana of their fears of an attack. By 11 the same night police reinforcements had been sent by the Superintendent Police, Udaipur to the thana. The patrolling police discovered "nothing untoward" but the Hadmatiya villagers assert that meetings and plans were afoot that evening for the next day's attack. Bhavarlal Somani, Avtar Singh and Lakshman Singh of Bhabrana, Abhay Singh of Badatalab, Tej Singh of Bhopalpur and Sarup Singh of Kothar and Shambhu Singh the Forest Officer and other powerful persons of the region are reported to have been involved in this meeting. Their antagonism to the growing activism of the tribals has been brewing for a long time. In any case, it seems unlikely that a minor altercation would lead to the such mob violence without more powerful backing. (This backing becomes more clear in the aftermath of the attack).

Around 11.30 on the morning of 3rd March, an armed mob of about 400 to 500 persons had collected near Hadmatiya. They consisted of people from Jhadap, Bhabrana, Manpur, Maiasula, Bhopalpur, Badatalab, Kothar and Lohagarh. The first house to be attacked was that of Mangal (Sanjela village), the president of the district unit of the RKS. The attackers systematically looted and burnt houses in those phallas of Hadmatiya where the Sangathan activists lived- Dhadawada, Sagdawada, Garnethi, Gaddha and Phutatalab. Most of the villagers escaped to the nearby fields. Those who could not, like Bhera and Lalki, were badly beaten. Goats were slaughtered and burnt. Seventy houses were destroyed. All that remains in the wreckage of the gutted dwellings are charred and crumbling walls, broken tiles, broken chakkis and grain bins, charred remnants of the wooden doors and scattered ash.

The police arrived too late to prevent the carnage or round up the attackers. This despite the fact that four persons from the village had gone to the thana the previous night and requested police protection for the village. They were detained that night for "their own security" but no one from the thana thought it necessary to accompany them to the village the next morning. We were told that a few villagers had returned twice that morning (3.3.91) to the thana to report the congregation of an armed mob near Hadmatiya but no assistance was sent. According to the S.P, Udaipur a police contingent was sent as soon as the patrolling police saw smoke arising from the village. Whatever the point of time or circumstances in which the police arrived it is clear that the attackers had a field day and that no serious attempts were made either to prevent or restrain the attack. For it is difficult to believe that an armed mob of 500 persons could become invisible to the patrolling police, on duty explicitly to prevent a confrontation at Hadmatiya. Also, if the terrorised villagers could go a number of miles from the village to the thana on foot, that morning, why couldn't the police with its better transport facilities make it on time to the village? The contrast with the police forces prompt assistance to the money-lender Tasdukh Hussain, last year, is a stark

reflection of the insidiously partisan role of the local police.

The first arrests were made only the next morning after the SP, Feroz Khan, arrived on the spot and surveyed the village. The Hadmatiya villagers were understandably wary of police interventions, given their bitter experience of police "protection" and initially refused to file FIRs. (This refusal is now being held against them). Six persons were arrested. They are all adivasis belonging to the dayma tribe. (The daymas are listed as a criminal tribe. More relevantly, many of them work on the fields of the rajputs in Manpur). The main perpetrators of the attack according to the Sangathan activists continue to remain outside the purview of legal action. The sense of unrestrained power and confidence the attackers seem to enjoy was brought home to the PUDR team when they were cautioned by officials against visiting the hostile villages of Bhabrana and Jhadap, three weeks after the attack took place.

The estimated loss is more than 4 lakhs. Two lakhs have been sanctioned by the government in addition to Rs 1500 per family under a group insurance scheme. This amount is yet to reach the villagers. In the meantime provisions for food for about seven days were made. Only there are no stoves or fuel to cook with and nothing with which to grind the grain. A blanket has been distributed to those families with more than 5 members, that is 50 blankets for the 365 affected persons. The government has promised supplies of kelu (clay tiles) to repair their roofs. But the charred wreckage of what was once the home of the adivasis needs much more than a roof. The wooden structure that supports the mud walls has to be built again. Timber for house construction can be collected free of charge by the villagers but there are no forests nearby which have the right kind of wood. More important the requirements of rebuilding 70 houses cannot be met without a major felling operation. The normal cost of building houses is about Rs 8000. House building is normally something that is planned at least two years in advance. Labour for building is normally provided by the community. But to rebuild 70 houses together requires more labour than the village can provide collectively.

The attempts at granting relief to the adivasis who have lost their homes are apparently as far removed from their struggle for survival as the process of development that has denied them the right to a decent life and livelihood.

The role of the local politicians, in aftermath of the attack is revealing. The Congress ex-MLA Kamalabhai (Lasadiya constituency) threw caution and the constraints of pre-electoral appearances to the wind and campaigned vociferously against the grant of relief to the villagers. The fact that he lost the last elections by a narrow margin of 800 votes, may be partly due to the influence of the Sangathan. The stand of the state president of the Congress, H.P. Prabhakar was more politic. Relief, according to him, should be given to any victimised party be he an expropriated jagirdar in need of rehabilitation or an impoverished adivasi who has lost his home and all his assets. The local BJP ML A, Narayanbhai, was less visible despite his covert support to the demand for the release of the arrested attackers. Even though Narayanbhai did not visit the village after the attack, the BJP affiliated organisation the Vanvasi Kalyan Parishad (VKP) surveyed the area and issued a variety of unsubstantiated charges (Rajasthan

Patrika, 19/3/91) against the Sangathan, including a ridiculous claim that the Sangathan was forcing religious conversions. Among the most vicious of these charges was the threat allegedly issued by the Sangathan to the sarpanch of Bhabrana that they would kidnap "women of five Jain families" if he failed to pay Rs. 50,000. The adivasis of Hadmatiya are conscious of the VKP's hostility to their democratic struggles and refused to accept the lotas and thalis sent to them by way of relief after the attack.

The attack on Hadmatiya is clearly an attack on the Sangathan. The houses that were burnt were all those of Sangathan supporters. Repeated demonstrations led by the ex-MLA Kamalabhai demanding the release of the arrested persons took place in the area. More startling was the opposition to the grant of any relief to the affected villagers. A few days later (9 March) a PUCL (Rajasthan) team investigating into the incident was attacked when they entered Bhabrana by a group of 50 people which included Sarup Singh and Bhawarlal Somani (both are merchant money-lenders). The RKS activist accompanying them was seriously injured and had to be hospitalised.

Conclusion

The fact that the attackers were predominantly adivasis has led to the obscuring of the root cause of the growing tensions in the region. The administration is projecting the incident as an inter adivasi conflict. Such a projection is convenient to those opposed to the struggles being spearheaded by the Sangathan.

The Sangathan is being charged with being high-handed and intimidatory in drawing its membership, and of increasingly liking law into its own hands. From such a viewpoint, the attack on the village is the result of naxalite "extremism". These charges of "extremism" are apparently merited by the growing ability of the adivasis to assert and enforce democratic rights that have been denied to them not only through the subversion of legal processes but, more pervasively, even through its actual implementation.

The violent and unrestrained hostility of certain sections to the RKS is beyond dispute. The attack and the events unfolding in its aftermath, bear testimony to the range and power of such hostile forces. These forces, be it the local police, local forest rangers, traders of Bhabrana, the gamethi of Jhadap or the money lender, Tasdukh Hussain; found their hegemony being challenged by the growing influence of the

Sangathan. It is precisely this hegemony that led to the tensions in Hadmatiya in the first place.

Both the attacks took place under the regime of the BJP government. The change from Congress to BJP has apparently made little difference to the pattern and strategy of development that was marginalising large sections of the adivasis. Under the BJP, however, this economic strategy is sought to be reinforced by a dangerous revivalist ideology. The BJP has been attempting to make inroads among the adivasis, virtually all of whom are Hindu, both through its "philanthropic" organisation the

Vanvasi Kalyan Parishad and through its recent rathayatra that passed through Rajasthan. The attempt to bring adivasis into the fold of the agitation for the disputed Ram Janambhooini Temple at Ayodhya is not without its ironies in this region. For the rathayatra was particularly well received in Aspur where the rajputs have been trying, for a long time, to gain control of the Bijwa Mata temple belonging to the adivasis. The most ominous aspect of the BJP-VKP campaign is the offensive they have launched against the democratic struggles of the adivasis. These struggles are resisting the continuous harassment and extortions suffered at the hands of money-lenders, traders, forest officials, patwaris, contractors and middlemen whose intervention is integral to the "development" of tribal regions. Political parties and the processes of electoral democracy in this reserved constituency have evidently served to strengthen the power of the forces that precipitate incidents like that witnessed in Hadmatiya.

The civil society of the tribal communities is already being eroded by the development process which was displacing communities and creating gradations within them. The tribal community is far from being a homogeneous collective. The collusion of sections with the vested interests responsible for the deprivation and oppression inflicted on the adivasis creates oppositions to any democratic struggles even within the community. Added to this is the electoral process in reserved constituencies that strengthens and legitimises such collusions with exploitative mechanisms. While the constituency of the elected representatives of the people is derived largely from the adivasis (a constituency that is mustered through the crucial intervention of the gamethi) the clinching support in terms of muscle and money power is derived from precisely those sections that are responsible for unleashing these processes.

Last years attack was clearly and starkly a response to the resistance of the Hadmatiya adivasis to a moneylender's usurpation of their land. If a year later the conflict and its focus are less defined it is because the dimensions of the conflict have become more complex. More importantly the range of interests antagonised by the Sangathan have also become more organised. What remains unchanged however are the privations and pressures the adivasi faces and the violence of the reprisal against any struggle to change this exploitative structure or even to light for constitutionally guaranteed rights. The right of the people to organise and struggle against oppressive forces, through movements like that launched by the Rajasthan Kisan Sangathan has to be defended by all democratic sections of society.

