

CHAPTER IV:  
CHANGING  
RELATIONSHIP  
TRIBALS AND  
THEIR  
ENVIRONMENT

## CHANGING RELATIONSHIP- TRIBALS AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT

### Acculturation, Assimilation and Co-existence of the tribal people

In this chapter I will be exploring; firstly the relationship between the tribal people and the state vis-a vis the forests; secondly the simultaneous processes of attempts of assimilation and co-existence either by appeasement or force for gaining access to the forest resources while treating them as the other or people outside the mainstream society; and thirdly marginalization of the traditional knowledge of the tribal people regarding the sustainable use of the forest resources.

Tracing the relationship of the tribal people, the mainstream society and the state would help in understanding the scenario in pre modern times. It would also help in analyzing the intervention of the British colonial state which led to the breach of relationship between the forests and its original users.

In the Indian context the Vedic society has been described as tribal. According to Romila Thapar, the word 'tribe' precisely refers to a community of people claiming descent from a common ancestor. In its application, however it has been used to cover a variety of social and economic forms as well as claims to biological and racial identities.<sup>1</sup>

In the Rigveda, which is the earliest of the four Vedas, references have been made to the *Dasas* or *Dasyus*. These were the local tribes who after their defeat by the Aryans came to be regarded as alien and barbaric. Thus the society came to be divided into two main groups, *Arya-varna* and *Dasa varna*. (Varna literally means color). The distinctions were made between the two groups also on the basis of the language and territory.

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<sup>1</sup> Romila Thapar, *Interpreting Early India*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992, pg.116-117

Later the aspects of ritual and purity were also added to the distinctions between the Arya and the *dasa*<sup>2</sup>. In the later Vedic texts, the word '*mleccha*' was used widely for denoting the lower castes. In the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B C, there was extensive urbanization of the Gangetic valley by the Aryans. They assumed the role of the advanced urban civilization based on technological and economic sophistication. The Aryans therefore regarded with contempt the tribes living in the forests who had remained at the food-gathering and hunting stage. Such technologically inferior tribes as e. g. Sabara, Pulinda, Mutiba and Kirata constituted yet another category which came to be included in the term *mleccha*.

It is during the Mauryan period, that we get more information about various tribes, their participation in the administration and the role of Ashoka in dealing with them.

Gerard Fussman through the use of the Greek accounts and the edicts of Ashoka, he concludes that the Mauryan Empire was made up of<sup>3</sup>

1. Territories administered directly by the crown.
2. Kingdoms conquered or won over, and
3. Tribes and republics with some degree of internal freedom.

These tribes existed before the Mauryan Empire and they survived its dissolution.

Asoka during his rule made a distinction between the tribal people and the forest tribes. The latter was wooed by his officers in the context of a paternalistic policy where he regards himself in the image of the father and his subjects as his children. It seems that the forest tribe did not easily reconcile themselves to the law and order as state had framed strict laws

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<sup>2</sup> Romila Thapar, The Image of the Barbarian in the Early India, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1971, vol. XIII, no.4, pg. 408-436.

<sup>3</sup> Gerard Fussman, 'Central and Provincial' administration in Ancient India : The problems of the Mauryan Empire, *The Indian Historical Review*, vol. 14:1-2, 1987-88, pg.48.

regarding the control and subjugation of forest dwellers as they were viewed a danger to the state. The same problem is reflected in Arthashastra. Kautilya also distinguishes between the *mleccha* and the forest dwellers (*aranyacarah, atavikah*). They, the *atavikas*, were said to be well organized and brave. He recognizes the political advantages to be gained from keeping the forest tribes happy since they had their own strongholds and could be used effectively in campaigns which would also keep them off from time to time to prevent their resorting to plundering and pillaging. According to Kautilya, strong king could destroy the kingdom of a forest chieftain by winning him over with bribes.<sup>4</sup>

Megasthenes, the writer of 'Indica', who was the ambassador of the Seleucid Empire to the Mauryan court, refers to India as surrounded by the barbarian tribes. This possibly refers to the *arya-varta* surrounded by the *mleccha-desa*. Megasthenes also adds that all these tribes were indigenous but they differed in mind and disposition from Indians<sup>5</sup>.

During the pre medieval period, the tribals were able to assert their political authority owing to the political turmoil. As early as the first century B.C., the Bhils of Malwa had established a small kingdom, which disintegrated very soon.<sup>6</sup> The Gonds of Madhya Pradesh had established a kingdom called Gondwana till they were overthrown by the Marathas. "Walled towns and forts still remain a witness of the Gond power and civilization".<sup>7</sup> The epigraphic records refer to a possible kingdom of the Bhils in the present Panchmahals district of Gujarat, between the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Bhil kingdom in the Dangs was vast. To a lesser extent, the Kolis and the Minas also had formed their kingdom.

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, pg.179

<sup>5</sup> McCrindle J W, *India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian*, London, 1877, pp.20-21

<sup>6</sup> Jaganath Pathy, *Agrarian Structure in Tribal Gujarat and its implications for the tribal politics*, Dept. of sociology, South Gujarat University, Surat, 1982, pg.68

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, pg.68

During the medieval period, efforts were made by the state to bring the tribal communities within the fold of agriculture to bring more land under cultivation. Trade and strategic routes passing through various forests came to acquire more significance as they provided opportunities for greater political and economic controls. The tribes such as the Bhils, the Minas, the Kolis and the Gonds were recognized as dominant communities by the Mughal Empire. Efforts were made especially by Akbar to appease various chieftains' kings of Gujarat to strengthen his power by grants of '*mansab*'. Some of them were even granted the '*mansabs*'. For example, the Rathod chief in 1600-01 of the Baglana region (area comprising largely of Dangs and the Khandesh region) was granted the mansab of 3000<sup>8</sup>. Though there were petty resistances also by the tribal chiefs, on a larger scale the relation between the state and the tribes remained cordial.

However the situation altered considerably during the British period. The following passage explicitly narrates the tale of small farmers and the tribals during the British Raj.

"In the olden days small landholders who could not subsist on cultivation alone, use to eat wild fruits like figs and jamun and sell the leaves and flowers of the forest and the Mahowa tree. They could also depend on the village grazing ground to maintain one or two cows and two to four goats, thereby living happily in their own ancestral villages. However the cunning European employers of our motherly government have used their foreign brains to erect a great superstructure called the 'Forest Department'. With all the hills and undulating lands as also the fallow lands and grazing grounds brought under the control of the forest department, the livestock of the poor farmers

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<sup>8</sup> Ahsan Raza Khan, *Chieftains in the Mughal Empire, during the reign of Akbar*, Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla, 1977, pg.89.

does not even have a place to breath anywhere on the surface of the earth".<sup>9</sup>

### **Interventions of the Colonial State**

British colonial Forestry in the second half of the nineteenth century inherited along with the forest management ethos, the continental attitude to other forest resource users. Foresters in India and the rest of the empire during this period were like their continental ancestors in that they held a clear bias against such communities, whom they viewed as ignorant, environmental profligate and wasteful<sup>10</sup>. The colonial state in order to define the forests for the purpose of scientific management, devised a system of curtailing traditional and customary rights of the forest dwellers. This in time developed a sub discipline of forestry—forest law. So the import of the continental forest management in the British Empire resulted in Lewis Munford's terminology, in the introduction of an authoritarian technique in the realm of forests<sup>11</sup>. This bias of the colonial foresters stemmed from their perception that the claims of the local people were illegitimate because of their scientific and technological backwardness. Surprisingly this attitude of judging communities on the bases of their scientific and technological prowess, at least in the realm of forestry was developed far away from their first human contacts in the colonies.<sup>12</sup>

The history of the Forest Department has been the history of the displacement of the marginalized section of the society. During the pre British era, the tribal and the forest dwellers were autonomous in their territory, though they were subjected to the pressures of the agrarian

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<sup>9</sup> Quote by Jyoti Rao Phulae, a social reformer in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, 1881, in *This fissured Land*, pg. 146

<sup>10</sup> Modernising nature, pg.104

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*, pg.104-05

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, pg.105

civilization from time to time. During the late 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries there is a gradual erosion of their autonomy, which finally resulted in their complete marginalization from their territories. Earlier being marginalized from the mainstream society did not disrupt the relationship they shared with the forests, the latter providing them with food, fuel, fodder, medicines and shelter. It was only after the forests were commercialized, and timber became a commodity, the English to ensure a larger and the maximum share of benefits created a 'Forest Department' demarcating them as 'reserved' and 'protected' areas, thereby depriving the forest communities of their rights, which the latter had enjoyed since the earliest times.

During the colonial period, emerged a perceptible change in the tribal-state-forest relationship. During the early and formative years of their rule, the British were quick to recognize the significance of the tribal chiefs in an attempt to establish their rule. Various agencies were set up (one such agency was set up in the Dangs by James Outram) in the tribal areas for opening communication, building of roads and railways for exploiting jungles which led to development of the market economy. The forests were brought under the various forest Acts, and thus began the process of diminishing the rights of the tribal people in the forests. The English in their effort to secure the rights over forests, first honoured the tribal chiefs with robes, and then gradually isolated them from the forests. Firstly, the land in the tribal area was incorporated into the system of land tenure. The tribal regions in Bihar, Bengal and eastern parts of the Central Provinces belonged to the Zamindari system whereas those in Bombay, Gujarat and the western parts of the Central Provinces were under the Ryotwari system. One significant feature of this period was the breakdown of the communal mode of production (hunting, gathering, slash and burn cultivation, collective labour) and the introduction of private ownership of land. To facilitate the commercial exploitation of forests, 'swidden' (shifting)

cultivation was banned and the concept of agricultural season and new crops were introduced in the tribal land. This gradually led to the emergence of peasant system and the infiltration of tribal economy by the market. By the process of peasantisation<sup>13</sup>, a social change was also seen in the tribal society. The tribes were brought closer to the peasant class, which indicated their upward mobility in the caste hierarchy, thus the beginning of the process of 'Sanskritisation'<sup>14</sup>. Besides, various social and religious movements amongst the tribals also upheld this process of upward mobility. One such example was the Devi movement, which had spread amongst the tribal areas of Bhils in the Dangs and the surrounding regions.

### **Tribal people in Gujarat**

The tribal population of Western India is mostly concentrated around Vindhyanchal, Satpura and Khandesh regions. In South Gujarat the tribal population is mainly concentrated in the Dangs, Valsad and Surat and in Central Gujarat, they reside in the talukas of Chhota Udepur (a part of the Rewakantha Agency) and Sankheda (situated on the right bank of the river Orsang).<sup>15</sup>

South Gujarat comprising of Bharuch (hills of Rajpipla), Surat, Navsari, Dangs and Valsad in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were thickly forested with tropical dry and moist deciduous forests. The thick forests and hills made the region to be known as 'Ranipradesh'<sup>16</sup>. Under the

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<sup>13</sup> This word has been used by K.S. Singh in his various books and articles dealing with the movements of the tribes. The word 'peasantisation' means the inclusion of more people into the fold of agriculture.

<sup>14</sup> Sanskritization is a process by which lower Hindu caste or the tribal group tries to change their customs, rituals, habits and a way of life in the direction of high castes. They do this to elevate their social position in the caste hierarchy.

<sup>15</sup> *Gazetteer of India*, Gujarat State Gazetteers, Vadodara district, Ahmedabad, 1979, pg.4.

<sup>16</sup> In the Gujarati dialectics, 'Rani' means 'jungles or forests'; therefore the region was known as 'Ranipradesh' meaning, a region of forest dwellers.



official category of scheduled tribes/ adivasis in South and Central Gujarat are:

- Bhils, further subdivided into Bhil Garasia, Dholi Bhil, Dangi Bhil, Dungri Garasia, Mewari Bhil, Rawat Bhil, tadavi Bhil, Bhagalia, Pawara, Vasava, Vasave and Bhilala;
- Dhodia,
- Dublas (Talavia, Halpati),
- Gamit (Gamta, Gavit, Mavchi, Padvi),
- Kokna (Kukna, Kokari),
- Kunbis,
- Naikda,
- Pardhi,
- Varlis,
- Vitolia (Barodia)<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> S.C. Bhatt, The Encyclopaedic District Gazetteer of India, Western zone, vol.7, New Delhi, Gyan publishing house, 1997, pg.204

**Table IV A**

**Tribal Population of Gujarat- 2001.<sup>18</sup>**

Sr. No.	Districts	% Of Tribal Population
1	Dangs	93.96
2	Valsad	54.35
3	Panchmahals	47.19
4	Bharuch	45.53
5	Surat	36.05
6	Vadodara	26.60
7	Sabarkantha	18.41
8	Kachchh	6.95
9	Banaskantha	6.91
10	Gandhinagar	1.37
11	Kheda	1.19
12	Ahemadabad	0.89
13	Surendranagar	0.78
14	Jamnagar	0.46
15	Junagadh	0.46
16	Mehsana	0.37
17	Rajkot	0.19
18	Amreli	0.16

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<sup>18</sup> Deepa Gavli and Diviakar Sharma, Traditional knowledge and biodiversity conservation in Gujarat, *Indian journal of Traditional Knowledge*, Vol. 3(1), Jan. 2004, pg.52

**Table IV B**

**The talukas dominated by tribal population in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Gujarat<sup>19</sup>:**

<b>Name Of Agency</b>	<b>Talukas</b>	<b>No on Map</b>
Mahikantha Agency	Danta	1
	Khedbrahma	2
	Vijayanagar	3
	Bhiloda	4
	Megharaj	5
Rewakantha Agency	Santrampur	6
	Limkheda	9
	Dhanpur	11
	Devgadbaria	12
	Chota Udepur	14
	Nandod	18
	Jhagadia	19
	Dediapada	20
	Valiya	38
	Sagpara	24
PanchMahal District	Fatepur	7
	Jhalod	8
	Dahod	10
Surat district	Mandavi	22
	Bardoli	27

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<sup>19</sup> Map Adapted from,

- Beena Sengar, Role of Gandhians and social transformation of Gujarat tribes (1920-60), Unpublished PhD thesis, The Maharaja Sayaji Rao University of Baroda, pg.66.
- Tribal Atlas of India, Jaipur, 1994, pp.36-37.
- Dr. Aruna Awasthi, Survey of Tribal Movement in Gujarat: 1820-1947, paper presented in seminar on 'The participation of common people in the freedom movement (1857-1947)', Bhopal, Nov. 2006. p1.

	Valod	28
	Valsad	34
	Pardi	35
	Umbergaon	36
	Nizar	25
Surat State Agency	Vansda	32
	Dharampur	37
Areas under Baroda state	Mangrol	21
	Songadh	23
	Vyara	29
	Mahuva	30
	Samkheda	15
	Jambugam	13
	Naswadi	16
	Tilakwada	17
	Billimora	31
Dangs (British 1830)	The Dangs	33

(See map IVA)

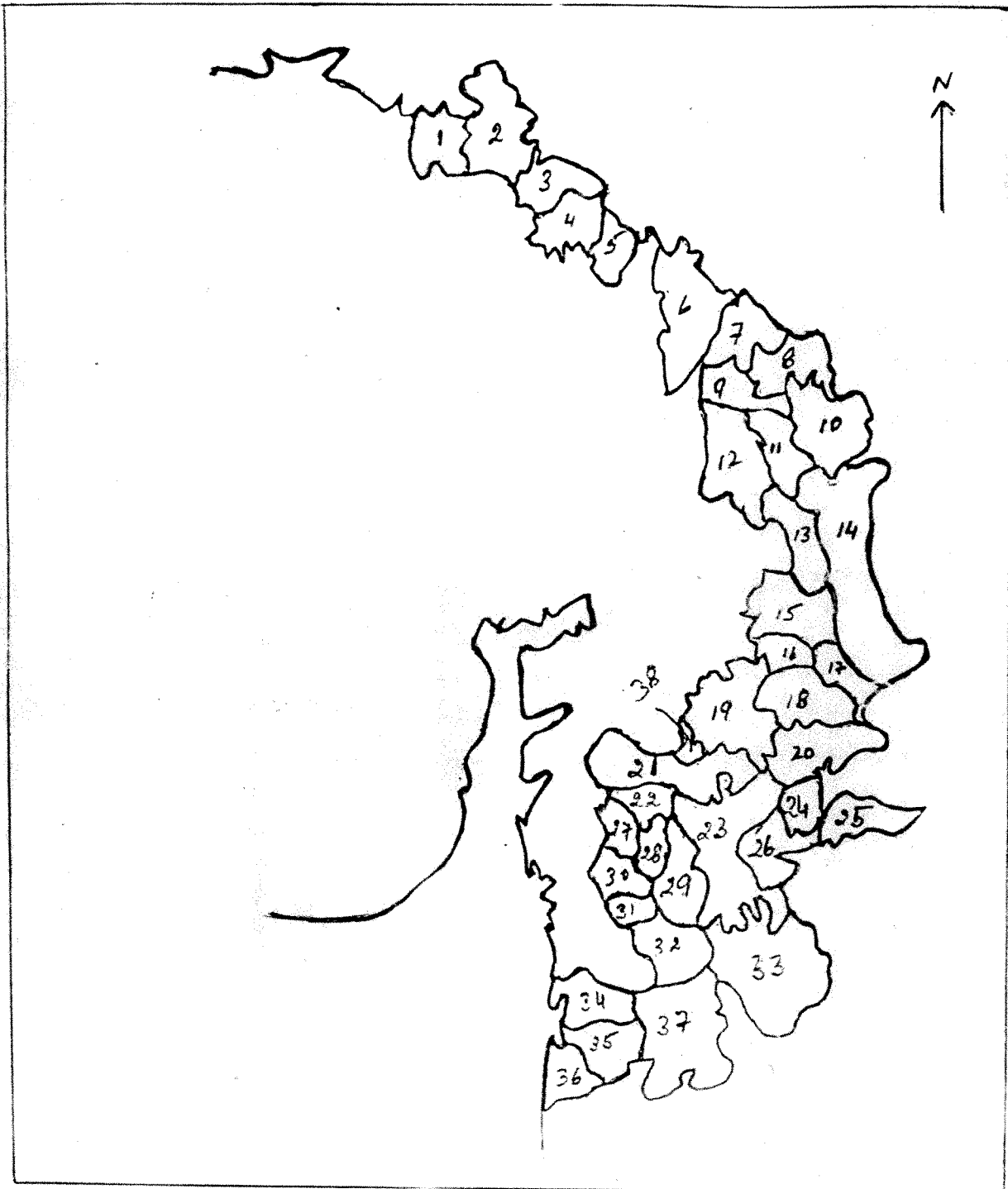
It is important now to discuss various prominent tribal people that had resided in the forests Gujarat during the British rule and their relationship with nature.

**BHILS:** They were the largest tribal group residing in South Gujarat. According to the 1901 census they were 511,982 in numbers. Regarding their dialect, the Khandesh district Gazetteer published in 1880 contains the following observations<sup>20</sup>:

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<sup>20</sup> M. Campbell, *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, vol.XII, Khandesh, 1880, pg.84

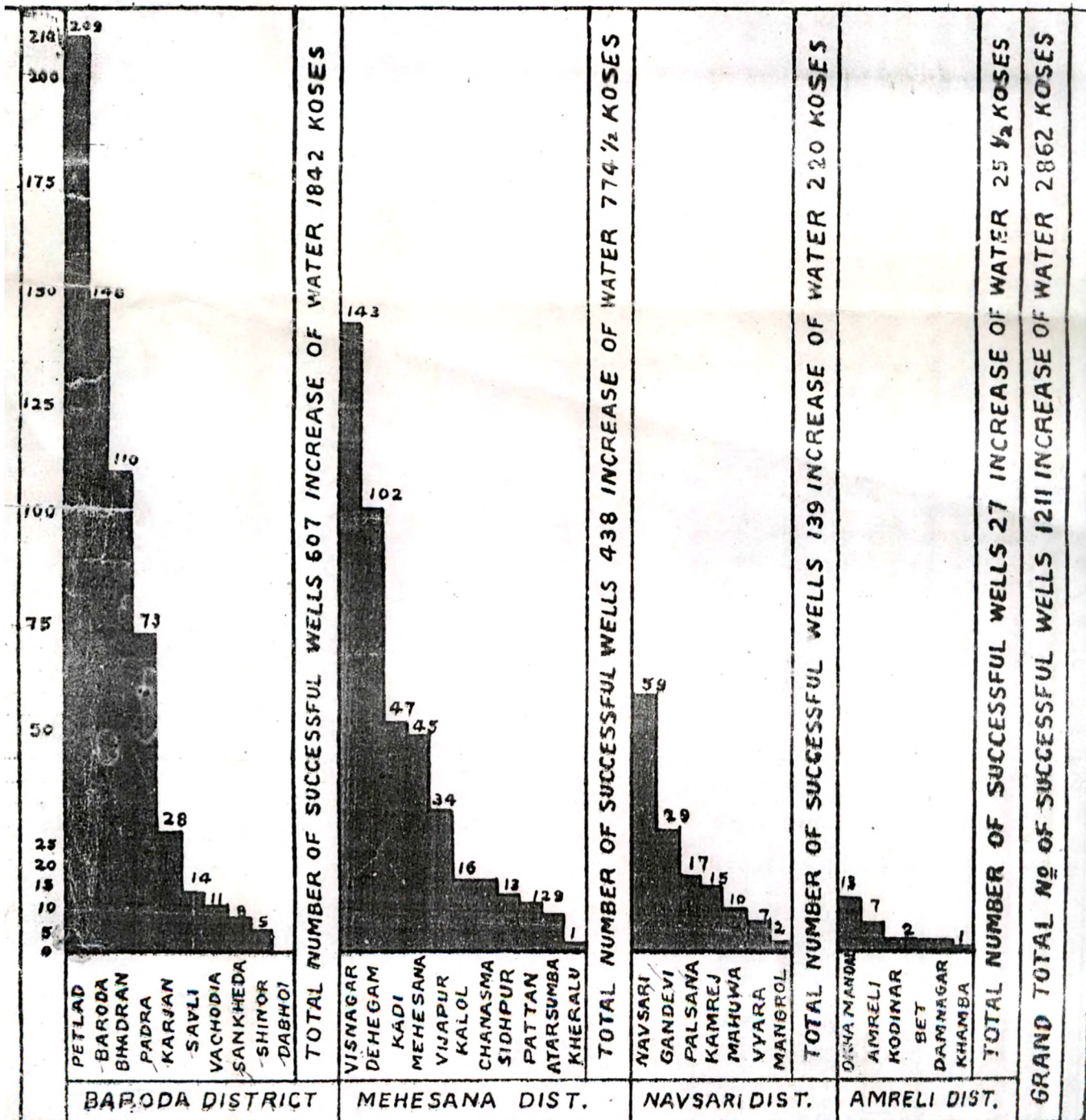
Map IV A  
Various talukas of Gujarat dominated by the Tribal population  
in the 19th century.



Source: Please see footnote no. 19 in this chapter

Map III C

**TOTAL NUMBER OF SUCCESSFUL WELLS BORED  
IN EACH TALUKA  
FROM  
1911-12 TO 1931-32**



Source: Baroda Administrative Report, 1932-1933, 1934

"Except among some of the wilder hill tribes, who perhaps are improperly ranked among Bhils, the Bhils have no trace of a language different from that of the country where they are settled. According to geographical positions, Bhils speak the cognate dialects of Marathi, Gujarati, Rangdi, Mevadi, Narmadi and Rajputani".

The chief of the Bhils is known as 'Gamit' or 'Patel'. The Panchayat (council of five) advised the chiefs, when consulted and also decides all matters relating to the cases of thefts, marriage disputes, and land disputes and altercations etc among the Bhils.

The Bhils were animists (worshipping the forces of nature, trees and animals). They worship Vagh Deva (tiger God), Nimaji Dev (plant God), Dungalrya Deo (mountain God) etc. Other minor deities worshipped by them are Kali, Hathi Pava, Gviva Deva, Shalupanda etc. Female deities are also worshipped by them. In general their places of worship include some trees consecrated by a few long stones set up on a mud terraces built round the roots and some of their most sacred images are, are enclosed in open shades. They believe in witchcraft, and demonical influence. Therefore, the Bhils shared a symbiotic relationship with nature, which is a key element in the sustaining of any eco system. Sacredness attached to animals, trees, in whole nature, helped in conservation and their minimal use in the fulfilling of the basic needs (not greed).

The following excerpt elicits a contemptuous attitude of the colonialists towards the Bhils<sup>21</sup>,

*"Bhils are rarely met except in the retinues of the chiefs. They are ugly and stunted, very black, wild and almost naked. Living like Kunbis in cone shaped huts made of tree boughs, they burn them on the slightest mishap, and seldom stay in one place for*

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid*, pg.85

more than a fortnight. Though nominally Hindus, they know very little of the Brahmanical religion, and, unless he is a beggar, hold a Brahmin in no particular respect. Hanuman, the monkey God, is occasionally seen in their villages. But their chief object of worship is the boundary God, Simaria Dev, the snake God, and the tiger God- Wagh Dev, in whom they say, the souls of their ancestors become incarnate. They believe in omens and greatly dread the power of witches and of the evil eye. Considering the member of a chief's family, they hold all the labour, except fieldwork, a degrading work. They neither work as woodcutters nor pilfer wood. But during the rains, they meet near Kunbi villages and hire themselves as field labourers receiving payments in grains. Polygamy, though allowed, is practiced by the chiefs only, some of whom have a dozen wives. Except that they are more industrious, making bamboo baskets and mats, the varlis are much the same as Bhils.

*They speak a mixture of Gujarati, Hindustani and Marathi, of which Gujarati is a chief element."*

The first few lines (in italics) show the colonial attitude towards the native tribes. The English always believed the natives as the noble savages, who according to them need to be reformed in their habits and manners. The last three lines of the above quotation (in italics), show the relative adaptability and the necessity of the tribal people as they were proficient in three languages.

The Vasavas form no separate castes, but it is a sub division of the Bhils. They are found primarily in the Vadodara district. Their main occupation is cultivation where they work as agricultural labourers. They mainly worship Lord Shiva.

The Kunbis: According to the Khandesh Gazetteer<sup>22</sup>,

"Kunbis are weak and miserable looking. Every man carries a sickle shaped knife fastened to a string tied round his waist. Their cone shaped huts have wattled walls and roofs

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid*, pp.600-601



thatched with bundles of hay. They supplement the scanty crops of coarse rice and nagli by fruit and produce of their bow and arrows. They are excessively fond of moha spirits and from their scanty food and drinking habits, are subjected to chest and lung complaints. As a rule, they are extremely shy and timid, but civil and obliging. They are only half settled. A death, an outbreak of cattle disease, or the working of a witch is enough to drive them away from their huts.

The Kunbis, though inferior to the Bhils in the social hierarchy, are now economically better off. They have adopted new tools and better techniques of agriculture under the impact of the community development programme. What is astonishing is that, though they attend Bhil's marriages, they do not dine with them and even do not drink water from the Bhil's place.<sup>23</sup>

**Dublas:** The Dublas numbering 100,775 in 1901 were found chiefly in Bharuch, Surat and Valsad district. They are classed among the Kaliparaj i.e. dark races, a common term used for the tribals in Gujarat.

They claim to be a race of the Rajputs, and try to show their lineage to the Rathods. They are primarily animists and believe in witchcraft, sorcery and magic. They worship the images of their ancestors prepared of the sandalwood called khatruns. They are divided into various subgroups like Kathodias, Talavias etc.

**Varlis:** According to Dr Wilson, 'Varlis' mean uplanders, the name given in the older times to denote the residents of Varalat, the sixth of the seventh Konkans.<sup>24</sup> The northern part of konkan was known as 'varalat' because Varlis originally lived there. Many Varlis in Gujarat claim that their original home is in Ramnagar (Dharampur) or nagar Haveli-a union territory. Varlis

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<sup>23</sup> *Gazetteer of the Gujarat State*, Dangs district, Ahemadabad, 1971, pg.173

<sup>24</sup> K.J. Save *The Warlis*, New Delhi, 1945, pg.5

are supposed to be a subdivision of the Bhils,<sup>25</sup> since they have many traits regarding their culture, religion etc. common with them. Their religion is animistic, as it is based on the spirit worship, though they also follow Hindu pattern of worship. They do not nurture any respect for a Brahmin and do not subscribe to any sacred books.

**Dhodias:** According to Enthoven, Dhodias numbering 94,381 in 1901 were chiefly settled in Surat, Thane and southern parts of Gujarat. The Dhodias are a part of the Baroda State too, and according to Baroda State Gazetteer, "Dhodia is a primitive tribe found in the Navsari district".<sup>26</sup>

They are animistic in religion and their main deities of worship are Behram Dev, Iria Dev, Mooli Mata, Kakabalia, etc. These deities are worshipped so that they may protect their followers from the evil influence of the witches, ghosts, smallpox, cholera, and other such epidemic diseases.

In most of the Dhodia villages, the post of headman or Naik is hereditary, and social disputes are decided by the tribal meetings. Breaches of rule are punished by payments or expulsion from the tribes.

**Naikdas:** They are one of the important tribes of Gujarat. They are found chiefly in Baroda, Surat and Bharuch district. According to the British sources, Naikdas and savage cruelty were synonymous (just because they revolted against the unjust policies of the British?). In 1826, they were said to "exceed the Bhils in their predatory and lawless habits, in their cruelty, blood thirstiness and life of independence and in total disregard of all the customs and usage of the social life".<sup>27</sup> In 1868, they were stirred up to rebellion by one of their holy men or the Bhagats. What is important to be noticed is that in this tribe women occupy a position of superiority in

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<sup>25</sup> *Gazetteer of the Gujarat State, Dangs district*, pg. 173

<sup>26</sup> *Baroda State Gazetteer*, Ahmedabad, 1961, p.229

<sup>27</sup> *Gazetteer of the Panchmahals*, 1981, pg.207

several aspects of social life of the communities.<sup>28</sup> During marriages the girls are given more freedom of opinion and the groom's family has to pay a fixed price, before marrying her. The system of the residential son-in-law is another privilege of the Naikda women. Naikdas are generally engaged in settled agriculture, but some may wander from place to place in search of an employment during the fair weather. In rainy season they generally perform agricultural labour.

**Rathwas:** Rathwas are one of the leading tribe of the Vadodara district. As they call themselves Kolis, they are known as the Rathwa Kolis. They are mainly found in Chotta Udepur. Each Rathwa village has its headman known as patel or pujari who deals with all matters of village.

The Rathwa tribe lives mainly near the river and forest sources. The palm trees are most respected, as it is a resourceful tree for the Rathwas. Their main occupation is agriculture and the most important economic activity besides agriculture is animal husbandry. The liquor preferred by them is Mahowa and toddy. Their religion is basically animistic.

From the above description of the tribes it is clear that almost all the people belonging to the tribes are settled in the forests which are the chief provider of food, fodder, fuel and fiber to them. Nature is the chief form of worship. Many tribals engage themselves in agriculture on a small scale, entirely depended upon the rainfall, which is the example of subsidiary and subsisting living. In case of the failure of rainfall, they collect flowers, fruits and woods and sell them in the markets to earn their livelihood. This is the reason that forests are extremely precious and sacred to them. It would be relevant here to throw some light on the concept of 'Sacred Groves'. Sacred Groves are modes for protection of forest adopted by the forest dwellers especially by the tribals. In other words, they can also be explained as traditional management of protection of forests. Most tribal

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<sup>28</sup> *Gazetteer of the Vadodara district*, 1979, pg. 199

and rural communities give evidence of holding certain patches of forestland as special and thus not to be axed. Most communities along the west coast had some preserved forests. They were called, *Devaranya* (God's Grove) in Maharashtra, *Nagaranya* (serpent's Grove) in Karnataka, and *Serpakkadu* (serpent inhabited jungle) in Kerala. These were considered sacred. As such, no sickle or axe could be used in them. Only fruits that could be plucked or dry twigs that could be broken with one's hands; and use dry leaves and other material that had fallen down were used. Thus sacred Groves are one example of the conservation of nature. When the forests are reserved by the government (for commercial and industrial use and not for subsistence economy), the worst affected are the tribals and small peasants. It affects their economy, religion and culture or rather their very existence.

British tried to gain control of the forests in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century through the Acts of 1865 and 1878. In the very initial stages of the British rule, in the 18<sup>th</sup> and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century commercial exploitation of forest produce was largely restricted to commodities such as pepper, cardamom and ivory. It was the emergence of timber as an important commodity that led to a qualitative change in the pattern of harvesting and utilization of forests. Thus when the colonial state tried to assert its control over the woodlands earlier controlled by the local communities, the rights of the people were first taken away and then completely denied. The state aggressively redefined the property and the grazing rights adversely affecting the customary rights of the tribal people and the petty peasants that had been in existence since the time immemorial. Dangs is one such example, which shows the complete alteration of the utility forests and its products from that of economic use to the industrial use.

The **Dangs** consisted of a series of foothills between the flat alluvial plains of South Gujarat and the high mountains of the Sahayadris. It was a

thickly forested country broken by deep ravines through which the Rivers Ambica, Purna and Kapri rivers flowed in a southwesterly direction towards Surat.<sup>29</sup> Due to the thick forests the valleys were almost impenetrable by the armies of the outside states. During the pre-colonial period it was conquered by troops under the command of James Outram. The entire Dangs was brought under the British rule with the chiefs being allowed a certain degree of freedom, so long they abide by the rule of the British. Dangs was a tribal region. The major tribes were Bhils (sub divided into Rajas and *bahuband*- their relatives), Koknis and Varlis.

In 1872, the first census of the Dangs was taken in which 7,427 were Bhils and 9,310 were Gavits. The Gavits were further divided into 6,517 Konkans, 2,491 Varlis and 302 Gamits.<sup>30</sup> By the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, the demand for timber was rising due to the increasing needs of the Navy and later the expansion of the railways. The forests of Central and South India had begun to show signs of exhaustion. Then attention was turned towards the forests of Gujarat. The first forest leases were entered into with the tribal chiefs in 1842 (discussed in chapter 2). 466 villages were leased for 16 years, with the option of renewal for an annual subsidy of Rs.11, 230.<sup>31</sup> The British had made a huge deal with the minimum expenditures.

Before exploring the dissatisfaction of the tribes in the Dangs, it is necessary to analyze some important aspects of the Forest Acts of 1865 and 1878, which were instrumental in curtailing the tribal rights vis-a-vis the use of forests. The first Forest Act was enacted in 1865, so that timber could be procured for the railways without any major hassles from the Indian forests. This Act though gave some powers to the British, it did not alienate the forest dwellers, tribes and petty peasants from using the

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<sup>29</sup> 'J.V. Karamchandani, *The Dangs*, *Indian Forester*, vol. 74, no.11, 1948, pg.375

<sup>30</sup> Census Report of the Bombay Presidency, part III, 1872, Bombay, pg. 632

<sup>31</sup> 'The Dangs', *Indian Forester*, pg. 376.

forest produce freely. It was generally felt by the British that the Act of 1865 did not give them enough control over the forests. At a forest conference held at Allahabad in 1873-74, the defects of the Act VII of 1865 were discussed in detail. Mr. Hope clearly mentioned the primary deficiency of the bill in the Vice regal Council on 6<sup>th</sup> March 1878 as follows<sup>32</sup>:

"It drew no distinction between the forests which required to be closely reserved, even at the cost of more or less interference with private rights, and those which merely needed general control to prevent improvident working. It also provided no procedure for enquiring into and settling the rights which it so vaguely saved, and gave no powers for regulating the exercise of such rights without appropriating them. If obliged you, in short, either to take entirely or to let alone entirely. On control over the private forests in general interests of the community, it was absolutely silent. For duties on timber, even those actually levied, it gave no authority. Protection for government forests, so interacted with private ones as to be in chronic danger of plunder, there was none".

All the provision of the 1865 Act, except one pertaining to arrest, were found defective. Regarding the Section 8, it was said<sup>33</sup>:

"It gives one satisfactory power in the Act, and must be maintained in a new law; arrest without warrant is absolutely essential".

The major drawback of the Act, felt by the English was the extent of control over forests exercised by the State. The 1865 Act provided for the protection of a forest only after it had been selected and declared a Government forest. For an effective control, it was felt that they should be given the power of domination over the entire forests of the country. To that effect, a new Act (Act VII of 1878) was passed. This Act provided for

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<sup>32</sup> *Forests of India*, vol. II, pg.469

<sup>33</sup> Ramachandran Guha, *Forestry in British and Post British India*, EPW, pg.1940

the constitution of "Reserved" and "protected" forests.<sup>34</sup> Activities forbidden in these forests included the felling, girdling, lopping, tapping and burning of trees and stripping them of barks and leaves.<sup>35</sup> The exclusion of fire and cattle from reserved forests was seen as a prerequisite for successful forest management. Shifting cultivation was restricted and it was now made a 'privilege' (not the right) which could be exercised at the mercy of the settlement officer, who, if he admitted its exercise "wholly or in part", would then specify the extent of forest in which it could be carried out.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, the British on the pretext of the scientific management of forests denied the right to the forest dwellers, tribes and small peasants to earn their livelihood through the selling of forest produce. Ajay Sakaria terms this control of English on forests, as the desiccationist policy of the British.<sup>37</sup> He opines that it was an influential intellectual position, calling for greater control over all forests in colonial territories.

The desiccationist lobby was successful in setting up forest departments to run on their principles. Ajay Sakaria further expands this term to 'imperial desiccationism'.<sup>38</sup>

One area, which the dessicationists severely condemned, was the practice of the Shifting or Swidden Cultivation, (also known as *rab*, *dhya*, *dalhi*, *kumri* and *jhum* in the local languages). The practice of shifting agriculture was and has been an integral part of the tribal way of life. It refers to a practice of clearing a plot of land by burning. Then that piece of

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<sup>34</sup> *Forests of India*, vol II, pg.470

<sup>35</sup> NAI, Department of Revenue and Agriculture, Forests, no.7, act of 1878, 1878, Appendix A, section 25 of the Act listed activities banned in the Reserved Forests, pg.16

<sup>36</sup> *Forestry in British and post British India*, pg.1941.

<sup>37</sup> Ajay Sakaria, *Timber Conservancy, Dessicationism and Scientific Forestry, The Dangs, 1840-1920*, in Richard Grove (ed), *Environmental History of South and South East Asia*, pg.596-601

<sup>38</sup> *ibid*, pp.596-601

land was cultivated. After few years of cultivation, the land is left fallow for about dozen of years so that it may regain its lost fertility and then the tribals move to another plot of land to begin with the same process of cultivation.

In the Dangs the Kokans, Bhils and Varlis practiced the *rab* and the *kumri* cultivation.<sup>39</sup> The *rab* cultivation practiced by the kokans involved, burning a piece of land and then sowing of the seeds of *nagli* (a grain) or rice. After the beginning of rains, the land was ploughed or worked with hoes. Weeding was carried out and the crop was harvested soon after the Monsoon. After the soil tended to become exhausted, a fresh patch of land was sought.

The Bhils and Varlis practiced *kumri* or the *dalhi* cultivation, which did not require ploughing. Seeds were directly sown in the ashes of the land burnt. British considered this method of cultivation unscientific and unproductive.

When Hodgson submitted his proposals for the future management of the Dangs, he held that only 9% injury to the forests was caused by fires whereas 90% was caused by swidden cultivation.<sup>40</sup> As a result, efforts were made to disallow cultivation, in the reserved forests. The area under the reserved forests was increased from 217 sq. miles, in 1902 to 331 square miles in 1911, bringing more than half of the forests of the Dangs under the reserved category forests.<sup>41</sup> In addition to this, it was prohibited for the Dangis to cultivate on a third and half of the protected forests treated as the reserved. Thus the cultivated area of the Dangis was reduced by 2/3<sup>rd</sup>. The impact was that the cultivators were driven out of nearly 300 villages.<sup>42</sup> It was becoming difficult for the Dangis to cultivate

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<sup>39</sup> David Hardiman, Power in the forests: The Dangs, 1820-1940, *Subaltern Studies*, vol VIII, 1984, pp: 95-96

<sup>40</sup> Report on the future administration of the Dangs, BA, Revenue Department (RD), 902, vol. 107, Com.949, pt. II

<sup>41</sup> Report by Hodgson, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1910, BA, RD, 1911, vol. 120, Comp.636.

<sup>42</sup> Timber Conservancy, Dessicationism and Scientific Forestry, pg.619



on the protected forests since all the densely wooded fertile patches required for *khandad* were taken into the reserve forest area. Khandad cultivation was thus not possible without openly defying the forest department.

The Konkans were able to earn a subsistence living, despite the fact that they had to pay taxes to their chiefs and also satisfy the demands of the Bhils. Participation in the *kumri* cultivation of the Bhils and the Varlis provided them with grains for only two to three months after the harvests, and for the rest of the year, they depended on other sources of subsistence, like fruits, *mahowa*, flowers, grain from wild grasses and various roots. They also followed the practice of setting fire to the tall grass to drive animals out, so that they could be sighted and hunted for food. By 1909, it was claimed by the British that the shifting had been completely stopped and, no one in the Dangs, except a few and destructive Bhils desire to revert to this destructive method.<sup>43</sup>

We find that just as the British officials began to 'civilize' the 'wild tribes'; the forest department took upon itself to civilize the forests. As has been said "colonial forestry was in many ways an industrial science...informed by the conception of 'rational' use of natural resources intrinsic to industrial capitalism".<sup>44</sup>

This civilizing mission of the colonial forestry was carried out<sup>45</sup> through:

- Guarding the Dangs from incursions of the merchants and peasants from the Gaekwad territories.

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<sup>43</sup> The Dangs, 1840-1920, pg.620

<sup>44</sup> Ramachandran Guha, 'Scientific Forestry and social Change', *EPW*, vol.20, Nov.1985, pg.1949

<sup>45</sup> *Hybrid Histories*, pg. 200-205

- Exclusion of the Dangis from the forests (chief motive of the dessicationist environmentalism).
- Protecting the tribes and forest from themselves (silvicultural techniques).
- Rational and efficient (maximum) use of the Dangi timber.
- Putting an end to the Dangi practices (lopping and firing).

It was these principles, so called scientific management of forest, which transformed the wooded resources in many ways. Firstly, in the absence of fire, grass became coarser and less suitable for grazing; decrease in the production of teak as the fire helped in the germination of hard-shelled teak seeds and denudation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to the large scale extraction of timber for the commercial use. It also led to a shift from the mosaic forests (woods of different varieties) to monoculture (one kind tree) forests.

After the ban on the shifting cultivation, English turned their attention to the regulation and control of the Mahowa flowers which was used for the production of the local liquor. The idea of control on the supply of Mahowa flowers was initially proposed by the Charles Pritchard, who wanted to put an end to the illegal distillation of liquor in Thane district. The officials throughout the Bombay Presidency were against this proposal, as the flowers were eaten by poor peasants and their livestock mostly in the summer months, when the daily meals were hard to come by. A note on the importance of the Mahua tree and its flowers would be help in the greater understanding of the integrated and interdependent life of tribes and the forests.

**Importance of the Mahowa Tree and Flower to the tribal people:**<sup>46</sup>

*Bassia latifolia* is a tree known as the *mahua* or *mohwa* in Northern India, as *mahuda* and *mawara* in Western and Central India and as *kaat-illupa*, *ippe-chettu* and *cpi* in Southern India.

The mahua tree is valued for its flowers, its fruits and kernel of its seeds and is of considerable economic importance to a large proportion of the poorer classes of the population. It is a large tree attaining a height of 40-60 feet. The tree shed its leaves gradually from February to April. The flowers generally appear immediately afterwards in March and April, and are soon followed by the new leaf buds. The flowers after a bloom of two or three weeks begin to fall. The flowers are chiefly used in two ways, as an article of food and as a basic ingredient in the manufacture of local liquor.

The corollas are said to form an important addition to the food supply of the poorer classes of some parts of the country in which the trees grow in abundance. The mahua flowers have proved to be a source of subsistence in dire circumstances, of crop failures, due to vagaries of nature. The flowers are either stored at home or sold in the bazaars. They can be eaten raw or cooked, and often with parched grain; seeds of the Sal trees; or leaves of the other edible plants.

The Assistant Commissioner of the Balaghat district of the Central Provinces reckoned that, out of a total population of 325,000 people, about 10,000 people used mahua as food from June to April. In Awadh, the mahua is represented by far the most important of the wild vegetable products, prized by the people for its edible flowers, as well as for its fruits and timber. The use of these flowers in Bengal was confined to the forest tribes of western tracts. Mr. Forbes recorded in his Settlement Report that

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<sup>46</sup> L. Liotard, Dept. of Revenue and Agriculture, *Proceedings for August*, File no.1, Part B, National Archives of India, 1882.

in the Palamow subdivision of Lohardaya district had 114,000 mahua trees. Each tree yielded about 2.5 maunds of dry flowers and this produce apparently fetched 12 annas per maund, thus representing of over 2 lakh of rupees saved annually to the people by the use of the flowers.

In the Rewa Kantha state of Gujarat the flowers are a chief article of food and drink for the poor Bariya and Udipur tribes. In the summer season, when the Bhils are short of grain, they eat boiled mahua flowers mixed with a little corn flour. The Bhils and the Kolis set so high a value of a tree, that, they are often the cause of bloody feuds. A bhil woman looks on mahua flowers as her parent from whose kindness alone, she can buy a petticoat or a piece of cloth.

In the mahua and grain seasons, the tribes barter mahua flowers, grain, gum, lac, and honey etc in exchange for large quantities of cloth. In the Palanpur state of Gujarat, mahua is one of the chief fruit trees. The Narukot state in 1877 witnessed a very scanty rainfall which caused a serious failure of crops followed by a scarcity of fodder and the death of a large number of cattle. The distress was accentuated in the spring of 1878 by a poor mahuwa harvest. In July and August, excessive rains washed away much of the grain. With stores almost exhausted, the people were reduced to great hunger, feeding on roots and forest produce, this distressful condition continued to plague the tribals up to April 1879 when a magnificent mahua crop was reaped.

In Surat, the Bhils are said to eat the flowers and occasionally exchange it for liquor. In Ahemdabad, the flower is boiled with grain and the leaves of a creeper, called *dori*, it is a favored delicacy.

For the manufacture of liquor, dried flowers are sold by the gatherers at various rates either to the village distillers; to the banias or exported to the neighbouring places. The manufacture of liquor is a long process. The dried flowers are immersed in water for four days, then they are fermented

and the process of distillation begins. The liquor produced from a single distillation is extremely weak, but second distillation results in strong liquor.

It is evident from the above not that the Mahuwa flower has been an extremely vital source of livelihood for the Adivasis

However the imperial dessicationists probably inspired by Victorian morals, were able to get their way and 'The Mahowa Act' was passed in December 1892.<sup>47</sup> Initially it was applied only to the Thane and Kolaba (Colaba) districts. There were demands by the Abkari department of extending this Act to the Surat district, to curb the rise of illicit distillation. The Act was extended to three southern talukas of South Gujarat, i.e. Pardi, Valsad and Chikli, as according to the government most cases of illegal distillation were in these three areas.<sup>48</sup> Later in 1930, the Mahowa Act was extended to the rest of Surat district. The Mahowa Act granted one relief to the small peasants and the tribals. They could collect Mahowa flowers during the period extending from Feb.15 to April 15 each year. At other times the storage and the selling of mahowa flowers was to be banned.

This policy took away from the adivasis, the last mode of their subsistence. In 1843, the traffic in the Mahowa flowers was reported to be second only to that of teak from the Dangs.<sup>49</sup> A forest officer Report dated 10<sup>th</sup> April 1856 reaffirms the above observation about the immense volume of trade in the Mahowa flowers in the Dangs.<sup>50</sup> In the years of scarcity mahowa was a valuable food for both peasants and their cattle. The surplus was either sold into the market or converted into liquor or sold.

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<sup>47</sup> *Excise Administration Report, Bombay, 1892-93, pg.7*

<sup>48</sup> David Hardiman, *The Politics of Drinking in South Gujarat, Subaltern Studies* IV, ed. Ranjit Guha, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1985, pg.209

<sup>49</sup> W.J. Morris to H.W. Reeves, 22 May, 1843, NAI, FD, Pol. 24 Feb., 1844, 1-10

<sup>50</sup> *Power in the forests: The Dangs*, pg. 98

In the Dangs the mahowa flowers trade was a principal source for earning money, which was used in purchasing of cloths and other necessities.<sup>51</sup> Now with the ban on the flowers, the English denied to the tribals an important source of income as well as reduced their purchasing power. Moreover the liquor made from the Mahowa flowers had extremely low of alcohol content and it was considered beneficial, as it was believed that it provided the protection against malaria, cholera and plague.<sup>52</sup> Thus the English in order to earn maximum profits were virtually taking away the source of daily livelihood from them. As already discussed in chapter II, the main occupation of the Dangis of selling the timber was systematically taken away by the British by acquiring the forests on leases.

British foresters in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were following scientific management of forests; to them it was a practical and scientific approach for administering the forests as a resource and creating profits. Tribal societies, by contrast, are based on knowledge about their forest environment that is gained after lifelong experience and is passed down from generation to generation. Scientific management looks at profit in the terms of cash only, while the traditional agriculture also values other outputs such as fodder, medicines (extracted from various plants), and edible weeds etc. This further helped in maintaining various relationships in a community which was dependent on the barter system. For example seed exchanges between nomads and farmers, use of various leaves of trees in religious ceremonies by the Brahmins etc. All these helped in sustaining a social fabric leading towards a holistic approach.

The reserving of India's forests from 1860's and 1870's was motivated primarily by the concern of preventing a vital source of government revenue used freely by the tribal people. The protection of the forests was

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<sup>51</sup> *ibid*; pg. 98

<sup>52</sup> The politics of drinking in South Gujarat, Hardiman though also makes a note, that this belief is not accepted in western medical theory. Pg.176

one-sided, as it meant isolating them from their original users only, whereas the colonial government freely exploited the forests to maximize their revenues or help in expansion of their tentacles of imperialism—the railways. The government blamed deforestation on the tribal practice of shifting cultivation. The Forest Services set up a system of forest guards touring tribal areas to register reserved forests and prevent the unauthorized cutting of trees. But there are instances of forest officers allowing illegal clearing of forests after receiving bribes.

Shifting cultivation has always been a debatable issue. Foresters had been grappling with soil erosion and shifting cultivation in various degrees since the onset of forestry in the British Empire, but it was only in the late 1920s, the 1930s and the 1940s that these issues blew up into major colonial environmental crisis. These issues were debated upon at the Empire Forestry Conferences<sup>53</sup> hoping to determine an effective pan-colonial strategy. J R Ainslie, a forest officer from Nigeria made an apt distinction between shifting cultivation and 'real agriculture': whereas the former was 'cultivation of crops on a rotation of soils' the latter was the 'cultivation on a rotation of crops'<sup>54</sup>. General view was that shifting cultivation was destructive and eventually led to soil erosion, but it could not be completely banned for various political and social reasons in certain African colonies. Professor Troup agreed with Ainslie and R M White (forest officer from Ceylon) and cited the example of India. In Bengal natural regeneration of Sal, the most important timber tree had failed. It was being grown only through artificial regeneration—that is with the aid of shifting cultivation<sup>55</sup>. Ultimately it was resolved to accept controlled shifting cultivation as a part of silvicultural system with little modification being made by various colonies depending upon the geographical, ecological

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<sup>53</sup> *Modernising nature*, pg. 172-179

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 172; R Ainslie ; *Second Empire Forest Conference*, p 325

<sup>55</sup> As quoted in *Modernising nature* pg. 175 ; Prof. R S Troup, *Second Empire Forest Conference*, p. 333

and political demands. Finally for India it was stated that the existing laws were adequate and that protection against shifting cultivation could be extended by reserving land which ought to be maintained under forests. It was also urged that forest villages should be formed for the practice of controlled shifting cultivation inside reserves as a silvicultural operation<sup>56</sup>. Within the above framework and analysis of the extension of the ban on shifting cultivation in the tribal regions of South Gujarat--The Dangs become relevant. There are always differences in the opinions, but one thing emerges very clearly, that the causes for the large-scale depletion lie somewhere else. In the Dangi forests the land- human ratio was in the favor of humans as the use of land was need based only. In the given scenario, the tribal people frequently shifted their cultivation; fields are left fallow for a dozen of years, allowing the undergrowth to recuperate before being cleared again, so the forests are always reclaiming what the humans have cleared. The tribal farming is based on sowing several kinds of grains and one major crop in a clearing, the perceptible reason being many species being grown together, there is less expenditure on pest control; and due to the consumption of many crops and semi wild species there is greater nutritional security. Where the pressure on the land grows, the rotation cycle gets shorter, and thus arise a tendency to create field by permanently clearing the forests. Therefore, the causes of deforestation lie outside the tribal society, a pressure to generate an economic surplus from the forest that began or was hugely intensified, during the British rule. Shifting cultivation evolved as a frame of land use to circumvent major problems of tropical agriculture like soil erosion, low nutrient status and pest pressures. It is a brief period of utilization, small size of the plots and far reaching preservation of the original surface roughness and soil texture due to residual tree stumps absence of

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<sup>56</sup> As quoted in *modernizing nature*, p 178; Report of the Committee on Shifting Cultivation, p 410



leveling, etc. which prevent intensive erosion.<sup>57</sup> Many tropical forests in the South and South East Asia owe their existence, and make up, at least in part, to shifting cultivation.<sup>58</sup> The forest department's attempts to so call 'preserve' the forests by forbidding and restricting the tribals' customary cutting of trees has had effect on the latter. Adivasis reacted to the restrictions on their customary rights by cutting whatever they could- even the trees which they would otherwise conserve for religious or ecological reasons. In order to defy the forest regulators the Dangis villagers would beat the forest guards and abandon their fields for pursuing shifting cultivation.<sup>59</sup> The Amla Raja even threatened to fine cultivators Rs.5 each if they left the reserves as the forest department had ordered.<sup>60</sup>

Besides shifting cultivation, various other activities of the tribal people were put under the scanner such as setting fire to the undergrowth and the tall grass for hunting small games. Hares were smoked out of their holes or trapped in nets. At times fish and birds were also a part of their diet on a subsistence level.<sup>61</sup> From December 1893 onwards, the Dangis were allowed to hunt, fish collect mahua, and smoke rats out of their holes in the reserves. The forest department re-imposed restrictions in December 1906, whereby setting fire to the grass under the mahua trees; smoking out of rats, squirrels and killing of parrots and other games were prohibited.<sup>62</sup> Hunting is an integral part of the tribal way of life. It supplies them with vital source of nutrients in their diet. On the other hand, hunting was a hobby of the colonial officers.

Reserved forests were also called 'Game reserves' as hunting was the first reason for reserving them. One has to remember that forest

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<sup>57</sup> M.D. Subhash Chandra, Shifting Cultivation, Sacred Groves and conflicts in colonial Forest policy in Western Ghats, in Richard Grove (ed.) in *Environmental History of South and South East Asia*, pg.675

<sup>58</sup> *ibid*, pg.675

<sup>59</sup> *Hybrid Histories*, pg.217

<sup>60</sup> *ibid*, pg.217

<sup>61</sup> Power in the forests, pg. 97

<sup>62</sup> Hodgson to Coll. Surat, 22 Dec. 1906, BA, RD, 1907, vol.126, Bombay, 1880

management in mainland Britain was stuck in tradition. For the landed classes, the principal cultural significance of the forests lay in the fact that they provided for game, especially foxes and birds.<sup>63</sup> Although the commoners were, in theory, allowed to graze their animals on the forest floors, but in practice, it was laden with conflict and tension. Customary rights were often denied by the landlords to maintain their exclusive privileges for recreation and sport. Moreover from the eighteenth century onwards encroachments in the woodlands were met by severe punishments<sup>64</sup>.

This attitude it seems was imported and integrated in the forest policy in colonial India- Most foresters in India were also great '*shikaris*'. Their love of games brought them in conflict with the tribals. For example, in the Dangs, the hunting of the tiger, by the English caused much distress, as the animal was revered as *Vagh Dev*. The Dangis did their best to avoid being involved in such a slaughter.<sup>65</sup> The forest dwellers disliked the task of beating the bush to drive wild animals towards the guns of the wild hunter for the sake of enjoyment.<sup>66</sup> Here we find the nuances of cultural differences. A clash between two civilizations: one which seeks domination over the natural world as a right and as a manifestation of Darwinism; and the other which revered the nature while considering itself as a part of nature as opposed to above it. Thus, when the rights of the indigenous population are encroached upon by the foreign band of people and their cultural and religious settlements trampled upon the only option left with them is to manifest their anger through an uprising.

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<sup>63</sup> *Modernising nature*, pg.108-109

<sup>64</sup> K Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500-1800*, Penguin, London, 1983, pp 198-211

<sup>65</sup> *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, Vol.XII, pg. 103 & pg. 600

<sup>66</sup> *Power in the Dangs*, pg.119

### **Classification of the tribal movement**

A well-known historian K.S. Singh has categorized the tribal movements into three phases.<sup>67</sup>

- Phase 1 (1795-1860): The first phase belongs to the period of the rise, expansion and establishment of the British Empire. It was the period of various resistance movements, like the Uprising of Chero zamindars, disturbances in Chotanagpur (1820) and the resistance of the Gonds in 1819 and 1842, etc.
- Phase 2 (1860-1920): coincides with the intensive phase of colonialism, when tribal societies were deeply penetrated by the market economy, peasantisation, abolition of their rights in the forests, transfer of land to the non tribal people and the infiltration of their economy by usurers and moneylenders. This phase witnessed various socio religious movements amongst the tribals. Some major revolts were of Bersa Munda amongst the Mundas (1869-95), Santhal insurrection and the Kharwar movement (1871-80) etc. To this period also belonged the Devi Movement in South Gujarat, an uprising against usurers in the Panchmahals and the revolt of the Bhils in the Dangs.
- Phase 3 (1920-47): this period marks the rise of secular, political and nationalist uprising combined with Forest Satyagrah, dominated particularly by the Gandhian ideologies and principles. During this phase we see the participation of the tribes in the national and the agrarian movements.

I would now present a brief survey of the tribal movements that took place in various parts of Gujarat.

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<sup>67</sup> K.S. Singh, Presidential Address, 'Colonial Transformation of the Tribal Society in Middle India', proceedings of *Indian History Congress*, 38<sup>th</sup> Session, 1997, pp. 373-397

### **Infiltration of the Tribal Economy by the Sahukars and the resultant action by the Bhils**

Though, this movement took place in a geographical area outside the area of my work, I feel it would be apt to throw some light on it, so as to understand the larger picture. The Panchmahals, in Eastern Gujarat, it witnessed the dissatisfaction of the Bhils against the monetary policies of the moneylenders. This disturbance points towards a general pattern of the exploitation of the tribal communities, on an all India level.

The Panchmahals is in Eastern Gujarat lying between 73 15' and 74 30' eastern longitude and 20 30' and 23 30' northern latitude. It is called Panchmahals because it originally consisted of five *mahals*, viz. Godhra, Kalol, Halol, Dahod and Jhalod. From 1853, it was under the British occupation. Panchmahals has been famous for its forests and teak (*Tectona grandis*), accounts for 70% of the total wood.

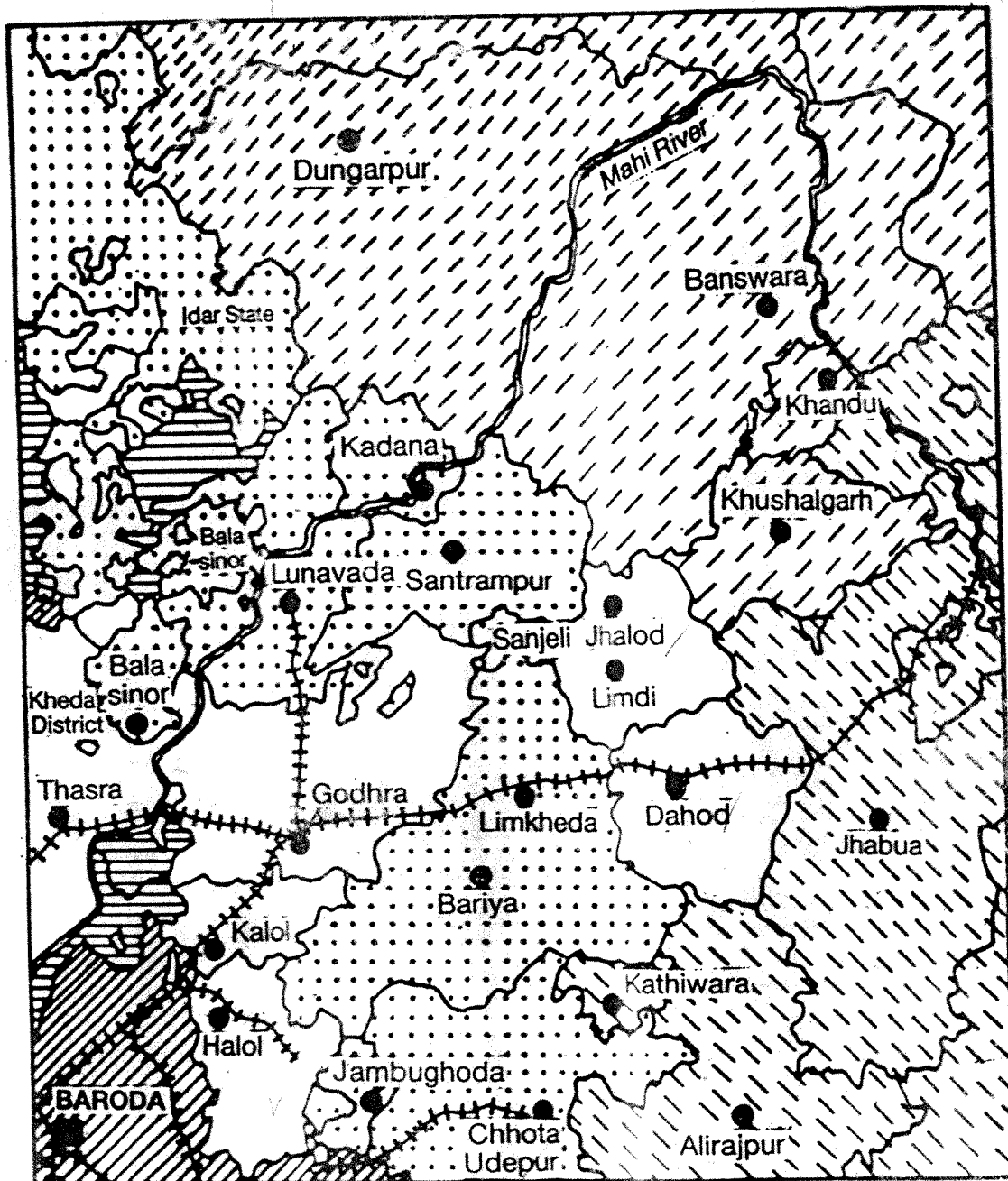
In the Eastern Gujarat, the Adivasis are mostly concentrated in the three towns of Dahod, Jhalod and Limbdi (See map IVB). The majority of the adivasis were Bhils (64%), followed by Labanas, and Patelians. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the Bhils of Eastern Mahals had given up Swidden agriculture and had taken to settled agriculture. They grew maize on a large scale during the rainy season, as it was the staple food of the area. In 1877-78, 42% of the cultivated area was under maize,<sup>68</sup> while 8% of the cultivated area was under rice.<sup>69</sup> The Bhils, since many generations were engaged in farming, they had acquired good knowledge about the nature of crop and its effects on the soil. They had worked out some kind of a crop rotation- after the harvesting of maize and rice, the soil still had enough moisture and nutrients for growing gram-*chana dal* and wheat. Till 1878, poppy was grown as a commercial crop. Its juice was extracted,

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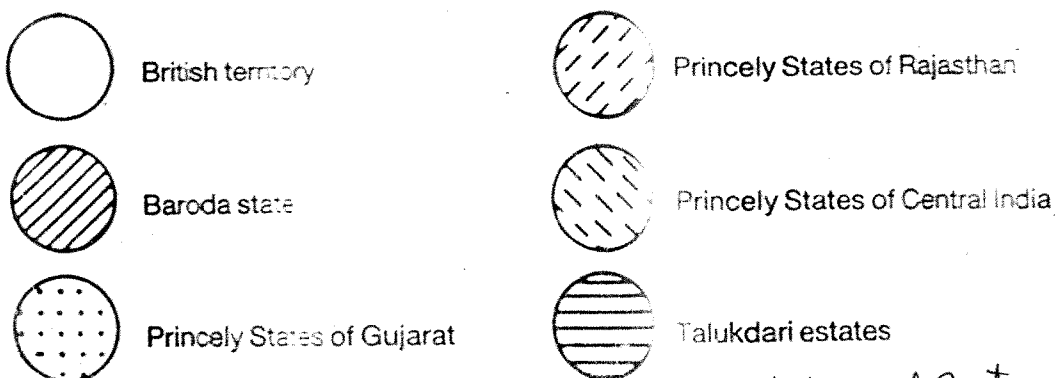
<sup>68</sup> Gazetteer Bombay Presidency, Kaira and Panchmahals, 1879, pg.300

<sup>69</sup> *ibid*, pg. 302

map IV B  
The Panch Mahal District



North-eastern Gujarat during the Colonial Period



Source: P. Hardiman, *The Bhils and Sahukars of Eastern Gujarat*,  
Subaltern Studies, Vol. V, 1984

dried and the opium prepared, which was handed over to the 'sahukars' (money lenders), who mostly exported it to Baroda and Bombay.<sup>70</sup>

Cultivation of opium was banned by the government; by the Abkari Act of 1878. The Bhils in the off-season were engaged primarily in the cutting and selling of wood besides collecting gum and lac from the forests.

They further collected mahua flowers, most of which were sold to the money lenders, who in turn sold them either to the liquor distilleries or exported to South Gujarat (Surat by this time had emerged as one of the biggest town in manufacturing liquor) or Bombay.

Given the subsistence nature of the occupation of the Bhils, they had no regular earnings, and consequently hardly any savings. It is here that they came into a controversial relationship with a *sahukar*, as they were dependent upon the latter for the advance payments to buy seeds during the time of sowing and food grains when the crops failed. As soon as crops were harvested by the Bhils the Sahukars would set out to the Bhil villages with the empty bullock carts. The normal terms of borrowings were that one and a half times the amount of grain advanced during the preceding months to be repaid at the harvest times. According to a report of 1878, the peasants generally handed over half their crop of maize to moneylenders at the time.<sup>71</sup> Another report of 1881, estimated that three-fifths of the crop went to the Sahukar.<sup>72</sup> Each Sahukar had a Bhil in a monopolistic relationship and the latter could not approach any other moneylender.

Sahukar took full advantage of fluctuations in prices, advancing loans on 'agricultural produce' when the prices were high and demanding the

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<sup>70</sup> *ibid*, pp. 233-234

<sup>71</sup> David Hardiman, *The Bhils and saukars of Eastern Gujarat, Subaltern Studies*, vol V, pg.11

<sup>72</sup> *Jhalod taluka Settlement Report*, 1881, pg. 13

payments back when the prices were low. Thus the debts of the peasants kept on multiplying. Often the son inherited the debts of his father. The Bhils also borrowed large sums of money for marriages and for memorial services to the dead, which later became extremely difficult for them to pay back. The sahuکار not only gave the loans to the Bhils, but he also paid government taxes on their behalf to the *talatis* when the latter left their villages for seasonal work, he paid government taxes on their behalf to the *talatis*. If a sahuکار did not do so, the land of Bhil would be confiscated and his debts would remain unpaid resulting in the loss of money to the moneylender.

The year 1899 was a period of famine in Gujarat. With the failure of the kharif crops, the urban seths refused the credit to the sahuکارs who in turn refused the same to the Bhils. As a result to make the two ends meet, the Bhils went into the forest to cut the wood to sell it in the market. But as markets were overloaded with wood, they had to dispose their wood at the minimum prices. Further many of them were detained by the forest guards for illegally felling of trees and breaking the forest regulations.<sup>73</sup> At the same time merchants and the grain dealers decided to make greater profit by exporting grain to other parts of western India besides hoarding. This created food crisis for the Bhils.

Bhils approached to the *mamlatdar*, with their grievances of their harassment by the sahuکارs and the forest officers. They also demanded the right to fell and sell wood freely during the famine. The complaints were ignored. Further when the Bhils were going back they were insulted by a Bohra. This enraged the Bhils and they resorted to violence. They also looted the grain shop looting of the grain shops, first in Jhalod and then in Valod and Santrampur. On September 12, 1899, troops were

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<sup>73</sup> *Administrative Reports of the Forest Department in Bombay Presidency, including Sind*, for the year 1899-1900, Bombay, 1901, pp.8-9

called in to handle the situation. The Bhils avoided confrontation by keeping away from the main routes of communication. In the mean time, there was scanty to average rains, (76 mm falling between 9 -16 September), which encouraged the Adivasis to go back and start cultivation.<sup>74</sup> It is to be taken into account that the Adivasis violence was confined to looting. No single member of the dominant class was killed, and in the clashes, all the nine fatalities were of Bhils. According to David Hardiman, what provoked the Bhils into uprising was not only the fact that the Sahukars had refused to advance loan to them, but also that they were hoarding the grain to export it for greater profits.<sup>75</sup> The rights of the Bhils to supplement their livelihood from the forests was also taken away systematically, which was a general pattern emerging in India at this time. The Bhils aim was clear- to take the grain from the sahuks, which they were hoarding.

#### **Demands of Modern Economy versus Survival of the Dangis**

The conditions prevailing in the Dangis has been discussed earlier in this chapter. The entire region was a bone of contention among the Bhils, the British and the Gaekwads because of its forest power. The English partly due to their superior negotiation skills and partly because of the ignorance of the Bhils were able to secure the entire forest area of the Dangis on their own terms and conditions. Forests were reserved and restrictions were imposed on shifting agriculture, ban was imposed on the collection and the sale of the Mahua flowers and the trade of adivasis in the Dangis was stopped. These conditions created an environment, which could at any time lead to the insurgency from below. These tensions were reflected in three major outbreaks between 1907 and 1913.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> The Bhils and Sahukars of Eastern Gujarat, pg. 41 (Hardiman however says that the rain proved insufficient to produce any crops)

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, pg.42

<sup>76</sup> *Hybrid Histories*, pp.268-272; Power in the forests, pp.135-137



In September 1907, when the Patil of Ahwa died without leaving any direct adult male heir, the son of the Raja of Amla came to his house and forcibly took away two bullocks from his family.<sup>77</sup> When the family of the deceased Patil complained, the Dewan along with reinforcements threatened them physically. As a result number of Bhils gathered with their bows and arrows. The Dewan fled and when the Bhils could not find him, they resorted to violence and started smashing the things. Later they attacked and plundered the houses of several Kokins. When the Raja of Amla came to the scene, he expressed his regret over what had happened and sent his entire Bhils home. When the colonial reinforcements came to Dangs, they met with no resistance. The offenders were punished and peace was restored. Raja of Amla was forced to pay Rs. 2134 in compensation as his sons and his followers were involved in the disturbances caused.

The second uprising of the Bhils broke in 1911. A Bhil resident called Sonji Kabaria wanted to rebuild his hut. The required wood could only be procured after he had to obtain permission from the forest guards of that area. Sukaria, a leading *bahuband* of the area instigated Sonji by saying that since he was the master of the Kadmal area he could go ahead and cut the trees without taking any permission from the forest guards. Sonji did the same. When the forest guards came to arrest him, Sonji at the behest of Sukaria threatened the guard, armed himself with bows and arrows and went around setting fire to the forests.

When a party of three armed men came to arrest Sonji, the clash ensued between both the parties in which a policeman was killed and after some chase Sonji was captured. Later officials received a report that the local forest guard was threatened by the Bhils who later fled. Within a few days, more forests were burnt in the Kadmal area, liquor shops were looted and

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<sup>77</sup> It was an old custom of taking away a Kokni patel's grain and cattle, if he died without having any adult male heir, *Hybrid Histories*, pg. 268

a kokni patel was threatened. More forests were burnt in the Eastern Dangs. G.E. Majoribanks (DFO), called for the assistance from Surat. A band of 30 policemen arrived, and Sukaria along with eleven other Bhils was arrested. The armed police remained in the Dangs until order was restored.

The third outbreak occurred in December 1914. This was set off by rumors of imminent defeat of the British in Europe during the First World War. This was seen by the Bhils as an opportunity to reassert their lost authority. The Naik of Pimpri played an active part in this defiance. Large group of Bhils gathered together led by chiefs such as Raja of Gadhvi and the Raja of Amla. They set fire to the forests and began the felling of trees. They even threatened the forest guards with violence, if confronted. Quick action was taken by the British. Armed police was sent to the Dangs and the uprising collapsed. The leaders of the uprising were tried and sentenced. After this revolt Bhils did not dare to risk any confrontations with the British.

We find that in these revolts, the anger of the Bhils was directed not against the forests, but against the government demanding that the latter should stop interfering with their use of the forests. It had become a way of defying and resisting the authority of the colonial state. We also get the glimpse of the collectivism; a basic feature of tribal character, a feeling of nationalism was seen in the tribal area, though it was mainly concentrated on the local issues. The mainstreaming of the forest communities was a central theme of the Gandhian and nationalist thought and social work.

## **Assimilation of Religio-Cultural Traditions in the Nationalist Movement**

The exploitation of the adivasis by high caste moneylenders and the Parsi liquor dealers prepared the ground for this movement in South Gujarat. The colonial bureaucracy also either demanded free labour services or charged high rate of taxation. This profit was invested in large-scale acquisition of the land from the tribals after the latter was unable to pay the same. Therefore the adivasis became the tenants of their own lands.

This movement initially started in the coastal villages in Bessin, lying to the north of Bombay and later spread to the Ranimahals of South Gujarat (Dangs and in surrounding areas-see map IVC).

The movement was supposed to have been started by a Goddess Salabai, not represented by an image, but by her 'spirit medium' after being possessed. According to Hardiman, her commands were as follows.<sup>78</sup>

### **1. Alcohol**

- Do not drink liquor or toddy.
- Do not serve on liquor or toddy shop.
- Do not tap toddy trees.

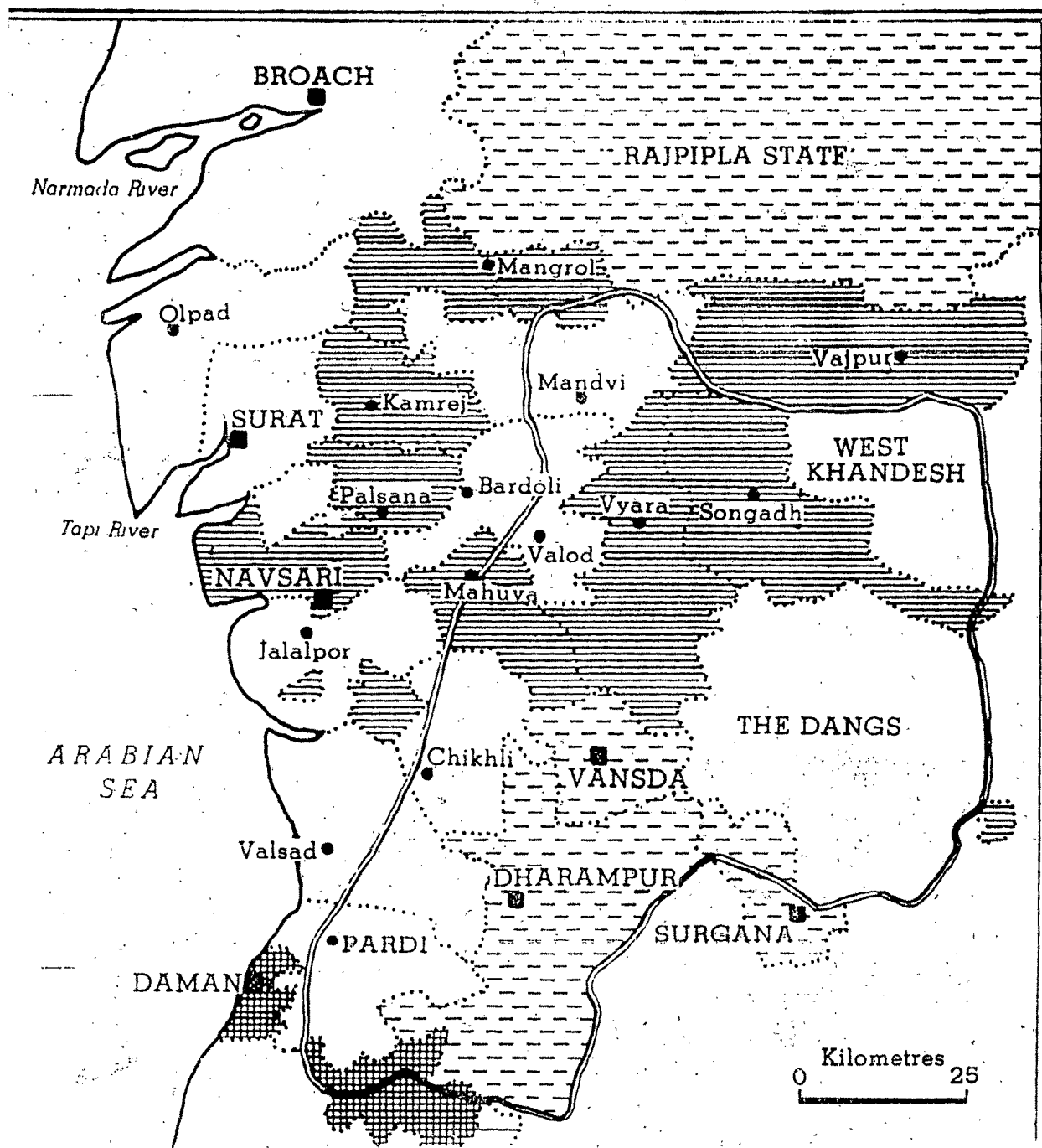
### **2. Flesh**

- Do not eat meat or fish.
- Dispose all live fowls, goats and sheep (kept for eating or sacrifice).
- Destroy all cooking vessels used for cooking meat.

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<sup>78</sup> David Hardiman, *Adivasi Assertion in South Gujarat, The Devi Movement, 1922-23, Subaltern Studies*, vol III, pg.211

Map IV C  
The Spread of the Devi Movement



Source: D. Hardiman, *Adivasi Assertion in South Gujarat, The Devi Movement, 1922-23*, *Southern Studies*, Vol. III, 1968

- Remove and burn roofs of houses (normally of thatch in adivasi villages) as smoke from fires used to cook meat have passed through them.

### 3. Cleanliness

- Take a bath daily (in some cases twice or thrice a day).
- Use water to clean up after defecation.
- Keep houses and compounds scrupulously clean.

### 4. Dominant Classes

- Boycott Parsis.
- Boycott Muslims.
- Do not work for anyone connected with the liquor trade
- Demand higher wages.
- Take a bath when crossed by the shadow of a Parsi.

The first set of commands is seen as giving up of basic essence of the tribal lifestyle. Drinking since generations was an integral part of the tribal lifestyle. The second and the third set of commands clearly shows the glimpse of the process of 'Sanskritisation', being adopted by the adivasis in large number. It could be deduced from the fourth set of commands, that it was directed chiefly against the Parsis, who were charging high prices for liquor besides morally degrading the adivasis by selling them the alcohol. This movement strongly urged adivasis to remain clean and abstain from consuming meat. The Gandhian leader Sumant Mehta described this as a self-purification movement. The movement was carried with such zeal, that the local Parsis were complaining about serious fall in the sales and profit of the liquor. This movement did not become popular with the Parsis, the British government and the Dewan of Baroda (he

banned it),<sup>79</sup> as the movement led to a fall in their collection of taxes from liquor and, their (tribal) demand for higher wages for working as agriculture labour.

The movement, which initially started on social and religious lines soon drifted into politics, as the Devi further commanded the Adivasis to advocate the burning of foreign cloth and the boycott of the governmental schools- both prominent feature of the Non-Cooperation movement.<sup>80</sup> The Devi movement proved to be a successful movement of the tribal assertion against their exploiters. They then favoured their allies in the nationalists and the adivasis were streamlined into the nationalist movement. They gave firm support to the Gandhian movement and the freedom struggle in 1930-31 and in 1942. The *Kisan sabha* organized a rally of thousands of adivasis to abolish the *hali pratha* among the Dublas of South Gujarat. It was later joined by the leaders (Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel) of the Bardoli Satyagrah and efforts were made by them to bring the adivasis into the nationalist movement. The Gandhian constructive programmes were propagated through the *bhajan mandalis* and *Bhuvās* (people believed to have supernatural powers- messengers of mother Goddess). At this time *Kaliparaj* conference was organized in Mahuva a taluka of the Baroda State under the leadership of Vallabhbhai Patel on January 21, 1923 attended by 20,000 adivasis. Later *Kaliparaj* society passed a resolution of non-payment of revenues dues to the English, with severe action taken against those, who did not follow the resolution.

Many political leaders like Gopal Krishna Gokhale were favouring the prohibition of liquor, because it was helping the government in the collection of the revenues on liquor at a large scale. In 1921, Gandhi

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<sup>79</sup> Sir Sayaji Rao Gaekwad. III, a staunch reformist after returning from Europe (he was in Europe when the Deewan banned it), allowed the Adivasis to hold meetings for the movement and asked the officials to cooperate in such activities.

<sup>80</sup> Adivasi Assertion in South Gujarat, The Devi Movement, pg.224

asked the people to picket liquor and toddy shops, which resulted in the decline of sales in liquor in many areas.<sup>81</sup> In the Haripura congress of 1940, about 5000 adivasis resolved to put an end to the British rule.

It is a known fact that at this time Congress was to a large extent a political party, which was emerging rapidly into the Indian political scenario to liberate the country from the colonial hegemony. Their prime motive behind the inclusion of the tribals in the nationalist movement was to strengthen the base of their party and its nationalistic ideas to fight the colonists. But it seems that the grief and grievances of the adivasis was forgotten and not addressed when the Congress party came into power. The condition of the tribals remained the same, in some cases, it actually worsened, and no actual measures were taken to restore the forests to the adivasis- who at one time were its rightful owners.

It would be relevant here to throw some light also on the Bardoli Satyagrah and the Kheda Movement (1917-1934) that took place in South Gujarat and Central Gujarat respectively.

These movements dealt with the non-payment of revenues by the peasants, which to them were exorbitant, especially during the time of floods or drought. The community, which suffered on a large scale, consisted largely of small farmers and the daily wage earners, most of whom were the adivasis. Thus these movements along with the farming community mobilized the tribals on a large scale.

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<sup>81</sup> Judith Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power: Indian Politics, 1915-1922*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1972, pp. 315-316

### The Bardoli Satyagraha of 1928

Parts of Bardoli taluka in Central Surat district had become a part of the British territories as a result of the Treaty of Bassein in December 1802 between the British and Peshwa Raghunath Rao. (See map IVD). Later rest of the taluka was ceded to the English by the Gaekwads in 1817.<sup>82</sup> When the British came to possess the area, the *Desais*, who were responsible for the management of the revenues, were a powerful force receiving a fixed percentage of the revenues as their share. The *Majumdar* was an accountant who was responsible for maintaining revenue records of the district. Each village also had a Patel, as its head. Offices of the *patel* had become hereditary and many of them were also big landlords. They were responsible for assessing and collecting land revenue and maintaining law and order in the village.

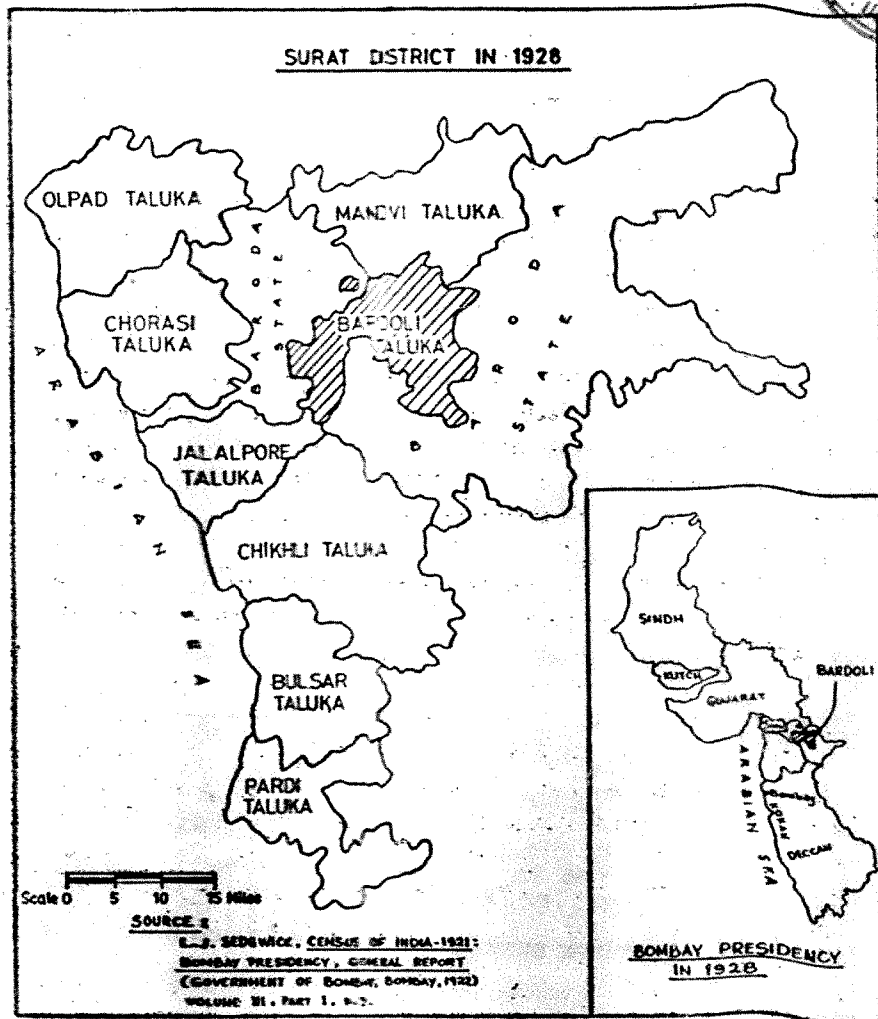
When the British occupied the Surat district, they believed that the revenue functionaries were taking advantage of both the government and the peasants. As a result Ryotwari system was introduced in Gujarat, and it was decided to fix the government demand at 55% of the produce. However it was realized that due to faulty settlements and high rates of assessments, the system was resulting in the depressed condition of the farmers. In 1821, Elphinstone, though was against the reduction of the land revenues, admitted that in some cases, the rates were exceedingly high.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, Surat & Broach*, Gujarat Govt. of Bombay, Bombay, 1897, vol. II, pg. 212

<sup>83</sup> Shireen Mehta, *The Peasantry and Nationalism*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1984, pg.9





Source: Shreen Mehta, The Peasantry and Nationalism, New Delhi, 1984

The population of the Bardoli taluka (which was predominantly an agricultural tract), according to the census of 1921 was 87,909.<sup>84</sup> The upper castes consisted of the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Kayasthas, Baniyas and Jains. A large number of the population of Bardoli taluka comprised of the *Kaliparaj* population. They constituted about 63 percent of the total population. Majority of them were Dublas. Most of the *kaliparaj* in the Bardoli taluka were Halis (landless laborers), though some of them also held small piece of land or worked as the independent labourers. Most of these adivasis always found themselves in the clutches of the moneylenders. The *Kaliparaj* people were so poor that they were sometimes forced to live on roots.

Bardoli became an all India issue because of the unfair rate of assessment levied by the British. The cultivators had expected that in the revised settlements of 1888 and 1910, the rate of assessment would be reduced but the reverse happened. The settlement officer in charge of operations in the area was M.S. Jaykar. He completely misread the current economic and political condition, (see Appendix IV B) and proposed an increase of 30.59% in the land revenue of the Bardoli taluka.<sup>85</sup> The reaction of peasants under the leadership of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and later joined by Gandhi began what came to be known as the Bardoli satyagrah. Gandhi on February 1, 1922, as a part of Non Cooperation movement, sought the resignation of patels, talatis and other government servants and advocated the non-payment of taxes (especially land revenue) in Bardoli.<sup>86</sup> It was demanded that an independent inquiry committee should be appointed to look into unjustness of the Jaykar report. The government refused.

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<sup>84</sup> I.J. Sedgwick, *Census of India, 1921, Bombay Presidency (Bombay 1928)*, pg.30

<sup>85</sup> *The peasantry and nationalism*, pg.39

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.* Pg.39

Under the leadership of Sardar Patel and Gandhi, Bardoli became an all India issue. When the peasants refused to make the payment of land revenue, the government intensified the process of forfeiture of peasant's land, cattle and movable property.

In many cases the government confiscated land worth of thousands of rupees for a negligible amount of land revenue dues. For instances, the government attached the land of one Veerchand Chengaji worth Rs.13, 000 for his dues amounting to Rs.160. Similarly Ibrahim Patel lost his land worth Rs.20, 000 though his dues were only Rs.450.<sup>87</sup> One lower caste Khatedar lost his household belongings and furniture for his dues amounting to Rs.3. Poor peasants and tribals were deprived of their cattle. The stiff resistance provided by the people of Bardoli alongwith, the emergence of Bardoli issue on all India level, with the participation of leaders like Gandhi, Patel, Motilal Nehru and many at local level, the government inevitably bowed under the pressure. The Kunzru committee was formed under the leadership of Haridayanath Kunzru, who was the president of the Servants of India Society. The major findings of the report were<sup>88</sup>,

1. The settlement officer, Jaykar did not make any fresh enquiry on the spot as prescribed by the Settlement Manual and had relied on the data prepared by the *talatis*.
2. The data provided by Patels and talatis were defective, and
3. The complaint of peasants that the Settlement Officer had used the period of abnormal price rise for his calculation was justified.

On the basis of these findings the Kunzru Committee upheld the demand for a fresh inquiry into the case of the Bardoli peasants. Later the government formed the Broomfield and Maxwell Committee, which also upheld the views of Kunzru committee. The former suggested to the latter

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<sup>87</sup> K.M. Munshi, *Report of the Bardoli enquiry Committee*, Bombay, 1928, pg.154-155.

<sup>88</sup> *The peasantry and nationalism*, pg. 154-155

that villages should be grouped under new rates of assessment. On the basis of the value of land, it recommended the rise of 6.03% in the revenue<sup>89</sup> (Jaykar had proposed the increase of 30.5%). The committee, thus, set, at rest the problem that had agitated not only the Bardoli taluka and Surat district, but to an extent the whole country. Though the peasants were not entirely happy on the new rates of assessment, but were satisfied that their major demands had been met.

What is important here to note is that the low caste and the tribal people were also influenced by the movement. To mobilize the *Kaliparaj* and the tribal population, the agitators made effective use of the traditional institution of *Bhuvras* that prevailed among them. *Bhuvras* were a group of people credited to have supernatural powers and believed to be the messengers of the mother Goddess whom the *Kaliparaj* people worshipped. The *Bhuvras*, therefore, had become the natural leaders of these backward groups, and the local Gandhians and other leaders won the confidence and support of these *bhuvras* and through them to their followers.

The leaders convinced the *Bhuvras* that the Gandhi was also a God who ate simple food and wore simple dress like them. Various *bhajan mandalis* were started to further mobilize the population. In 1924, there were no less than 50 such *bhajan mandalis*, consisting of the members from the *Kaliparaj* and *Uliparaj* communities in the Surat district.

The *Kaliparaj* conference was another forum, which the agitators used successfully to their advantage. The first conference of the *Kaliparaj* community was held in 1922 at village Shekhpura of the Mahuva taluka in the Baroda state.

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<sup>89</sup> R.S. Broomfield & R.M. Maxwell, 'Report of the special Enquiry into the Second Revision Settlement of the Bardoli and Chorasi talukas'. Bombay, 1919, pg.1

In 1927, Gandhi while presiding over the conference pointed out that *Kaliparaj* was a derogatory term and it is more appropriate to call them '*Raniparaj*', or the residents of the forests. He further emphasized over the importance of the Indian forests and explained that the *Raniparaj* were the children of the forests. In 1929, Sardar Patel had called a *Kaliparaj* conference at Unai village in Baroda state where he warned the Parsis against exploiting these innocent people. He openly asked the *Kaliparaj* that they should resist the ill-treatment and exploitation at all costs. Thus the Bardoli satyagrah not only incorporated the tribals into the nationalist field but also made them think about fighting against the exploitation of the dominant communities.

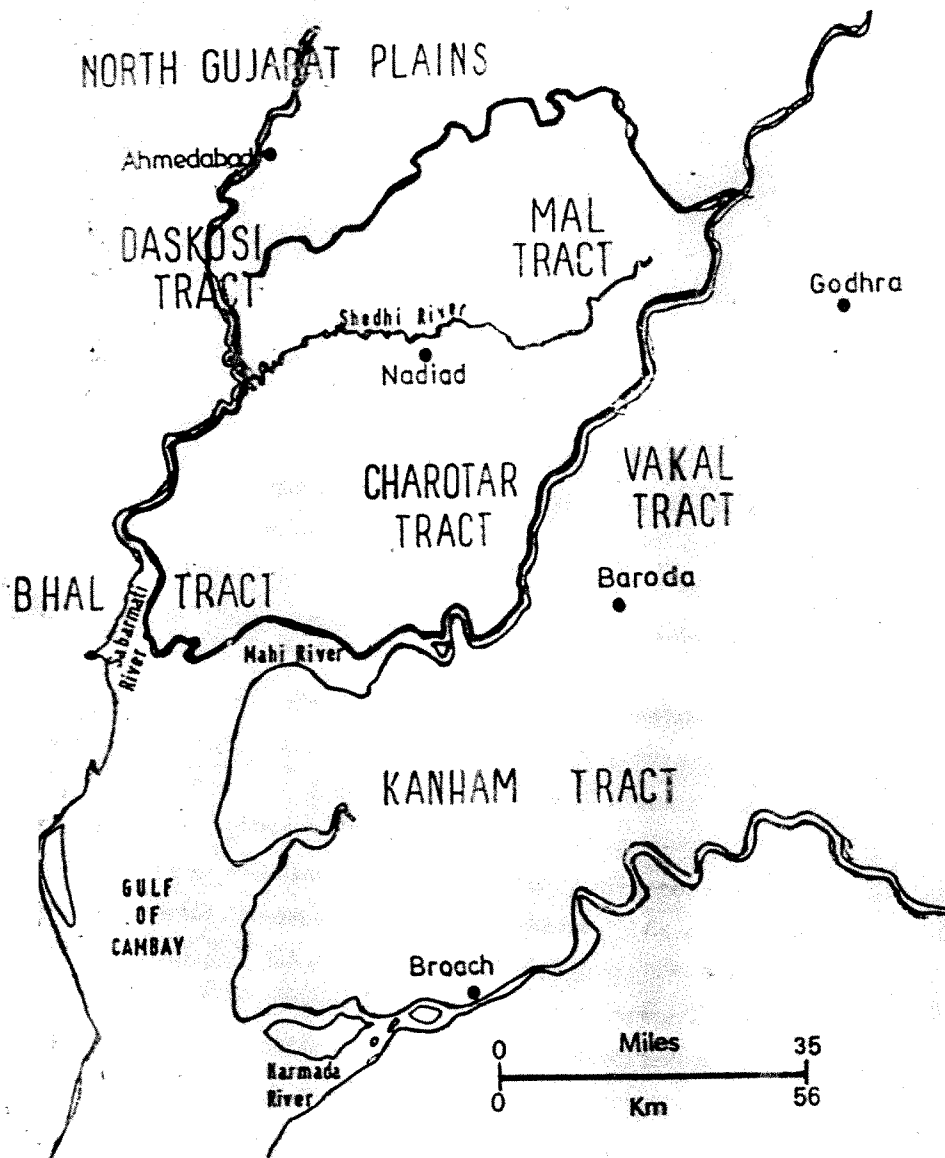
#### **The Kheda Satyagraha (1917-1918)**

Kheda district is located in Central Gujarat lying between the River Mahi and Sabarmati. (See map IVE). There were numerous reasons, which led to the beginning of the satyagrah. Kheda has been a fertile region and the single largest tract in Kheda has been 'Charotar' which has been an extremely fertile area. This movement represents the agitation of the rich and poor peasants including the adivasis against the exploitative revenue policies of the British.

During the First World War, the economic position of the peasants in Kheda deteriorated. The entire Gujarat was still trying to recover from the effects of the great famine of 1899-1900. In 1905, due to the scarcity of rains, the Kharif crops failed. In 1916, the season was better, and in 1917, late rains spoilt the harvested crops.

By this time Gandhi had announced that the nationalist movement in Gujarat was for the peasants. There were increasing demands by the cultivating class for some relief in the land revenues. Two local leaders,

Map IV E  
Boundaries of the Kheda district



Boundary of area covered by British  
 Kheda District, Petlad and Bhadrav  
 Talukas of Baroda State and  
 Cambay State

MAP 7

Agricultural tracts of Central Gujarat

Source: D. Handman, Peasant Nationalist of Gujarat, Kheda district,  
1917-35, OUP, Delhi, 1981

Mohanlal and Shankarlal after visiting various villages; approached the Collector of the district requesting him to waive some portion of the revenues. The collector after enquiry agreed to suspend half the revenue in 40 villages of the Nadiad taluka, 34 villages of the Kapadvanj taluka and 30 villages of the Matar taluka.<sup>90</sup>

Orders to this effect were circulated to the *Mamlatdars* of the concerned talukas on December 22, 1917, although they were not announced to the public until January 7, 1918.<sup>91</sup> The *Mamlatdars* made no attempts to carry out the Government's order. In other talukas also peasants demanded for remittance of the revenue

The Government of Bombay denied any further suspension of the revenues in Kheda. Gandhi, while making his own enquiry into the grievances of the peasants, concluded that their demands for the suspension of revenue was justified and informed the same to the collector but to no avail. In protest, Gandhi launched the Kheda Satyagrah. He stressed that the peasant's refusal of their revenue was political rather than economic act. He also urged the rich peasants to refuse their revenue for the sake of the poor peasants. The Government decided that those who refused the revenues were to be punished by raids in which their movable property was to be confiscated in lieu of the revenue arrears, and those who genuinely could not afford the revenue should not be compelled. The collector of various districts passed this order to the *Mamlatdars* but the latter again did not make any efforts to make these orders known to the public. The peasants thus achieved one of the major aims of the agitation without knowing it, and the satyagraha continued for another six weeks.

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<sup>90</sup> David Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalist of Gujarat, Kheda district, 1917-1935*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 981, pg. 94

<sup>91</sup> G.S. Parikh, *'Khedani Ladat'*, Ahmedabad, 1922, pg. 34

When Gandhi later came to know about the order, he announced that the agitation has achieved his aim, and all those who could pay the revenue, should do so. Only 8% of the revenue remained unpaid, and with the end of the satyagrah, this was soon reduced to one percentage.<sup>92</sup> Thus the satyagrah came to an end with neither side gaining an obvious victory. It is to be noticed that besides the satyagrah, Kheda also emerged as a powerful center of the Non cooperation and the Civil Disobedience Movement.

Thus by the end of 1935 small peasants and tribals were incorporated into the nationalist stream. Gandhi being a charismatic leader always raised the issues, which were close to common people's heart and close to the hearts of peasants and tribal people were land revenue and forests. Forest Satyagrah was a part of his programme, in which he made the tribals aware of their rights in forests and taught them the skills to encounter the colonial government through his notion of non-violence. In the forest areas of the Garhwal Himalaya, this style of protest was revived in independent India as the '*Chipko*' or 'Embrace- the tree' movement to protect trees marked for felling. Although *chipko* was first practiced in the Garhwal Himalayas, it later (post independence period) spread to most parts of the country, especially the hilly region. (See Appendix IV C).

We find that even after gaining independence, the condition of the tribals has still not improved. Though they received some lands from the high caste and upper class people, but suffered other kinds of exploitation like eviction and expropriation of their lands for industrial development projects, displacement due to the construction of dam and mining etc.

With bio-diversity concerns having been pushed upfront, traditional ecological knowledge (rejected by the colonialists as been scientifically and technologically backward), encompassing all issues linked to ecology and natural resource management has assumed greater significance.

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<sup>92</sup> *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat*, pg. 108



### **Traditional knowledge of the Tribals and the farmers**

The cultural and ecological diversity in the Indian society reflects a close relationship between the existence of human life and nature. In India, every region has its own ecology that was seen and understood by the inhabitants since the earliest times. The tribals and the small farmers, who are closely associated with nature as they plough, sow, and use plants as medicinal herbs, with experience have gained knowledge that deals with environment and its surroundings. They harbour rich and diverse knowledge about the ecological biodiversity and its importance. The information they have gathered is the result of their close association with nature through the ages, passed generation to generation. More than 50 million people of different ethnic origins, belonging to different social communities with various religious beliefs inhabit Gujarat. Traditional societies often referred to as indigenous or tribal people have accumulated a vast empirical knowledge on the basis of their experience while dealing with the nature and natural resources. They have and have been playing an important role in the preserving of the traditional management of resources.

Following is the outline of how the two-way interaction takes place between the traditional societies and the Eco system. (For greater details see P S Ramakrishnan, *Ecology and Sustainable Development*, NBT,2001,pp 13-24).

- In managing the agro- ecosystems, traditional societies use biodiversity in a variety of ways in order to ensure the relative stability of the eco system and ecosystem resilience to cope with uncertainties in the environment.

- At the sub specific level and species level of crop diversity in mixed species complex agro-ecosystems, the objective of the farmer is to optimize economic production, by synchronizing between crop organization and growth on one hand and soil fertility status on the other, at the plot/ ecosystem level.
- Since agro- ecosystem form part of the landscape, with other land use system, as part of the total village ecosystem and the natural forest ecosystem, with resource flow between all these different units, traditionally the farmer ensures a high level of heterogeneity at the landscape level too.
- Traditional societies, due to their experience of the utility of the various species, are able to recognize certain species, which are ecologically important key species, performing vital functions. For example, many north east Indian tribal communities grow *Flemingia vestita*, which can fix up to 250kgs of nitrogen per hectare for dealing with the problem of declining length of shifting agricultural fallow cycles, managed under infertile mountain soil conditions.
- Under the conditions of land degradation, which may be caused due to pressure of growing population on the land, water scarcity etc., the farmers uses his experiences based on the traditional ecological knowledge to make the land as productive as possible under the changed circumstances.
- Preservation of vegetation as sacred groves or through various taboos and other restrictions.
- Regularity of agricultural operations or cycles through mythological association with celestial bodies, seasons etc.

The benefits accruing from traditional ecological knowledge is of three kinds;

(1) *Economic*—traditional crop varieties and lesser known plants and animals of food value, medicinal plants etc. harvested from the wild;

(2) *Ecological/social*—manipulation of biodiversity for coping with uncertainties (in a situation of natural or man made environmental disasters) ; for controlling soil water regimes and hydrology, form efficient organic residue management , soil fertility management through modified soil biological processes, etc;

(3) *Ethical*—cultural, spiritual and religious belief systems centered around the concept of the sacred species and sacred groves and sacred landscapes

A survey of most used plants by tribal communities of Gujarat has revealed that, out of ca. 2000 plants taxa occurring in Gujarat, 760 are medicinal and 450 are of economical importance and most of these plants species are used by the tribal people.

**Table IV C**

**Plant species used by the tribal population economically and medically.<sup>93</sup>**

Utility	No. of species used
Cereals and pseudo meals	21
Pulses	7
Vegetables	80
Fruits and seeds	71
Fodder plants	43
Spices and condiments	51
Beverages	6
Oil yielding plants	15
Tooth brushes	11
<i>Bidi</i> wrappers	2
Timber trees	44
Fish poison and arrow head poison	15
Taboos	17
Fiber yielding plants	17
Hedge plant	24
Miscellaneous	48
Medicinal plant	76

*The regional occurrence of medicinally important species in Gujarat is 353 species from Kachchh and Banaskantha (desert zone), 488 species from Bharuch, Valsad, Surat and Dangs (Malabar zone).*

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<sup>93</sup> A.J. Umadevi, M.H. Parabia and M.N. Reddy, Medicinal Plants of Gujarat: a survey, proceedings of all India Symposium on the 'Biology and Utility of Wild plants', Prof. G.L. Shah Commemoration, (Dept. of Biosciences, S.G. University, Surat), 1989, pg.12

**Table IV D**

**Plant species used in folk medicines and ethno botany in South and Central Gujarat.<sup>94</sup>**

<b>Botanical Name</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Utility</b>
Arisaema Tortuosuma	South Gujarat	Roots are used to kill worms in cattle.
Bulea Superba	South Gujarat	Multiple usages; Leaves are applied on boils, flowers yield yellow brown dye, plant extract as remedy against poisonous insect bites, snake bites and scorpion stings
Cassytha fileformis	Central Gujarat	Tonic. Plant powder mixed with sesame oil as hair tonic; when mixed with butter and ginger, it is used to clean ulcers.
Cholrophylum borivilianum	South Gujarat	Tubers possess anti fertility

<sup>94</sup> Traditional knowledge and biodiversity conservation in Gujarat, pg.53

Botanical Name	Region	Utility
		property. Leaves are used as vegetables.
Citrullus colocynthus	South and Central Gujarat	Fruits are used to treat boils and stomachache.
Colebrookea oppositifolia	South Gujarat	Leaves are crushed and applied to wounds.
Dendrobium microbulbim	South Gujarat	Bulbs edible
Derris scandris	South and Central Gujarat	Roots are used to cure tumors; barks are used for snakebites.
Malaxis mankinxis	South Gujarat	Edible leaves
Milletia racemosa	South Gujarat	Roots are used as fish poison.
Nervilia aragoana	South Gujarat	Tubers are used for good lactation in women
Piliostigma malabarica	South Gujarat	Used as fodder
Salicornia brachiata	South Gujarat	Leaves are used as spinach.

Apart from this, the knowledge of tribals of **wild edible plants** particularly in South Gujarat has opened doors to wide range of food items. Fibers are

extracted from varied sources. The people of coastal regions extract fiber from palm trees like *Borassus flabellifer*, *Phoenix dactylifera* and *Cocies nucifera*. In forest areas, fiber-yielding tree like *Combrelum ovalifolium*, *Derris scandens* etc. are used for making ropes. In the Dangs, ropes are made from fibers extracted from the leaves of 'ketki', which are durable and used for restraining cattle, as these ropes, do not hurt the skin of the animals.<sup>95</sup>

For the aboriginals the traditional knowledge and conservation goes together. Many species are protected by people because they are valued for cultural or religious reasons for example *tulsi*, *pipal*, *vad*, *ashok*, etc. The concept of 'Ahimsa' and 'Jeev Daya' is respected by the Vala Kathi, Vala Rajputs, Patels and Jains of Saurashtra and North Gujarat region. There are cases where people have protected blackbuck in the dry areas in Saurashtra and kutch. Further traditional knowledge has helped in the conservation of natural resources like water. Water has always been a prized possession, especially in North and central Gujarat as people since ages have survived in such dry conditions through the technique of water harvesting. In Gujarat agriculture has mainly been rain fed and thus number of storage tanks and step wells were built. Similarly water lands were protected as *Vavs*, *talavs* and *kunds* which indirectly resulted in the maintenance and recharging of the hydrological regimes and aquifers.

One area where the tribals and farmers have been successfully utilizing their knowledge since ages has been the using of traditional metrological beliefs in the forecasting of rains. In this case, the farmers takes the help of environmental and ecological components like the appearance of the sky, velocity and direction of winds, colour or appearance of clouds, behaviour of various birds and animals in the forecasting of weather. The

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<sup>95</sup>, A.J. Umadevi, Identification and Status Survey of Medicinal plants of Gujarat, PhD thesis, South Gujarat University, Surat, Gujarat, 1988, pg.56

farmers of Gujarat like their counterparts in the entire country gives a lot of significance to the onset of Monsoon since the entire cropping pattern is depended on rains. Early showers would enable a farmer to go for long duration crops as groundnut, cotton and sesamun. On the other hand delayed Monsoon could mean the restricting of the choices to pulses, pearl millet and castor.

Although the Indian satellite technology has made considerable progress since independence, the Monsoon predictions made by the Department of Metrology are not very helpful to farmers in making choices related to cropping pattern. This is because the department makes long-range predictions for the nation as a whole. In the case of specific regions, the predictions are of short ranged in nature i.e.... for a period of three days only. As a result the farmers in North and Central Gujarat rely chiefly on the indigenous metrological beliefs and knowledge to make calculations regarding Monsoon. They base their decision of cropping patterns on predictions made by their own knowledge and by local experts. We find that the farmers' beliefs in traditional metrological beliefs are quite firm. The local experts use methods and principles evolved by eminent astronomers and astrologers like *Varahmihir* (AD. 700-800), *Poet Ghagh* (1200-1300 AD), *Unnad Joshi* (1350-1400AD) and *Bhadli* (AD 1000-1200). Many of their principles were embedded in cultural and religious books or carried on from generations to generations as oral sayings.

A famous woman Bhadhli in 12<sup>th</sup> century, who was considered an expert in forecasting of weather, had described ten chieftains (variables) responsible for the development of "ethereal embryo" of rain. These are winds, clouds, lightening, colours of the sky, rumbling, thunder, dew snow, rainbow and occurrence of orb around the moon and sun.



Similarly, B.A. Golakia studied local beliefs regarding the occurrence of droughts based on few observations<sup>96</sup>;

1. If the sky acquires a faint yellow colour, there is less hope of rain.
2. If crow coloured clouds are observed through out the day, while night sky remain clear, a drought is indicated.
3. Occurrence of winds with velocity on 5<sup>th</sup> day of the first fortnight of the *Shrawan* month is indicative of severe drought.
4. Occurrence of rain in the presence of sunshine is an indicator of poor rainfall in the near future.

Not only the study of sky and clouds, predict about weather, but the behaviour of certain species of trees and birds, also predict the possibilities of rains and droughts.

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<sup>96</sup> Golakia B.A, Proverbs for predicting the moods of Monsoon, *Honey Bee* 3(1): 12

**Table IV E**

**Various trees used as indicators of Monsoon by the local communities in South and Central Gujarat <sup>97</sup>.**

Name of species	Indicator	Expected Outcome
<i>Mahowa</i> , <i>Madhuca Latifolia</i>	Good Foliage	Good Monsoon
<i>Bamboo</i> spcs.	Good Foliage	Drought
<i>Ber</i> , <i>Zyzphus mauritiana</i>	Heavy flush of fruit	Average Monsoon
<i>Darbha grass</i> , <i>Eragraostis cynosuroides</i>	Appearance of good foliage	Good Monsoon
<i>Billi</i> , <i>Aegle marmelos</i>	Good Foliage	Subnormal Monsoon
<i>Rupal</i> , <i>Ficus religiosa</i>	Good Foliage	Adequate rain
<i>Khejro</i> , <i>prosopis cineraria</i>	Heavy foliage	Drought
<i>Kothi</i> , <i>Limonia acidissima</i>	Good growth	Stormy rain
<i>Neem</i> , <i>Azadirachta indica</i>	Heavy flush	Drought

<sup>97</sup> P.R. Pusharoty, Plants that predicts Monsoon, 1993, *Honey Bee* 4 (4): 12

Table IV F

Behaviour of specific birds and animals used as indicators of rain<sup>98</sup>

Indicator	Outcome
Sparrow bathing in dust	Good rain
<i>Kachinda</i> (chameleon), climbs the tree and assumes black-white-red colours	Immediate Rains
Frog starts singing in the initial days of <i>Jayestha</i> (May)	Early rains
Peacocks cry frequently	Rain within a day or two
Cows cry during the night and foxes during the day	Severe drought
<i>Titodi</i> , Lapwing bird lay eggs during the night, especially on river banks	Heavy rains
<i>Klheu</i> / <i>Bapaiya</i> (a bird) sings song early in the morning	Rain within a day or two
Snake climbs up on trees	Drought
Camel keeps facing north east direction, crow scratches its nest	Immediate rains
Birds take bath in the dust on the full moon day of <i>Jayestha</i> .	Plenty of rains

Therefore we find that the study of the trees and the behaviour of birds and animals as indicator of rain and drought is knowledge accumulated by the natives through their keen observation and experience that has been passed from generations to generations. Thus nature, if studied closely is a knowledge within itself, which can guide humans from time to time.

<sup>98</sup> P.R. Kanani et al, D.D. Malviya, M.A. Munshi, V.J. Savalia and P.D. Verma, Sky: As a slate for predicting the moods of the Monsoon, 2002. In Proceedings of Seminar on prediction of rainfall based on astrological methods and local practices. 2002

The influence of science and technology has had dual impact. On one hand, where it has made life smoother for the humans, it has also made our planet, a dangerous place to live (if used excessively to exploit nature and non-renewable resources of energy etc). The equipments of science and technology has tried to control nature, giving way to multiplicity of projects by clearing chunks of forests, thereby also alienating tribals from the lands.

The development of the market economy and the migration of the people from the villages to the cities have led to the loss of information on the traditional system. Many tribals in Gujarat migrate to nearby urban areas such as from Dangs to Surat, Panchmahals to Vadodara and Ahemadabad. Once, these people migrate to new places for earning livelihood, their traditional knowledge gets eroded, as its application is limited in the new environment.

The age old practice of the farmers were based on sustainable use of natural resources, but due to the large demand of food by rapid growth in population, consumerism, crop technologies have induced the farmers to give up the traditional practice of mixed and rotational cropping. Instead of land itself claiming the lost nutrients, the spreading of artificial fertilizers on a large scale has not helped them in the long run. Green Revolution had also played a part in the erosion of the traditional knowledge. It was found that with the extension of modern scientific agriculture, farmers began to doubt the wisdom of their own knowledge base, which had evolved over centuries.

The introduction of scientific education had also alienated the younger generation from the age-old practices of farming. They do not hold traditional knowledge as reliable when compared to information based on

science. Earlier, the farmers had the knowledge of differentiating between the beneficial and harmful insects, but this knowledge is degrading now. They now use insecticides, which kill all the insects; many of them, which are non-, targeted species. This is the case in Kheda, Vadodara, Valsad, Ahemadabad, Mehsana and Surat districts. Therefore efforts are required to save the erosion of knowledge of the tribals and small farmers as this has been gathered and acquired by them from their ancestors since generations. This knowledge once lost can never be recovered.

### **Representation of Nature in Tribal Culture**

Art is the reflection of a collective consciousness, both ideal and realistic of a civilization. It expresses the pomp and prosperity, interests and aptitude, glory, peace as well as vision of the society prevalent from time to time. Tribal art, dance and painting reflect their social, economic and cultural lives. The prominent feature reflected in their Art is 'nature'. We can notice number of paintings, sculpture, and celebration of festivals, folk dances and songs depicting nature.

Festivals are celebrated to announce the change of seasons, and harvest time etc. For example the adivasis of Panchmahal, Sabarkantha, and the Dangs celebrate *Vasantotsav* (spring festival) till *Akhatrij*<sup>99</sup>.

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<sup>99</sup> Joravarsinh Jadav, *Folk Art and Culture of Gujarat*, Gandhinagar, Translated by Kanti P Tolikar, 1999, column1, pg.64.

Experienced farmers make prediction of a good harvest by observing the wind directions, for which there is a famous 'sakhi' in the folk literature:

*Uttar dariya amrit bhariya*

*Nadiye nir na mai*

*Akhatrijini paheli ghadi*

*Uttar vayu su vai*

(During the first hours of the early morning on *akhatrij*, if the wind blows from the north direction, there would surely be clouds full of water and rivers will flow abundantly.)

Gamits celebrate the unique festival of 'removal of rats'. The gamit villagers assemble and make four rats out of clay. These are then placed on a '*chaddar*'. Four young men pick up the ends of the *chaddar* and run out of the village. The rest of the people run after them, throwing stones on the clay rats. Once they are out of the village, then the four young men empty the *chaddar* by throwing away the clay rats, hoping that all the real rats will go away from their homes<sup>100</sup>.

Folk dance of the tribal is an art, in which the nature is easily and prominently depicted. One of the famous dances of the tribal population of Gujarat is "*Charo*" which in the local language means 'imitation' or 'mimicry'. The names are symbolic of various animals, which are imitated, for example, *Marghi Charo* (cock dance), *Khalli Charo* (squirrel dance) and *Gho Charo* (lizard dance)<sup>101</sup>.

- *Maghi Charo*: In the cock dance, the tribals imitate the cock, in the manner in which the birds pick up and eat grain from the ground. They further through their movements depict the fights among the cocks.

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<sup>100</sup> Folk Art and Culture of Gujarat, column1, pg.76

<sup>101</sup> P.G. Shah, *The Dublas of Gujarat*, B.A.S. Sangh Publications, Delhi, 1958, pp.102-103

- *Khiskoli Charo*: In this dance, the voice and the swift movements of the squirrel are emphasized.

These dances show that the influence of birds and animals is great because they are constant companions of the tribal population. Besides these, since the adivasis mostly are the agricultural community, they derive inspiration from the agricultural operations and crops. Since they are aware of the different processes of farming they try to weave them into their dance. One such dance is *Sherdi Charo* (sugarcane dance). This dance represents the operation of planting sugar cane. The movements proceed very rhythmically, and one could always feel as if he/she is in the field observing the actual process of plantation.

Other well known dances of the tribal people are:

- ❖ *Shikar Nritya* (hunt dance)<sup>102</sup> of the Dharmpur region of Valsad. The tribal people armed with bows, arrows, and spears screaming loudly dance together in rhythm with the *manjir*, *Pungi* and *dhol*. This dance is very similar to the *Dhamal* dance of the *Sidis* of Saurashtra.
- ❖ *Thaakarya* and *Bhaacha nrityas* of the Dangs. These dances begin with 'Sur' and 'Kahalya'. It is not accompanied by singing. The dance changes its mode according to the *tal* of the *dhol*. Modes are called 'Chaal' which are of several varieties—*Bhajaniyo*, *sipai*, *mor*, etc. There are generally twenty seven *chaalas* /modes.
- ❖ *Aaleni-Haalen* nritya. It is performed by the Tadvī Bhils to welcome 'ritu' (spring) season hoping for a green surrounding dotted with flowers of vibrant colours.

Folk songs of the tribals are related to various themes like marriage, festivals, religious activities and nature.

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<sup>102</sup> Folk Art and culture of Gujarat, column 2, pg.52

One could always observe the forces of nature in their songs. One extremely famous song amongst the tribal population of South Gujarat is the song sung while waiting for the rains. The song goes as<sup>103</sup>:

Thy earth-wife awaits you

Oh dear Rain God!

Thy happy hails await you

Oh dear Rain God!

Thy nourished people awaits you

Oh dear Rain God!

Thy birds and animals awaits you

Oh dear Rain God!

Besides, painting is the other mode, where nature and its objects figure prominently. The sketch of birds, animals, trees and leaves exhibits the close relationship between the adivasis and nature which they have been sharing since the time immemorial. For example the *Pithora* wall paintings of the Rathwa Bhils<sup>104</sup>. The Rathwas take a vow in the name of Baba *Pithora* in the event of failure of crops, a bad harvest or disease among animals etc. When their wishes are fulfilled then a *Pithora* is drawn inside the house of the person who had taken the vow. 'Aalekh' of the *Pithora* is done on a wall/ ceiling. Before the drawing is done the wall is white-washed. Then the *aalekh* is done depicting a wedding scene near a step well, well, or a *panihari* (water fetcher); *naagdeo*; horses of the gods; a farmer ploughing the field; jumping monkeys; donkey; tigers and nowadays a gunman, cycle, motorcycle, a train, television etc are also included. A typical *pithora* will consist of 30 to 40 such figures. The colours generally used are-red, green, black, blue, yellow, and sometimes a mixture of several colours. These paintings are a reflection of the importance of the natural world around them.

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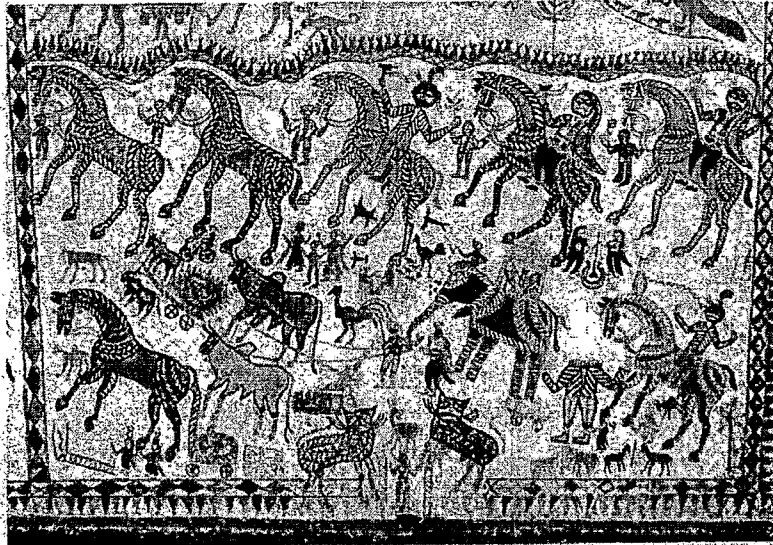
<sup>103</sup> *ibid*, 154

<sup>104</sup> *ibid*, column 2, pg.111-112

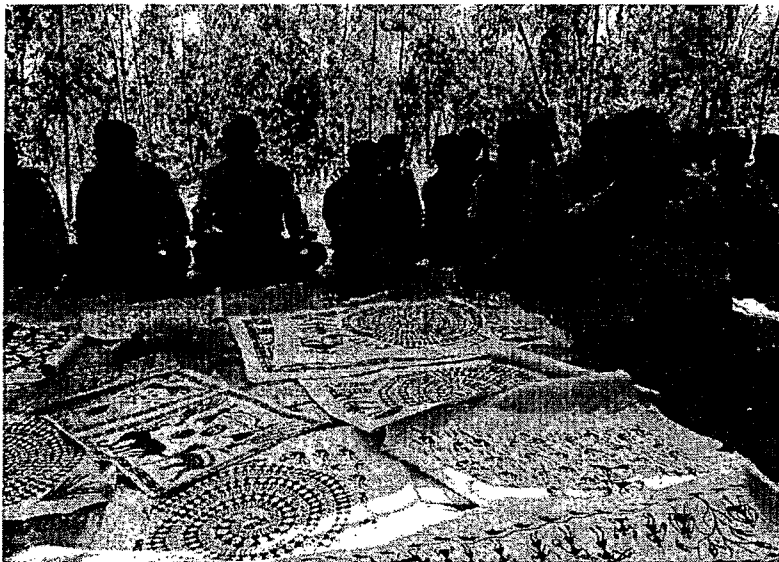


The following painting shows the objects of nature as a subject of the tribal paintings;

Painting 1:



Painting 2:



Therefore we may conclude that the tribal religion and culture is based on a community's relationship with its natural environment or rather one can comment that for the tribal people religion became a way of life with sacredness being attached to the elements of nature. Shrines dedicated to the forces of nature are located deep into the forests. The Sun, Moon, stars, the wind, species of the trees, animals, bird and insects have their place in a tribe's mythology- this signifies a recognition and respect of life giving and sustaining nature as it helps in nurture and survival of every living organism. When this relationship is interfered and ruptured by the strangers, who want to commercialize and destroy the abode of their livelihood and religion, the tribal population is left with no other alternative, but to fight for their rights and place in the forests. The principle of 'scientific forestry' was used by the British for their own advantage which were against the interests of the Adivasis. When the situation became worse, resistance took an open and violent form sparked by a prohibitive regulation which seems to threaten the very survival of the tribals. The poor, in particular, the tribal, through the combined forms of appeal, evasion and confrontation, carried on the struggle against the mighty imperial State and its agendas. This has further extended into the post colonial period, and the struggle of the tribal people is still continuing.

Tribal regions can be regarded as areas of ecological prudence exhibiting a symbiotic relationship between biophysical ecosystems and social systems, with strong cultural inter connections between the two. But if these areas are interfered with by external forces such as the colonial state they begin to disintegrate and show signs of irreversible changes. Culture and environment are complimentary, and can be seen in various stages of evolution. One has to recognize the fact that tribal societies have co-evolved with their environment; they have modified nature but continued to maintain in it a diverse and productive state, based on locally

evolved traditional ecological knowledge, socio-cultural practices and /or religious beliefs since ancient times. But the intervention of the colonial state for scientific and effective forest management led to the predominance of a culture of over-consumption of the natural resources; erosion of time-tested and value based institutions; and ultimate social fragmentation of the tribal societies.

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#### Appendix IV B

#### **BARDOLI SATYAGRAH: Reasons leading to the inflated rate of assessment by M.S. Jaykar**

The Settlement Officer in charge of revenue operations was M.S. Jaykar who proposed extremely high rate of revenue collection from the farmers in the taluka of Bardoli taking into account artificial economic and political conditions.

When the work of revision started in Bardoli, a high power committee of the Government of India had recommended the adoption of the principle of 'annual value' as the basis of settlement in future. This annual value was defined as "the gross produce minus cost of production including the value of the labour actually expended by the farmer and his family on the holding"<sup>1</sup>. Jaykar however ignored this recommendation and instead applied the 'Rental value thesis' favoured by his superior officer. He besides using the rental statistics to determine the assessment, he also used rental indices for the purpose of grouping various kinds of lands<sup>2</sup>.

The result was the complete distortion of the situation. As was later pointed out by a committee appointed to enquire into the whole matter, Jaykar in many cases had treated 'jiyarat' or grain producing land as 'bhata' or the garden lands. He had also in some cases, assessed large areas as rice lands simply because at some point of time in the past they were used for growing rice.

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the Indian Taxation Enquiry Committee, Government of India, 1924-25, Calcutta 1926, vol.I, no. 20, pg.85

<sup>2</sup> R.S. Broomfield and R.M. Maxwell, *Report of the Special Enquiry into the Second Revision Settlement of the Bardoli and the Chorasi talukas*, Bombay, 1929, pg. 9

though now they were only capable of growing dry crop or grass. He had also in few places, assessed the land on the assumption that the irrigational facilities were available in the past, though in fact these facilities had ceased to exist<sup>3</sup>. Besides the theory of rental value, Jaykar also used price indices of the commodities as the basis for the determination of the rate of assessment. The chief crops grown in Bardoli were juwar, rice and cotton. However due to the conditions created by the World War I, there was steep rise in the prices. The price of juwar, for instance, registered a rise of 47.91% from 1895 to 1924. Similarly cotton prices also rose to about 196.87% in the same period<sup>4</sup>.

Jaykar took into account these rise in prices, but by the time he finalized his report, the prices of crops had begun to fall except that of cotton. He also ignored the fact that much of the price rise was due to currency inflation<sup>5</sup>.

Thus presenting a rosy picture of the economy and the taluka, Jaykar proposed an increase of 30.59% in the land revenue of the taluka.

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<sup>3</sup> *The Peasantry and Nationalism*, pg.39

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, pg.40

<sup>5</sup> *Report of the Special Enquiry into the Second Revision Settlement of the Bardoli and the Chorasi talukas*, pp. 15-17

## **Appendix IV C**

### **THE CHIPKO MOVEMENT- A FORM OF FOREST SATYAGRAH**

Forests have always been an important source of revenue for the state. They have also been the home of various tribes who depended solely on the forest and its produce for survival. Thus the wooded resources at times became the area of contention between the state and the forest dwellers. This contest reached its height during the British period. Forests during the Raj were felled on a large scale to satisfy non-local commercial needs, such as shipbuilding for the Royal Navy and for the expansion of the imperial railways. The prime aim of forest conservancy was to generate revenues from the forests. Thus the rights of the tribals and forest dwellers were taken away.

Satyagrah, in the Gandhian ideology, was the use of non-violent means as a political weapon to attain the sought motives. The years 1930-31 witnessed the spread of forest satyagrah throughout India as a protest against the reservation of forests for exclusive exploitation by the British commercial interests. The forests satyagrah were especially successful in the regions where the survival of the local population was closely associated with the forests, like The Himalayas, the Western Ghats and the Central Indian hills. In Central India, Gond tribals were gunned down for participating in the satyagrah. On May 30, 1930, number of unarmed villagers were killed and many were injured in the Tilari village, Tehri Garwal, when they gathered to protest the Forest laws of the rulers.

In 1850 an Englishman, Mr. Wilson, obtained a lease to exploit the forests of the kingdom of Tehri-Garhwal for an annual rent of Rs 400. Under him several Deodar and Chir forests were felled for the commercial use. In 1864, taking inspiration from Wilson's flourishing trade, the British rulers of

the North Western frontier provinces took a lease for 20 years and engaged him to exploit the forests for them. When the kingdom of Tehri realized the large revenues made by the government, they took the management of forests in their own hands.

The conflict between the people and the state arose when the latter put several restrictions on the former regarding the use of the woods. The people protested and the king (Kirti Shah) had to pacify the people by granting them more rights.

However, the altercations between the state and the people continued which intensified in 1930, when the locals of Garhwal began the non-cooperation movement mainly around the issue of forests. Satyagrah to resist the oppressive laws was more intensive in the Rawain region. The king of Tehri being in Europe, his dewan, Chakradhar Tayal, crushed the peaceful protest with the help of armed forces. A large number of satyagrahis were killed and wounded, while many others lost their lives in a desperate attempt to cross the river Yamuna. In the meantime the Saklana, Badiyargarh, Karakot, Kirtinagar, and other regions revolted against the king's rule in 1947, and declared themselves the panchayats. Finally on August 1, 1949 the kingdom of Tehri was liberated from the feudal rule and it became a part of the state of Uttar Pradesh.

The state under any regime can assume dictatorial powers. The significance of the chipko Movement was that it intensified further after independence. During the colonial period the nationalist colorings were given to the forest satyagrah, but the depletion of the woods continued even after independence in those areas where they were crucial in the survival of the tribal people and small farmers.

This movement was carried out in post independence India by Gandhians, such as, Sarla Behn, Mira Behn and Dev Suman. Sunder Lal Bahuguna belonged to a later generation of Forest Satyagrahis who were deeply inspired by the Gandhians. The Chipko Movement in Garhwal, primarily aims at protecting the forests, preserving of culture and maintaining of livelihoods and this is the reason that women have been the major supporter of this movement.

The first Chipko Movement in independent India took place in April 1973, when the villagers agitated against felling of ash trees in the Mandal forests. Again in March 1974, 27 women under the leadership of Gaura Devi saved a large number of trees from a contractor's axe. It was after this incident that the government ended the contract system of falling and formed the Uttar Pradesh Forest Corporation. During the next five years Chipko resistance against the felling of trees took place in various parts of Garhwal- Himalaya region. Among various regions, the movement was most successful in Adwani, Amarsar, and Badigarh.

The auction of Adwani forests took place in Narendra Nagar, in October 1977. Bahuguna was actively involved in the protest and appealed the forest contractor to refrain from auctioning the forests. However the auction was undertaken but when the men of contractor came along with the policemen to fell the trees, the large group of women under Bachhni Devi (wife of the contractor) came forward to save the forests. Women tied sacred threads to the trees and each tree was guarded by three women. The contractor and the police having been failed withdrew. It was here in the Adwani forests that the ecological slogan "What do the forests bear? Soil water and pure air", was born.



Thus the Chipko Movement reflected the ecological struggle between the State and the People since the colonial times, which further extended to the post independence period.

Source:

1. Vandana Shiva and J. Bandyopadhyay, *"The Evolution, Structure, and Impact of the Chipko Movement"*, Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Natural Resource Policy for India, 1982
2. Sundar Lal Bahuguna, *Chipko- A Novel Movement for the Establishment of Cordial Relationship between Man and Nature*, Chipko Information Centre, Tehri Garhwal, 1980.