

Chapter-V

**GANDHIANS' WORK FOR THE TRIBALS IN PRE-
INDEPENDENT GUJARAT**

The chapter attempts to study the growth of Gandhian *ashrams* and reform activities in tribal areas of Gujarat. It also examines the impacts of arch intervention on the tribal societies in the first half of the twentieth century. While the first part deals with the growth of Bhil Sewa Mandal in Dahod in the Panchmahals, the second looks at the growth of similar activities in the South Gujarat emanating from the Vedchhi.

Mahatma Gandhi and His *Ashrams*

Ashram serves a base for the Gandhian workers to practice and propagate the Gandhi's principles. *Ashrams* have been the places from where most humanitarian services are rendered.¹

Gandhi and His *ashrams* could be examples of micro level institutions where agriculture has been the main focus of economic activity.² Mark Thompson in his study on Gandhi and his *ashrams* say:

(Gandhi) sought to provide the people of Sewagram with a practical demonstration in various agricultural techniques designed to enhance the quality and output of crops, a section of the *ashram* land was brought under cultivation. Crops such

¹ Ajay Skaria, 'Homeless in Gujarat and India: On the Curious Love of Indulal Yagnik', *IESHR*, Vol. No. 38, No. 3, 2001, p. 45

² Vivek Pinto, *Gandhi Vision and Values: The Moral Quest for Change in Indian Agriculture*, London, Oak Pub: 1998, p. 67

as sugarcane and Papaya, which were not extensively cultivated in the district, were introduced in the Sewagram.³

Mainstream Nationalists such as Nehru were often frustrated about the time Gandhi spent in and on the tiny institutions of the *ashrams*. They regarded this as a wasteful eccentricity in a man who was after all the principle leader of the nationalist movement. Gandhi obviously did not feel this way. He said to the *ashramites* of the Satyagriha *ashram*, that it 'set out to remedy what it thought it our national life'. If *Hind Swaraj* represented Gandhi's critique of liberal modernity, then the *ashram* was the conceptual site through which he tried to think about and developed practices for an alternative politics that inquired the notion constituted by the logic of transcendence. This politics is most explicitly spelt out in two books, which deal with the vows or observances⁴ involved in the *ashram* life. *Mangal Prabhat*, his famous book focuses on the vows involved in the *ashram* life.⁵ While reading John Ruskin, Gandhi realized that the ideas of Ruskin are equally relevant to India.⁶ He wrote:

Ruskin's book has a lesson for Indians no less than for the Englishmen to whom it was primarily addressed. New ideas are in the India. Our young men who have received western education are full of high spirits. This spirit should be directed into the right channels, harm. 'Let us have Swaraj' is one slogan; 'let us industrialize the country is another'... But we

³ cited in *Ibid.*, p. 137

⁴ "As he (Gandhi) interchangeably translated the *Gujarati* words *vrat* (sacrosanct fasting) and *yama* (observance)"

⁵ In the *ashrams* of Gandhi eleven vows—the precise number kept on changing, but they usually included the vows of truth, ahimsa or love, celibacy or brahmacharya, control of palate, poverty, swadeshi, fearlessness, and removal of untouchability, articulated a very precise alternative politics." Ajay Skaria, 'Homeless in Gujarat and India: On the Curious Love of Indulal Yagnik', *IESHR*, Vol. No. 38, No. 3, 2001, pp. 286-287. For details see M. K. Gandhi, *Mangal Prabhat*, Ahmedabad, Navjivan Pub.: 1945

⁶ See Kanti Shah, *Paltati Duniya Maa Gandhi*, Vadodara, Yagna Prakashan: 1995

hardly understand what Swaraj is? Natal for instance enjoys Swaraj but her Swaraj stinks in our nostrils, for she crushes... Indians. Thus, Swaraj is not enough, to make nation happy, what would be the result of Swaraj being conferred on a band of robbers? They would be happy only if they were placed under the control of a good man who was not a robber himself...Swaraj really means self-control. Only he is capable of self-control who observes the rules of morality, does not cheat or give up truth, and does his duty to his parents... Such a man is in enjoyment of Swaraj, no matter where he lives. A state enjoys Swaraj if it can boast of a large number of such good citizens.⁷

This way the objective of Mahatma Gandhi was to have such *ashrams* in every village and these *ashrams* were intended to reform and instill basic human values in every human being possible to cultivate goodness in human society and their environment around. Gandhi had a completely different objective for independent India. He designed in his mind, Swaraj in India with its microcosm units the villages to be self-reliant, and they will be made so by the efforts by *Gram-Sevak* with their activities conducted from their *ashrams*. The description of such *ashrams* units located in the eastern tribal tract of Gujarat is given in the following pages. The work done by these *ashrams* shows that *antodaya* is the pathway to a Sarvodaya Society where the happiness or property of one is not pursued at the cost of another persons well being.⁸

⁷ M. K. Gandhi, *Ruskin: Unto the Last, A Paraphrase*, Ahmedabad, Navjivan Pub.: 1956, pp. 41-43

⁸ K. D. Gangrade, Book Review of *The Banwasi Sewa Ashram* by Elisabeth Hoddy in *Gandhi Marg*, New Delhi, Gandhi Peace Foundation: 2001, Vol. 23, No. 2, Jul – Sep. 2001, p.185

Panchmahals: Its Terrain and Tribal Communities

The nature of a tract has much to do with the life of people who live in that particular tract. The Panchmahals area reveals unevenness and it is difficult to find level ground running over a few miles at least. Hillocks and small pools of water occur frequently, and there is less land and water for agricultural purpose.⁹

The tribals of Panchmahals (Bhils) mainly reside in the southern *talukas* of Jambughoda, Devgadh-Baria and Limkheda. Ratanmal which is the part of Devgadh-Baria is habited by Bhils who got settled permanently only in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Earlier they reportedly practiced a system of shifting cultivation known locally as *bhatta* or *dahdia*.¹⁰ The ruler of Ratanmal was entitled to a quarter-share in the first year's produce plus a *jhudi* or a bundle of 40-50 tobacco leaves and a *seer* of salt.¹¹

The village of a tribal community itself was/is not a clearly demarcated unit. Usually, it was a stretch of forest territory demarcated along certain natural and often shifting or perishable landmarks such as a stream or a hillock.¹² Earlier the crops used to be so abundant that people would not even bother to watch over the standing crops except at night, against the numerous herbivorous animals of jungle. Main crops were

⁹ L. M. Shrikant, *Report of the Committee Appointed by the Government of Bombay for the Programme of Educational Expansion in the Backward Area of the Panchmahals District*, O. R 1966, 1, MSA, Mumbai, pp. 6-7

¹⁰ Since this area had nearly ninety percent forestland, the rulers considered damage to the forest area practically negligible and therefore Bhils were allowed to clear as much land as they wanted for cultivation. Also Bhils, however, were not allowed to have all their clearings in one place, but had to distribute them all over the jungle. Y. V. S. Nath, *op. cit.*, P. 25

¹¹ 5 *seer* = 3 lbs

¹² Such settlement patterns of villages could still be seen in the region of Panchmahals and Dahod especially those in territories of Devgadh-Baria where tribal people live in scattered settlements. Fieldwork conducted in Dahod and Ratanmal, November 2002

Indian maize (*juwar*), millets, wild rice, and lentils etc. Bhils also collected minor forest produce from jungles.¹³

There was little circulation of money as most of their dealings were with government agencies or with a nearby trader where they would exchange their ware for an equivalent value in goods required by them. In years of scarcity, Bhils were accommodated to extensive credit both by the governmental agencies and the traders at an interest of 50 percent or more, which they had to pay twice a year. *Veth* was prevalent in Ratanmal, Kathivada and Bariya. But Bhils say that they were happy with *vethia*¹⁴, free labour. The *veth* and shifting cultivation declined with organized British administration and system of direct taxation was introduced in 1860-1870 with lenient approach.¹⁵ The Bhils paid their taxes promptly as they considered arrears as inauspicious.¹⁶ Before the entry of Gandhians and Gandhian ideology in the areas of Bhils, they were not living in very healthy condition as they suffered a lot due to unemployment, addiction of liquor and adapted to dacoits.¹⁷ It was under these circumstances that Gandhians entered in these areas and left their footsteps effectively.

¹³ Y. V. S. Nath, *op. cit.*, P. 25.

¹⁴ It seems contradictory in case of Dungri Garasia who were very unhappy about veth, unlike to Bhils of Ratanmal. It is understood through the interviews of Virji Khatraji a Dungri Garasia, village Dholvani, *taluka*; Vijaynagar, District; Sabarkantha, interview dated: 26,05,2003

¹⁵ In the Ratanmal for instance a Bhil paid a tax of eight *annas* per *bigha*, while a Koli would have had to pay rupee 1 for the same plot and a person belonging to a more advanced community such as *Vania* would have had to pay as much as rupee 5 apparently the idea was that a more advanced community was likely to derive greater benefits from the land. Y.V.S. Nath, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

¹⁶ Anderson's Settlement Report for Dohad and Jhalod *talukas* state that on an average there would be one bad year out of every five years. He therefore helps in building the understanding regarding the traditions among the Bhils. Also see L. M. Shrikant, *op. cit.*, P. 6-7

¹⁷ The practice of dacoits continues even during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This became frequent during the drought times. Affected areas were Dahod and Jhalod. These incidents made the Panchmahals region unpopular among the people. As a result hardly any sane person thought of working there.

BHIL SEWA MANDAL

The first initiative on the part of government for the amelioration of the Bhils came in 1919-1920 by one Sukhdev Vishwanath Trivedi who carried out proper relief and rehabilitation work.¹⁸ He could initiate in this direction with the help of Sir P. T. Purushottam Das, who was secretary of the Drought Relief Committee of the Indian National Congress. It was Purushottam Das who contacted in this regard to Mahatma Gandhi.¹⁹ Gandhi was quite passionate and full of empathy for the 'antodaya' and any call from them made him send his followers for their betterment and sometimes he himself contributed for these cause in spite of his busy schedule. When Sukhdev Vishwanath Trivedi drew his attention towards the condition of Panchmahals, Gandhi informed Servants of India Society; Mumbai. Amritlal Vitthalbhai Thakkar was sent to study the region. He prepared a detail report for further actions in the process of amelioration of the Bhils.²⁰ At the local level the process was initiated through Dahod Sankat Samiti (Dahod Relief Society) under the guidance of Thakkar Bapa, Indulal Yagnik and Sukhdev Trivedi. The committee realized that the *Adivasis*/ (tribals) were poverty stricken, illiterate, ignorant, and heavily indebted, were harassed by the Government servants, and exploited by the moneylenders. With such surroundings Thakkar Bapa decided to start social work of a permanent nature to save tribals from exploitation and to impart education to tribal boys with the main purpose of creating network of social workers among them. He also started an *ashram* school at Mirakhedi in Jhalod *taluka* as an experiment. At that time Dahyabhai Naik a graduate of Gujarat Vidyapith was in-charge of the *ashram* of Mirakhedi.

¹⁸ Mr. Trivedi could do so as a result of incident, when a high official insisted for tea in a village, which was severely affected by draught. See Chumilal Hathila, *Bhil Sewa Mandal Annual Report*, 1961, P. 1

¹⁹ *Twenty Five Years: Jubilee Memorial Book*, op. cit., P. 3

²⁰ *Ibid.* P. 23.

This experiment remained successful to a certain extent. For expanding the work Thakkar Bapa started *Bhil Sewa Mandal* in 1923 the objective of the organization was imparting education, and their emancipation both economically and socially. *Bhil Sewa Mandal* slowly progressed with the operation of primary schools.²¹ With the expansion of the activities of *Bhil Sewa Mandal* the requirements for volunteers also increased. Among them the prominent ones were Indulal Yagnik, A. V. Thakkar, Dahyabhai Naik &c. The Bhils of Panchmahals called A.V. Thakkar as Bapa.²² Indulal Yagnik (1892-1970), a young enthusiast who joined *Bhil Sewa Mandal* from Ahmedabad remained active in Godhra since 1917. At the persuasion of Sukhdev Vishwanath Trivedi in January 1918 he worked in Dahod and visited several villages with him, which were affected by famine (1917-1919).²³ It was by 1921 that the activities that took shape in south Gujarat started acquiring permanent silhouette. Thakkar Bapa and Yagnik started a 'Rashtriya Bhil Ashram' at Mirakhedi village and a school for the untouchables. In order to meet the expenses Yagnik proposed a budget for Rs. 5000. He submitted the same to the Indian National Congress-Provincial Committee. The request of Yagnik was however turned down by Vallabhbhai Patel as their stress was on untouchability campaign but they wanted to use the funds for struggle against the British. Such a development made Yagnik protest in the following words:

[H]ow long can we watch, as the defenseless and half naked Bhils are looted by the Government and moneylenders, and are hurtled with starvation with every failure of the rains?...if the present deprivation and misery of the Bhils continues, does Swaraj means anything for them? If our fight for Swaraj

²¹ *Progress Report, Bhil Sewa Mandal, Dahod -01,04,2000, P. 3*

²² *Bapa means father*

²³ *Progress Report, Bhil Sewa Mandal, Dahod -01,04,2000, P. 158 and Indulal Yagnik, Atmakatha-II: Gujaratma Navjivan, Mumbai, Chetan Prakashan: 1955, P. 45*

is not for a fistful of *bhadra* (elite) people but for the *daridranarayan* then even in the course of our struggle we should establish ideal institutions to demonstrate our unity with those backward people, and to show them the governances of the failure.²⁴

Indulal Yagnik continued with the task and met Gandhi directly. He secured his approval. However the relations got strained with Vallabhbhai. Vallabhbhai remarked, "How long will you go over our heads and get your work done through Gandhiji?" Indulal Yagnik felt frustrated and realized that there was little point staying in the Congress in the face of such hostility from many senior members. He submitted his resignation from the Congress. Here the most important thing to note is that how the common people figure in the debate. Vallabhbhai and others within the Congress did not question the centrality of the work for the people. For them there were certain goals that required more attention in cost of which many subjects were either been retaliated or were overshadowed. In order to generate his own financial resources for the chosen task, Indulal Yagnik seek encouragement from Christian Missionaries working in the region of our study. He initiated this, from village Mirakhedi and thus stepped for scaling the heights.²⁵

²⁴ Indulal Yagnik, *Atmakatha: Vol. III 'Karawas' Kheda, Watrak Khedut Vidyalaya: 1956, P. 21.*
Also see Ajay Skaria, *op. cit.*, P. 283

²⁵ Indulal Yagnik, *Atmakatha, Vol. III, Karawas, op. cit.*, P. 8



The Hut at village Mirakhedi, Taluka-Jhalod where Indulal Yagnik initially began his social welfare activity among the Tribals of Panchmahals.

Another person in process of strengthening the task of mobilization for Bhils was Amritlal Vitthalbhai Thakkar. His contribution in this arena suggests that actually he was the master craftsman of the entire structure that was formulated for the purpose under investigation. He was entitled Thakkar Bapa among the people of Gujarat. He emerged as an institution. Gandhi commented that Thakkar Bapa is born only to serve the depressed and the service he has rendered has taken India forward.²⁶

²⁶ See for detailed biography of Thakkar Bapa, *Viyogi Hari* (tr. by Krishan Kumar Mitra), *Builders of Modern India: Thakkar Bapa*, New Delhi, Information and Broadcasting, Government of India: 1977, P. 1



Amritlal Vitthalbhai Thakkar

Thakkar Bapa dedicated his services to all the downtrodden people. His fatherly care of the helpless won for him an epithet of 'Bapa'. His name was Amritlal Vitthalbhai Thakkar. He was born in 1869 in the city of

Bhavnagar, the same year when Mahatma Gandhi was born. After obtaining a degree in Civil engineering at the age of twenty-one, the young Amritlal served in Porbundar and other places in the Saurashtra. In the year of terrific famine in 1900 he lost his job. To earn livelihood he went to South Africa and sought employment with the Kenya-Uganda Railways. In Kenya he used to get letters from his father after every fortnight. These letters informed him how his father served the famine stricken people of Saurashtra. While appreciating the efforts of his father, Amritlal knew that whatever his father did was to serve and to be helpful to a small section of the multitude that happened to be his caste. Sometimes he felt sorry and thought of the true service transcending the barriers of caste, creed, or colors.²⁷ After coming back to India from Uganda, like Gandhi, Bapa took his guidance from Gokhale, and joined his 'Servants of India Society.'²⁸ At the outset of his public life Thakkar Bapa shaped up himself keeping four gurus before his eyes. The first was his Father, Mr. Deodhar a member of the Servants of India Society founded by Gopal Krishna Ghokhale and the others were Vitthal Ramji Shinde and Dhondo Keshav Karve. Dhondo Keshav Karve was the savoir of the widows and divorced women. He strived hard for their education and work.²⁹

After joining Servants of India Society, Bapa wedded himself to the cause of depressed classes, mainly those suffering in famines. In 1914, excessive rainfall and hailstorms had created a fodder famine. Bapa was deputed along with other member Krishna Das Chitalia to Mathura. Neither of the two had any previous experience of this kind of work. Bapa, however, had gathered some experience of relief work, when he was chief

²⁷ Thakkar Bapa, *Introduction – Pamphlet*, Vadodara, Thakkar Bapa Trust: 1994

²⁸ Mama Phadke, 'Punya Smaran', *Bhil Sewa Mandal*, Dahod, 1965, p. 55

²⁹ Thakkar Bapa, *op. cit.*, p. 1

engineer at Porbundar. There had been example of his father to emulate. With this background, he organized relief and completed it with tremendous satisfaction given to the people. Soon after completion of the work at Mathura, Bapa returned to Bombay. Here he stayed for another five years and worked with Deodhar Dada among Harijans.³⁰ In 1918, the Director of "Tata Iron and Steel Company" wrote to the Servants of India Society seeking a reliable person to organize labour welfare work there. Prices of essential commodities like food grains and clothes had soared after the First World War and workers in the plant found it difficult to manage within their wages. The company had decided to open fair price shops for its twenty-five thousand employees at a cost of one million it needed an efficient experienced and reliable person to organize the system. The society chose Bapa for the job and he went there in August 1918. He found that the wholesale dealer and middlemen were main culprits for the spurt in the prices. He then prepared a scheme to eliminate the middlemen and to limit the profits of the trade.

With the *Harijans* in Bombay, indebtedness was the main problem. Bapa found that the similar malpractice pervades among the workers of Jamshedpur. The moneylenders here were pathans; they took 100-150 percent interest from the poor labourers. Bapa organized a dozen cooperative societies for different categories of workers to stop this loot. These societies paid off the pathans and from then onwards the workers managed the societies on their own. The result was improvement in the condition of the workers and increase in the confidence among them. During the first five months at Jamshedpur Bapa devoted himself to these problems. Then when he had some breathing time, he formulated a

³⁰ Viyogi Hari, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32. Also see, Zaverchand Maghani, *Thakkar Bapa: Ekhatarmon Janmadin*, Dahod, Bhil Sewa Mandal, 1989

number of schemes for the social welfare of the workers. He enlisted the support of the company proprietors for these schemes. The next seven months saw a number of primary schools, sports clubs, children parks and canteens coming up in Jamshedpur. He also designed and formulated a scheme to build spacious houses for the workers of the company.³¹ With this experience Thakkar Bapa moved to the tribals of Gujarat.

Bapa Comes To Dahod

Scarcity of rains had led to famine conditions in almost all parts of the country in 1918. In Panchmahals, the scarcity of fodder and food became very acute. Eighty percent of the district population was Bhils. They had no means of subsistence beyond the agricultural produce. A large part of their land was already in the hands of the moneylenders, which aggravated the already acute scarcity conditions. Most Bhils were reduced to mere skeletons in the absence of any sustenance. The Dahod and Jhalod talukas were the worst off. Some prominent social workers of Gujarat, including Indulal Yagnik agitated through the press for declaration of the region as famine stricken. The local officials including the *tehsildar* were, however, opposed to the demand. Taking advantage of the scarcity and the high prices they were earning a lot through black marketing of maize, *juwar*, and other millets. They were also in league with *Zamindars*, bootleggers and traders, who were openly exploiting the artless and simpler Bhils. The land was being snatched away from them deceitfully; they were being compelled to *veth*, and harassed in several other ways.³²

The situation gradually went bad to worse, and public opinion grew so strong that Government was forced to open test works to judge if the

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 32

³² Viyogi Hari, *op. cit.*, p. 35

area was really famine stricken. Bhils in groups trekked long distances sometimes up to seven miles, to work there for six or seven paisa per day. The authorities were rude and heartless towards them. The workload was excessive and fines were imposed if there was even a little delay in reporting for work, Sukhdevbhai Trivedi who was in charge of one such relief work, felt perturbed about the condition of the tribals and contacted Indulal Yagnik who was in charge of the Gujarat Congress Famine Relief Committee.

He then went to Bombay and met Shri Puroshottam Das Thakurdas and later Gandhi. Bapa reached the district in March 1919 for the first time. He did not stop at collecting information from the authorities and the relief committee, but undertook a tour of the Dahod and Jhalod *talukas* on a bullock cart. It took him eleven days to do it and then he visited eleven test work sites. Sukhdevbhai was with the Bapa all through the difficult and trying journey in the desolate region. He stressed the need for supplementing. The official work, with non-official efforts and also drew up a blueprint of how test work should be run. He persuaded a member of college students to proceed immediately to the famine area. While other workers like Sukhdev Trivedi devoted himself to the non-official relief work, Bapa kept an alert eye on the official efforts and whenever he found flaws he openly criticized them. In a way he was a non-official inspector of the official machinery. He played this role again and again. He came across several instances of official callousness and arrogance and some of these shook him badly.

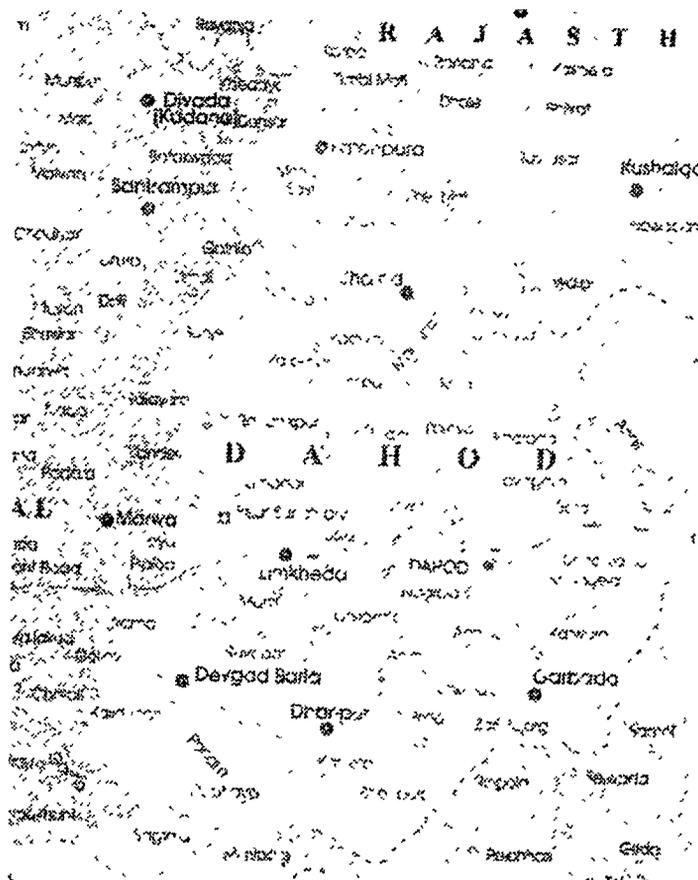
One such instance was in the village of Shankarpura. Bapa was going from house to house to distribute food and clothing during the 1922

famine, when he reached a hut, the women who lived there closed the door and hid her in a dark corner. Despite repeated requests she did not come out, nor she spoke a word.³³ Bapa was surprised; He said very loudly, “why do you not come out sister? We are from the relief committee; do you need some food or cloth?” She replied, “I need all help, but how can I come out? I have no clothes to cover myself and I am using the hut as the only cover I have?” Bapa was aghast! He threw some clothes inside the hut. Then the middle-aged women came out. Such instances convinced Bapa that one should not depend on solely on the government and its officials for famine relief work and that public institution should invariably undertake this work on their own.³⁴

³³ *The Progress of Bhil Sewa Mandal*, 1947, Ahmedabad, Navjivan Pub: 1948, p 1, Also see Hiraben Ninama, ‘Adivasi Bahenoma Shikshanno Vikas,’ in *Bhil Sewa Mandal Progress Report*, 1980, Ahmedabad, Navjivan Press, 1980, pp 57-58.

³⁴ Hiraben Ninama, *op. cit.*, P. 58

The Places Where the *Ashrams* of Bhil Sewa Mandal are located in the Dahod District



Source: *Gujarat State Atlas*: Ananda Prakashan-Ahmedabad, 2000

Bapa had first contact with the Bhils when he organized famine relief in Dahod and Jhalod *talukas* of Panchmahals in 1919-1922. He made an intensive study of their social life and economic conditions. Living close to them and seeing their life and customs dispelled many of the prevalent misconceptions about Bhils. There was general belief that Bhils were uncivilized and cruel, that they had no morals and those either hid themselves away from the urban people or killed them with bows and arrows. What Bapa found was the exact opposite. He found the Bhils to be simple, superstitious, who were mercilessly exploited, because of their ignorance and timidity, by petty Government officials, moneylenders, and

landlords and by priests of the black magic. No doubt they were prey to some evil habits. None of their religious or social functions could be conducted or contemplated without liquor. The use of liquor was inevitable at birth. It was a necessary ingredient of hospitality. This resulted in perpetual indebtedness. Repayment of loans, incurred once, continued generations after generations. Then hunger drove Bhils to theft and the police caught them and beat them up. They were in constant terror, not only of the police and petty officials, but also of upper class people. They lived in abject fear of law. Their position was that of serfs, their life a humiliating experience, people looked down upon them.

Bapa reached their huts and tried to win them with love and sympathy. He found that though some people were there to entice them for religious conversion, there were none to render selfless disinterested services. He felt that this extremely poor and superstitious community stood besides him in need of help; otherwise ruin stared in their faces. Bapa decided to set up a permanent organization for the service of the Bhil community. His dream was realized with a small *ashram* in Mirakhedi.³⁵

Bapa prepared a scheme for the organization and publicized it in the press. He needed a dozen young men inspired by the ideal of service, which would be prepared to serve the Bhil community with all their capacity for a period of at least three years on a small subsistence allowance of Rupees 30 to 50 per month. After he made a call half a dozen young men came forward to take up this work, prominent among them being Sukhdevbhai Trivedi, about whom Bapa wrote: "Sukhdevbhai Trivedi is the father

³⁵ Viyogi Hari, op. cit., p. 45

engaged in the service of the Bhils and I the mother.”³⁶ Dahyabhai Naik a graduate of Gujarat Vidyapith was also among the hard working volunteers.³⁷

Many other spirited young men also joined the services of Bapa. Lakshmidas Shrikant and his wife Lakshmiben, Pandurang Shastri Vanikar from Bombay, Ishwarlal Vaidya, Roopajibhai Parmar, Maganlal Mehta, and others also joined. On November 5th, 1922, the famine relief office at Dahod became the office of the Bhil Sewa Mandal. Centres were opened at Garbada, Jaisawada, and several other such villages, as enthusiastic young men joined the Mandal.³⁸ But even this innocent service had its risks, local officials and traders had not objected to Bapa's efforts in organizing relief during the famine but later they felt that the way Bapa and his colleagues were penetrating the Bhil community it might work as a check on their exploitation of Bhils. The *ashrams* were anathema to them. So the Mandal was obstructed in its activities in several ways. It became difficult for the workers to find a shelter. *Patwaris* uprooted the huts; they put up for the *ashrams* activities. False court cases were instituted upon them to involve them in lengthy litigation, resulting in extreme harassment for months. But the workers did not lose their strength; they put up with all these and faced all the obstacles with courage and determination.

³⁶ A. V. Thakkar, *Annual Report Bhil Sewa Mandal*, 1944, p. 6

³⁷ 'In praise of Dahya Bhai Thakkar, Bapa wrote: He is the only person with a penchant for public service who has the responsibility of a family on his shoulders worries about marrying his daughters and financing his sons' education, Widower and single as I am, I cannot even understand his problems and positions. The period of his vow to serve the *adivasis* for twenty years is over, but he is still engrossed in the service of the Bhils. During the past ten years he has set up a number of cooperative marketing societies, and a cooperative bank', Lalchandbhai Ninama, 'Bhekhdhari Sevako: Sukhdevbhai. Ane Dahyabhai' in *Progress Report Bhil Sewa Mandal, Dahod Progress Report*, 1980, p. 36

³⁸ R. B. Lal and Siddharaj Solanki, 'Adivasi Vikasma Swechhik Sansthaon No Fado' in *Adivasi Gujarat*, Vol. II, No. 1, 1979, pp. 93-95

To get Bhil children interested in studies and sustain their interests was a problem in itself. The Mandal workers used all the schools or the *ashrams*, but their enthusiasm for education would wave after a few days. It was more difficult for boys to live in the *ashrams* where they felt like caged birds. Those selfish people who stood to loose through the spread of literacy did their utmost to dissociate the Bhils from sending their children to school. "Nobody fed clothed, and educated others children for nothing they argued; there was surely some selfish motive behind it". They said all such ruinous words about the organization. Government officials were suspicious about the Mandal's activities from the beginning. They apprehended trouble of the same type that had been whipped up by Govind Guru back in 1913-1914 in Banswara.³⁹ Govind Guru was arrested and imprisoned for years. After his release, he joined the Mandal. This naturally led to apprehensions in the official mind. The authorities were asked to be alert and to take all actions and precautions.

Bhil Sewa Mandal also suffered from financial difficulties. Whatever donations were received through Bapa's efforts were not enough to meet the expenses⁴⁰. During 1925, the expenditure was over but Bapa was not worried. He believed that financial difficulties were a necessary part of the training for public workers. With Dahod as the centre of Bapa's activities in the entire region he guided all his volunteers from there.⁴¹

Bapa and His Working Strategy

Bapa believed in equality, in order to meet his goals, he setup a common mess for all workers in Dahod. He laid great stress on common

³⁹ The details about the movement could be had in Chapter-II, Part-I

⁴⁰ During 1925, the expenditure of Bhil Sewa Mandal was over Rs. 17000, whereas the receipts were 15000

⁴¹ Viyogi Hari, *op. cit.*, p. 48

eating and the practice was introduced at all the centers and *ashrams*. He wanted the teachers and students to eat together and share the same food. He considered cleanliness as an integral part of students' life. Therefore inspection of clothes became necessary. Next in priority was punctuality and regularity. Gandhi therefore commented:

Amritlal Thakkar does not don the yellow robes of a *sanyasi* (who renounces the worldly pressures and pursuits.), but he enriched and adorned the institution of *sanyasis*. He does not describe himself as a *sanyasi* but all his work pertains to that institution. He is old but does neither rests, nor does he let those around him rest, and who can relax when misery like a wild fire engulfs the people.⁴²

It was the result of the activities of Thakkar Bapa that we trace entry of brahmanical traditions in the tribal belt under investigation. It got started with the construction of Ram temple under the supervision of Vanikar at Jesawada. The temple was completed on April 21st, 1926 on the Ramanavami day. Shankaracharya Bharti Krishna Tirth of Jagannath Puri hoisted the flag on the temple and the idol of Rama was installed over there. The temple even today adorns the region.⁴³ Such an activity suggests transformation of the tribal society i.e. an attempt to bring them in the mainstream.

Other workers of Mandal

The work of the Mandal relating to temperance and cooperatives also met with great success. The Bhils had been given education and a

⁴² Viyogi Hari, *op. cit.*, p. 50

⁴³ Dahyabhai Naik, *Thakkar Bapa*, Bhil Sewa Mandal: Suvarna Jayanti Mahotsav, Dahod & Ahmedabad, Navjivan Press: 1980

sense of a clear virtuous living. Efforts were made to rid them from indebtedness, then expenses on liquor were brought down and they were attracted towards a religious outlook. Bapa was emboldened to extend and intensify the activities of the Mandal. So on the morning of February 22, 1927 Bapa was the first along with his associates to take the pledge at the Jesawada Ram temple. The pledge was as follows:

I shall devote all my intelligence and energy to the social uplift of my Bhil brethren and their backward branches. I shall be satisfied. With whatever arrangements the Mandal makes for my own and family's upkeep and shall not take any personal or selfish advantage of the task of serving the Bhils. For twenty years from April 1st 1923, I shall serve the Bhil brethren. I shall lead a life of purity in word, deed, and spirit. As far as possible, I shall not involve myself in any feud or dispute. I shall honestly observe the rules lay down by the Mandal, and shall strive for the fulfillment of the Mandals aims and objects. Along with the service to the Bhil community, I shall serve other communities of the untouchables. Like Dheds, Bhangis, Dabgars, and Chamars and shall strive for their social welfare. For the present, I shall live in Dahod, Jhaiod to which the activities of the Mandal are limited, but if called upon by the Mandal to serve the Bhils elsewhere, I shall go there.⁴⁴

At Gandhi's behest Bapa had to shoulder the responsibility of the Harijan Sevak Sangh and he proceeded to Delhi from Dohad in 1932. He, however, did not neglect the Mandals work even while he was in Delhi. Its activities had a quick expansion; financial difficulties had also been

⁴⁴ *Constitution of Bhil Sewa Mandal, Annual Report, 1955, p 1*

overcome. The chief minister of Bombay, Balasaheb Kher and other leaders including Morarji Desai and Vaikunthlal Mehta visited the various organization of the Mandal and encouraged the workers to continue the good work being done there.⁴⁵ Bapa's attachment to the Dahod continued till the death. His last visit was on September 23, 1949. In a public meeting at Jhalod he said with heavy heart:

Our Gandhi Bapu has left us. My Days too are numbered. But the work here being done is Bapu's this is not to be forgotten we have attained independence, but its defense is our responsibility. There are many communities like the Bhils in this country. Santhals, Gonds Jawangs, Ho, Mundas, are others. You should take up the type of work being done in Panchmahals in other tribal communities. It is everybody's duty today to be selfless. The country wants us to be altruistic.⁴⁶

One of the most dedicated volunteers of the Bhil Sewa Mandal was **Laxmidas Mangaldas Shrikant** (1897-1986). At Matunga Congress meeting he met Thakkar Bapa. After depicting to Laxmidas condition of Bhils of Panchmahals, Bapa asked him to work for the tribals. He then along with his wife **Lakshmiben** stayed in Panchmahals for the rest of his life. Together, they started Jhalod *ashram* and under the pledge of 1926, he became life member of Bhil Sewa Mandal. Jhalod *ashram* was opened on 21st November 1923 and Laxmidas Shrikant was given charge of it. He left his palatial residence in Bombay and settled at brewers hut. One can imagine what it meant to mean to him to serve the Bhil people. Virsingh

⁴⁵ Bapa extended the activities of the Mandal to other aborigines in different provinces. Sukhdevbhai was deputed to serve the adivasis in Rajasthan. The services of the Vanikar and Vaidya were lent to the Governments of the Central Provinces and Orissa respectively. These experienced workers initiated the adivasi uplift work in these states.

⁴⁶ Narsinhbhai Hathila, 'Bhil Sewa Mandal-Ochho Parichay', *Shri Yashvatika Uttar Buniyadi Vidya Mandir: Twenty-Five Years Rajat Jayanti Mahotsav Smriti Granth- 1992*, pp. 6-7

Bhabor and Ambalal Vyas later joined him at Jhalod. The *talukas* of Jhalod and Dahod were completely covered by the activities of the Mandal. Within three years (1919-1923) four *ashrams* and eight schools were opened. The Gujarat Congress Committee organized its annual meet at Mirakhedi *ashram* on May 8th 1925.⁴⁷ In 1928-1929 he went to Europe with a scout rally and after studying those countries and their villages he implemented certain positive ideas in Panchmahals. In 1929 he started Panchmahals Cooperative Bank of which he became the head.⁴⁸

Laxmidas participated in Civil Disobedience Movement and also started forest *Satyagriha* in Panchmahals at Mehlol *mahal*. For his defiance, he was sentenced eleven months rigorous imprisonment. Thereafter he remained the unchallenged Legislative Member from Panchmahal seat (1938-1950). In 1950 he was appointed as Tribal Commissioner under which he traveled extensively in different tribal tracts of India and prepared a report. He continued on this post till 1962. He was also the member of the Advisory Committee of Bharatiya Adimjati Sevak Sangh, Madhya Pradesh Vanvasi Parishad and 'Himanchal Kinnar Sangh'. He spent his last days in Dahod while serving Bhil tribes.⁴⁹ His devotion to tribes made him popular with name such as 'Bhai' and 'Sheth'.⁵⁰

Dahyabhai Naik belonged to a teachers' family of *Anavil Brahmin* of Olpad *taluka*, Surat. Dahyabhai Naik was born in 1901. He joined *Bhil Sewa Mandal* in 1921 and continued to serve the organization with

⁴⁷ Chandubhai Fuljibhai Vyas, 'Karmveer Thakkar Bapa: Progress Report', *Bhil Sewa Mandal, Dahod*, Ahmedabad, Navjivan Press: 1975, p. 55

⁴⁸ Lalchand Ninama, 'Adivasi Praja Sevaks: Ane Tena Vichaaro: Shrikant Bhai', *Vidyapith*, Sept-Oct. 1965, pp. 263-67

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 265-266

⁵⁰ Chunilal Hathila, *Social Transformation Through Nai-Talim Success Stories Series- 9, Bhil Sewa Mandal, Dahod*, Ahmedabad, Gujarat Nai Talim Sangh, 2001, pp. 5-6

perseverance and endeavor. Being reformist, he not only fought against evil practices prevalent among the Bhils but also those prevalent in his own Anavil community. In 1962 he was elected in Legislative Assembly. Till his last breath he continued to serve Bhil Sewa Mandal. He was also in the Advisory Committee of the Dhebar Commission.⁵¹

Sukhdevbhai Vishwanath Trivedi (1908-1968), born in the humble family of a Brahmin at Dohad had joined Government Public Works Department and continued to work till 1919. The prevalent corruption in the operating system made him leave the job and took social service for the Bhils. He enthusiastically worked against *veth*.

We find reference to atrocities on Bhil farmers by *talukdars* and *inamdars* of Dahod, Jhalod *talukas*. The Bhil Sevak Mandal activists (like Sukhdev Trivedi) stressed not to go for forced labour for the *talukdars* and *inamdars* and advocated *Satyagraha* in this regard. Veth thus became inspirational. However *talukdars* and *inamdars* got annoyed but Sukhdev Trivedi continued with his goal.⁵² Thus the Gandhians were successful in releasing tribal from the vicious circle of indebtedness and *veth*.

Another Gandhian who worked for the welfare of the tribals of Panchmahals was Pandurang Shastri Vanikar well known among the tribals of Dahod as Dada Vanikar. His father was servant in the Revenue Department of the Baroda State. It was during student days in Mumbai

⁵¹ Lalchand Ninama, *op. cit.*, pp. 270-71. Also see Mahendra G. Upadhyaya (ed.), *Shree Dahyabhai Naik: Smriti Granth*, Godhra Panchmahals District Pub. Ltd.: 1987

⁵² Once, Sukhdev, Shrikant Bhai and Dahyabhai were going to village Bordi when one *Inamdar* came and assaulted them with an iron rod. On Bhils' gathering large number the *Inamdars* left. This did not dissuade these volunteers from their fight against 'veth' and their constant struggle brought an end to 'veth' in Panchmahals district. Their constant association with Bhils in every village developed tremendous amount of trust and faith among adivasis. See Lalchand Ninama, *op. cit.*, pp. 267 - 275

that he came in contact of Shrikant Bhai and then Thakkar Bapa in 1923. He was motivated by the social workers to work for the Panchmahals tribals. He was put at Jesawada one of the most difficult places of Dohad. With surmounting difficulties and hardships he succeeded in bringing favourable results. After which he came to be known as Vanikkar Dada.⁵³

Ambalal Vyas, a native of village Rampura in Panchmahal was another dedicated worker who devoted his life to tribals' welfare. When hardly two months were left for the examination of his final year B. A. in 1921 his life was changed by Gandhi's call for the Non-Cooperation Movement. He left college and plunged into services of the country. Later on he earned a *snatak* degree from Gujarat Vidyapith, after which he joined Bhil Sewa Mandal (BSM). In the initial years of Bhil Sewa Mandal, he accompanied Indulal Yagnik and contributed in spinning activity, functioning of Rashtriya Vidyalaya, Uttarsanda and principal of Tintodi *Ashram* at Jhalod (1924-1946). With his continuous efforts he was successful in building rapport with upper caste population, tribals, government officers, *inamdars*, etc. They called him as *Mota*.⁵⁴

Thakkar Bapa attracted many more workers for work among the tribals. Some of the notables were Mangaldas Arya, Ishwarbhai Vaidya, Roopajibhai Parmar and Chaturbhai Dabhi. Thakkar Bapa got all these dedicated workers due to his magnetic and benevolent personality. There were also workers from the Bhil community; important among them to be mentioned are Lalchandbhai Dhurlabbhai Ninama, Hiraben Ninama, Jaisinghbhai Mansingbhai Solanki, Parthibhai Rajsingbhai Rathod,

⁵³ Lalchand Ninama, 'Bhekhdhari Sevaks: Bhilona Dada Vanikar' *Bhil Sewa Mandal, Dahod, Progress Report -1980*, pp. 41-43

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p. 8.

Jalajibhai Koyabhai, Narsinhbhai Kanjibhai Hathila, Databhai Bamania, Gopaldas Dalal, Kasturbhai Patel.⁵⁵

Expansion of Activities of Bhil Sewa Mandal

After the establishment of Mirakhedi *ashramshala* and foundation of *Bhil Sewa Mandal*-Dahod, one of the members of Bhil Sewa Mandal, Pandurang Govind Vanikar well known as 'Dada' began his work in one of the most notorious territories of Dahod district i.e., Jesawada. Here the most dominant community was Bhil Patelia and many of them were engaged in burglary and looting activities. When *Dada* started working in Jesawada, Surji Tadvi⁵⁶ himself sent his children to study in the *ashram*. Initiatives in the field of education at Jesawada made many tribals in becoming Bhagat⁵⁷ and children's, an educated creed. This saved the belt many a times, as and when the socio-political crisis arose.⁵⁸ Pandurang Govind Vanikar also solved the problems of 'fakirs' who were vagrant and forcibly used to collect grains from Bhil-Patelia community. Vanikar *Dada* took back grains from them and also won the court case. Cooperatives were also started at the behest of Vanikar *Dada* at Jesawada and Garbada. *Gram Sudhara Smiti* or village reform committee contributed in the management of superior agriculture, animal husbandry, poultry, water-

⁵⁵ Viyogi Hari, op. cit., pp. 9-10. Even though Thakkar Bapa had made Panchmahals his major place of fieldwork, the welfare of the tribals of the whole country was at his heart. He was instrumental in establishing *ashrams* for education of the tribal children at Bharuch, Vadodara, Sabarkantha and Banaskantha districts in Gujarat. He motivated several to go to Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh and even to faraway Orissa to start such work. He also started *ashrams* in Tharparkar area, which is located in Pakistan.

⁵⁶ Surji Tadvi was the chief person of the Bhil Patelia Community who was also a notorious dacoit. Lalchand Ninama, 'Bhekhdhari Sevaks: Bhilona Dada Vanikar' *Bhil Sewa Mandal, Dahod-Progress Report 1980*, pp. 41-43

⁵⁷ Bhagat: A religiously pious person (mainly tribal) who abstains liquor and non-vegetarian food

⁵⁸ The Bhil-Patelia community inhabited all the villages of Khajuria, Chharchhoda, Vadva, Nelsur, Vajelao and Natelav. Lalchand Ninama, 'Bhekhdhari Sevaks: Bhilona Dada Vanikar' *Bhil Sewa Mandal, Dahod-Progress Report 1980*, pp. 41-43

management, forestry, fishery and road-construction. Eventually these activities entirely changed the structure of village.⁵⁹

Nationalist Movement in Panchmahals

In 1927 the residents of Panchmahals showed their interest in national movement. With Bapa's permission they joined the movement. The atmosphere in the country was surcharged with the spirit of independence. Bapa released the Mandal's workers from the pledge of 20 years service to Bhil Sewa Mandal. He himself shouldered all their responsibilities to the Mandal. Bapa had not directly joined the movement but he had deep sympathy with the cause and those who were struggling. He raised his voice against the police atrocities on unarmed peaceful *satyagrahis*. He was arrested in Ahmedabad while the volunteers picketed liquor shops. He was charged with obstructing the police in their discharge of official duties. He was put in Sabarmati jail for six months as a result of court proceedings however he was released after a month and a quarter.⁶⁰

The other leaders of the Bhil Sewa Mandal also kept themselves devoted to the nationalist struggle of Civil Disobedience movement. Several processions were taken out in Dahod and Jhalod to boycott the British goods for which police meted out harsh action.⁶¹ Many of the workers of Bhil Sewa Mandal were given harsh punishments and were imprisoned.⁶² In 1932 when the Civil Disobedience Movement was over, Bapa revisited Dahod and discovered that all the members of the Bhil Sewa

⁵⁹ A shield was awarded by Collector's Office for the works carried out in this region. Lalchand Ninama, *op. cit.*, p. 283

⁶⁰ Dahyabhai Naik, *op. cit.*, P. 61

⁶¹ Weekly Confidential Report (W.C.R.), From D. M. Panchmahals to the Secretary, HD (SPL), Dt. 12th Oct. 1932, Godhra, F. No. 800 (73) (5), 1932 and *Civil Disobedience Movement 1932: Daily Report Panchmahals Districts*, HD (SPL), MSA, Mumbai

⁶² W.C.R. D.M. Panchmahals to The Secy, HD (SPL), Dt. 17th Jan. 1932, Godhra, F. No. 800 (73) (5), 1932

Mandal *were* arrested. He therefore, reorganized the Mandal's activities and decentralized the authority and responsibility of the various organization it had set-up.⁶³ An impetus to the movement in the area under investigation was met through the formation of Kisan Sabha.⁶⁴

The *Satyagriha* and Quit India Movement

Sukhdev Vishwanath Trivedi started *satyagriha* in a village in Dahod *taluka* with the assembly of 300 persons. The movement gained momentum after the arrest of Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad. There were *hartals* in Godhra, Kalol, Dahod and Halol of the Panchmahals district. Thus an agrarian agitation began in the Panchmahals sub-division under the leadership of local Congressmen. The grievances were the falling price of grain, the rising cost of other articles and poor crops. A meeting to meet these ends was held at Godhra *taluka* on 02/02/1941 and was addressed by four leading Congressmen of the district. A similar meeting was held in Kalol *taluka*.⁶⁵ For the British Government the *satyagriha* in the Panchmahals went unnoticed. The local leaders continued *satyagriha*. It is pertinent to mention that though the role of tribals in the nationalist struggle's historiography finds no significant place but the case of Panchmahals suggest a remarkable achievement. The tribal people who hardly had any concern about Indian National Movement were voluntarily participating in the nationalist struggle and took pride whenever any leader of Indian National Congress came to their territory.⁶⁶ In this regard a private meeting of the prominent Congress workers of the district was held

⁶³ Viyogi Hari, *op. cit.*, p. 79

⁶⁴ The MSA-Mumbai documents strengthen our argument

⁶⁵ Weekly letters: *Broach and Panchmahals Districts Weekly Reports 1941-1943*, From: D.M. Broach and Panchmahals District, To the Joint Secretary, Govt. HD (SPL), Bombay, No. SD-27, Dt. 8th Jan 1941, F. No. 800 (74) (5), Vol. III, Year 1941-43, HD (SPL), MSA, Mumbai, p. 45

⁶⁶ See Volumes of *Young India* 1919 to 1926, during these years Gandhi visited Bhil Sewa Mandal thrice along with most of all the eminent leaders of the Indian National Congress visited the Dahod and Jhalod area.

on 15th June 1941 in the Congress house at Kalol under the Presidentship of Sukhdev Vishwanath Trivedi of Dahod. Prominent Congress workers Kamala Shankar Pandya, Ramanlal Sheth, V. L. Phadke, Dahyabhai Naik, Akbarbhai Lokhandwala, Nanubhai Desai, Chhaganlal Majumdar, Marutisingh Chhagansingh Thakore, Pannalal Parikh and Jivanlal Parshottamdas Desai attended this meeting and had a discussion on the creed of violence and non-violence. It was resolved to be integral to the Principle of non-violence.⁶⁷ Acharya Kripalani, the Secretary of the All India Congress Committee trained the volunteers of the district. He was accompanied Jivanlal H Diwan and Mridula Sarojben of Ahmedabad; they gave visits at Derol, Kalol Halol, Godhra, Dahod, and Jhalod these meetings were organized by the *Taluka Congress Samiti*.⁶⁸ In all these meetings leaders and volunteers tried to invoke nationalist spirit among the tribals.

Under the auspices of the Dahod *Taluka Congress Samiti* a private meeting was held at Dahod on 11th Nov., 1941 to strategically begin the individual *Satyagriha* movement, started by Gandhi. Sumant Mehta came to Dahod to advance it among the tribal communities of the region. It is interesting to note here that the Bhils always shown an eagerness to hear such leaders but in terms of the participation they were reluctant. It was only in the agrarian agitation under the leadership of Indulal Yagnik that they participated in full strength.⁶⁹ The cultivators' unrest was channelised when a meeting of the Dahod *taluka* and Jhalod *mahal* agriculturists was held at Mirakhedi in Jhalod *mahal*, on 3rd March 1941 with Morarji R. Desai as the Chairperson under the *Khedut Parishad*. In the meeting

⁶⁷ W. C. R. 9th July 1941, Broach, *Ibid.*, p. 7

⁶⁸ W. C. R. 9th July 1941, Broach, *Ibid.*, p. 15

⁶⁹ W. C. R. 20th Nov 1941, Broach, *Ibid.*, p. 19

resolutions to establish *chowkies*, shops, enforcement of Debt Relief Act, survey of *inamdari* lands, prohibition of export of maize etc. were passed. Such resolutions were related to the prevalent drought condition of the region. These meetings received tremendous support from the tribal communities after which they whole-heartedly participated in the nationalist movement. The leaders of the Bhil Sewa Mandal were concerned about the poverty of the Bhils as well. They facilitated it through discerning of moral support and to face difficulties of famine they helped out to set-up *chowkies* for the protection of their persons and property and also insisted on the formation of storing food and fodder under grain banks.⁷⁰ The leaders of Bhil Sewa Mandal kept regular meetings in which they used to update about the activities of nationalist movement with the Bhil people. Along with certain processions, programmes and guests were also invited to keep the high spirits of these people.⁷¹ Excerpts from one such meeting in which the issues were discussed are reproduced here.

A meeting was held at Khandia in Godhra *taluka* on 2nd May 1942 under the auspices of the Godhra *taluka* Kisan Sabha. About 150 peasants were present. I. K. Yagnik was principal speaker. He referred to the war and said that stubborn resistance was being offered to the Japanese aggression and he said that prices has increased which are partly due to the hoarding and profiteering by merchants and opined that government should take possession of grains from the merchants and sell it at reasonable prices to peasants to prevent discontent and to preserve law and order. He further

⁷⁰ Such grain banks were established at Mirakhedi, Jhalod, Dahod, Jesawada, Santrampur and in few other villages to meet the challenges of Famine of 1940-1944

⁷¹ M. S. Moulavi: D. M. Broach and Panchmahals, to the Secretary. Government of Bombay, HD (SPL) Bombay, Dt. 16th Apr. 1942, Broach, F. No. 800 (74) (5), Vol. III, Year 1941-43, HD (SPL), MSA, Mumbai, p 1

stressed upon the necessity of the abolition of the caste-dinners, economy in the use of cloth, settlement of disputes with the aid of *panchas*, the curtailment in the journeys by railway and buses, practices of traveling on foot and by casts increase in the production of grain and oil seeds. Suppression of unfounded ruinous, removal of panic extinction of the class distinctions increase in the house of work, and the cooperation between the people of towns and village for the successful protection of the persons and property of the people of India during war crisis and for meeting the danger of Japanese aggression. Lastly, he exhorted the peasants to unite and organize in a disciplined manner for the establishment of the rule of the peasants and workers. The audience seemed interested in the speech the usual official observation constructed that for the time being.⁷²

The extremists' activities also grew up in Panchmahals during this phase of nationalist movement. These people were mainly involved in the underground activities. When some persons of this group removed a length of rails between Shivrajpur and Pavagadh railway stations on the narrow gauge line on 31st Aug. 1942. This caused an accident to the train; derailing the engine and four wagons loaded with manganese ore this incident also hampered the route to Dahod affecting the works of Bhil Sewa Mandal.⁷³

⁷² W. C. R., From: M. S. Moulavi, D. M. Broach and Panchmahals, to the Secretary, to The Government of Bombay, HD (SPL) Bombay No 1. Dt 12th June 1942, F. No. 800 (74) (5), Vol. III, Year 1941-43, HD (SPL), MSA, Mumbai

⁷³ W. C. R., From, M. S. Moulavi, D. M. Broach and Panchmahals, to the Secretary, to the Government of Bombay, HD (SPL) Bombay No. 1 Dt. 3rd Sept. 1942, Broach, F. No. 800 (74) (5), Vol. III, Year 1941-43, HD (SPL), MSA, Mumbai, p. 5

Partnership in Resisting Injustice and Bringing Land Reforms

Before Independence there were many small or big *talukdars*, *inamdars*, and *jagirdars* in Panchmahals. These landlords had large land holdings; village people were cultivating land but they had no rights as cultivators. Over and above they had to do *veth* on their land. They were not receiving government or neither non-government credit as farmers.

In order to solve the problems related to land rights and indebtedness of tribal cultivating class of Panchmahals, Indulal Yagnik and other leaders of *Bhil Sewa Mandal* formed the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS). AIKS was started in 1936 at Lucknow. The Gujarat Kisan Sabha was one of the provincial units of the AIKS. In Lucknow Congress (1936) the Kisan Sabha was not a peasant wing of Communist Party of India, as it became later. On the contrary, in 1930 during the Lucknow Congress the idea of Congress-Socialists was to have a peasant-wing within the Congress. But this could not happen. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was the main person who stood in opposition to it in Gujarat Pradesh Congress Committee. Even Gandhi did not like the idea to have a part within the Congress. The Congress Socialists had hopes of support from Jawaharlal Nehru who was President of the Lucknow session. In 1930 Nehru had his 'Marxist-phase'⁷⁴ and socialist leanings⁷⁵. He participated in deliberations of the Kisan Sabha leaders at Lucknow. Nehru did not wish to antagonize Gandhi. Nehru realized that his Marxist leanings would cost him the support of Gandhi. He therefore, "came back to Bapu's fold". At the Faizpur session of the congress, Nehru opposed the formation of Kisan Sabha. He

⁷⁴ See, Bipinchandra, *Modern India*, New Delhi, 1994

⁷⁵ Jawahar Lal Nehru was more influenced in the ideology of Socialists but the entire ideology of Congress did not supported it as a result for his prospective ambition he chose to side with the popular ideology of Congress.

said, "For the benefits of Kisans there is no need to start Kisan Sabhas". Nehru's speech angered the Kisan Sabha leaders like Sahjanand Saraswati from Bihar and Indulal Yagnik from Gujarat. The hopes of the leftist especially Congress socialists of forming a peasant organization within the congress fold were disappointed. At Faizpur, the Kisan Committee adopted the CPI's red flag as the All India Kisan Sabha's flag and thereafter for all practical purposes the Kisan Sabha became the peasant front of the CPI.⁷⁶

Members of Kisan Sabha

The majority of Kisan Sabha's membership came from poor peasants and agricultural laborers in the district of Broach, Surat, Kheda and Baroda. The Gujarat Kisan Sabha also had a following among Bhils of Panchmahals and the Dhodias of Valsad before 1946. Evicted tenants came into the Kisan Sabha fold in large numbers after large-scale eviction of tenants in the wake of land reforms. This trend continued till 1956.⁷⁷ In order to express peasants' grievances in Panchmahals, Indulal Yagnik took the lead. At the Dahod-Jhalod Peasant conference at village Mirakhedi on 27th Jan' 1936 he said:

Unfavorable weather and the economic crisis have been adversely affecting the peasants. The amount of land-revenue ...they are unable to pay. The problem of land rent charged by the *talukdars* is ...300 percent more land rent, than charged by the government. The government rule regarding installments of land revenue is not observed. The form of usury that exists here would stagger anybody; the entire peasantry is merged in indebtedness. The only

⁷⁶ L. S. Vishwanath, 'Gujarat Kisan Sabha: 1936-1956' in *EPW*, Vol. XX No. 28, July 13 1985, p. 1197

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p 1198

solution would be the liquidation of debts, but before that measure would be taken, some legislation restricting the rate of interest is necessary. There are the immediate economic grievances but as long as the present political and social structure is not completely overhauled and the power vested in the hands of the producing masses, even such small demands cannot be fulfilled. We must get political power to fulfill even the smallest demands. Our political movement must be built up on the demands of abolition of talukdari system; cancellation of government takavi (loan) no land revenue for uneconomic holdings; at least 50 percent reduction in land-revenue; land rent charged by the *zamindars* in no case to exceed 1 ½ of land-revenue. Complete abolition and penalization of forced labour and illegal exactions; cancellation of debts; free and compulsory education and freedom of speech and association.⁷⁸

After the meeting Indulal Yagnik was arrested.⁷⁹ His arrest created discontent among agriculturists of Gujarat. The *Desh Mitra* newspaper reported:

Protests have been raised in various quarters against the prohibitory orders issued against Mr. Yagnik, and from one point of the view the ban placed on him is ...unjust. Indulal

⁷⁸ 'Power must go to Masses. Demand of Dohad Congress': The Bombay Chronicle, 27th Jan 1936, in *Indulal Yagnik: Bolshevism*, F. No. 543 (14-C) 1936, Indulal Yagnik: Bolshevism, HD (SPL) Branch, MSA, Mumbai, p. 81.

⁷⁹ After the meeting Indulal Yagnik was arrested. R. S. Mani, the Additional. D. M. of Panchmahals described the episode, Mr. Yagnik was due to speak at another meeting at Dahod but he was arrested before he could do so, he was arrested under section 3 of the Bombay (special) emergency powers. Act. Mr. Yagnik was ordered detention in the Dohad sub-jail for a period of 15 days from 26th under section 3 (2) of the Bombay special emergency powers Act, Rendering further orders from government *About Arrest of Indulal Yagnik* F. No. R. S. Mani, To: The Secretary to Government. Bombay, Dt. 27th Oct. 1936, Godhra, F. No. 543 (14) - C, 1936. HD (SPL) Branch, 1936, p. 103

had taken up the movement for organizing the agriculturists only with the object of relieving them from the sufferings, which they were undergoing. We cannot understand on what grounds government had to place a ban on such activities, which are meant purely for the welfare of the agriculturists. Of course, the burden of the land revenue, which the agriculturists have to pay, is an excessive one. Agitation for getting it reduced was also included in these activities. For that reason, Government may perhaps have suspected that a movement like that of the Bardoli Satyagriha may perhaps spring up in future from activities of this type. Hence, it is likely that they may have taken this step by way of persecution. But in the light of previous experience, Government should not overlook the fact that by stifling activities in this manner dissatisfaction is not removed, but it is on the contrary increased thereby.⁸⁰

Similarly newspaper *Sandesh* lamented, that with the arrest of the Indulal Yagnik agriculturists have been deprived of the benefits of the services of public servant like Mr. Indulal. If the State wants to shut their eyes to the problems of the agriculturists by imposing restrictions on Mr. Indulal then they are committing great mistake. The consensus says that the problem could be solved by negotiation and not by restriction.⁸¹ After arrest of Indulal Yagnik other leaders like Ramanlal Sheth carried the work of Kisan Sabha in Panchmahals forward. These leaders kept the spirits of peasants high and made them to continuously strive for the cause of land

⁸⁰ Newspaper Clippings: 8th Feb. 1936, 9th Feb. 1936 in *Desh Mitra* and *Sandesh* F. No. 543 14-C 1936, HD (SPL) Branch, 1936, MSA, Mumbai, pp. 166-168

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 168

reforms. The ignorant tribal peasants were made aware about their rights and possibilities to improve their conditions. Ramanlal Sheth the officiating President after the arrest of the Indulal Yagnik delivered a thought provoking address at Dohad-Jhalod Peasant's Conference held at Mirakhedi on 27th Jan. 1936. In his speech he presented all the proposed land reforms which were on the liquidation of debts, restricting the rate of interest up to six percent, abolition of *talukdari* system, cancellation of government *takavi* (loan), no land revenue for uneconomic holdings at least 50 percent reduction in land-revenue, complete abolition and penalization of forced labour and illegal exactions, cancellation of debts, free compulsory education, freedom of speech and association and unions and free use of forests.⁸² In a way the proposal was meant for workers and peasants who were exploited economically and politically by the British governance. The new constitution and the village uplift scheme were designed to raise the mass discontent against the existing problems.

To propagate the ideas of Gujarat Kisan Sabha, leaflets under the signature of Dahyabhai Akbar Ali Lokhandwala and Somabhai Nathjibhai Shirshiya-Sectaries Godhra *taluka*, Khedut *Parishad* were distributed in the villages of Godhra *taluka* and Godhra town. A list was published for the knowledge of the peasants of all the reforms proposed by the AIKS⁸³ and

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 23

⁸³ Following resolutions were passed at the meeting (1) Requesting Government for declaration of scarcity condition in Godhra *taluka* and remittance of half the land-revenue and postponement of the recovery of the other half and *takavi* and execution of decrees; (2) Requesting payment of full wages to agricultural labourers employed by forest department; The resolution further recommended that no undue pressure be employed on such labourers; (3) Censoring the present *annevari* system and requesting Government that *talatis* should fix *annevari* in consultation with a committee of the villages at every village; Requesting grant of sufficient lands and appointment of a committee to investigate the question of shortage of land; (5) Requesting grant of permission to take wood from forest tree of charge for ploughs etc; (6) request for making permanent boundaries between the reserved forests and those plots given for grazing of cattle(7) requesting grant of power to *talatis* for giving permission for cutting of trees for use by agriculturists ; (8) Sympathizing with Deoli detunes in their hunger strike and

regular meetings were conducted in different villages of the district to generate public opinion about the movement of Gujarat Kisan Sabha.⁸⁴

Bhil Sewa Mandal and Growth of Education among the Bhils

Apart from poverty alleviation, cultural development of the Bhils was another target of the leaders of Bhil Sewa Mandal due to their backwardness in literacy and attitude towards superstitions. The most appropriate way to overcome in tribal society was through education. Over the years, Bhil Sewa Mandal has opened many schools, hostels, *ashramshalas* or residential school and *bahwadis*.⁸⁵ Bhil Sewa Mandal began the work of education among tribal in 1921. Tribal boys used to get free education along with cost free lodging and food facilities.

Ashramshalas:

Gandhi advocated value-based education through out his experiments on life. For this purpose he initiated the concept of *nai-talim*.⁸⁶ Gandhi (1815-1935) emphasized on such an education that could prepare freedom fighters who would sacrifice their lives to gain independence by truth and non-violence. Keeping this concept in mind, the Gandhians who went in tribal areas started schools and imparted

recommending to them necessary facilities; The resolution further asked the detunes to give up their fast; (9) Protesting against increase in local fund tax by the district local board; (10) Requesting inquiry into collection of excessive and illegal rent of taxes by Inamdars and asking their immediate stoppage by government; (11) Requesting the immediate putting into operation of debt-relief tenancy and moneylenders acts. From the D.M. of Broach and Panchmahals, to the Secretary of Government, HD (SPL), Bombay, Dt. 4th Dec. 1941, via F. No. 543 14-C, HD (SPL), MSA, Mumbai, 1941

⁸⁴ F. No. D.M. of Broach and Panchmahals, to the Secretary of Government, HD (SPL), Bombay, Dt. 4th Dec. 1941, Camp via Broach, F. No. 800 (74) (5), Vol. III, Year 1941-43, HD (SPL), MSA, Mumbai

⁸⁵ Report prepared for: Assistance for Bhil Sewa Mandal, An NGO Working for Tribal Welfare collected during field work of Dahod. Bhil Sewa Mandal, Nov. 2003, pp. 1-2

⁸⁶ For *nai-talim* and details See Chapter-III of the Thesis

education according to the norm governing the Gujarat Vidyapith and those of *nai-talim*.

There was a little change in the way education was imparted in tribal areas of Panchmahals, through '*ashramshalas*'. The tribal population, which lives in jungle tracts, has limited access and use of mainstream education. They have their own boundaries for knowledge, entertainment, culture; all are limited to one particular regional boundary. Another reason to begin *ashramshalas* was that the distribution and settlement of tribals is very sparse for which reason it was not feasible for them to commute daily to the school.⁸⁷ Therefore Gandhians come up with the idea of *ashramshalas* where the children's of tribals were lodged and taught. The pioneer who conceptualized *ashramshalas* was Thakkar Bapa.

Before coming to Panchmahals, Thakkar Bapa had already been to tribal dominated place of Jamshedpur. During his stay among them he realized that the root problems of the tribals' life are: - (1) Illiteracy and ignorance (2) Poverty and exploitation (3) Superstition and liquor, and, (4) Diseases or health problems. To ameliorate such conditions, Thakkar Bapa prepared the Programme of *Ashramshala* for which he received support of young people who dedicated their life in upholding the cause of tribals.

The first *ashramshala* was founded at Mirakhedi; it was initiated, by Indulal Yagnik. Nandubhai Harjivan became the first teacher of this '*Rashtriya Bhil Ashram*' where he taught four boys of Bhil community. Dahyabhai Naik a graduate from Gujarat Vidyapith joined the Mirakhedi *ashramshala* in 1922. Later on Thakkar Bapa started an *ashramshala* at

⁸⁷ Babalbhai Mehta, '*Ashramshala nu. Mahatva*', *Bhil Sewa Mandal, Dahod, Smriti Granth*, 1965. Ahmedabad, Navjivan Press: 1965, p. 62

village Gultora in December 1922. When Thakkar Bapa went to Mumbai Laxmidas Shrikant and Pandurang Govind Vanikar also joined him. Vanikar started 'Yash Vatika Bhil Ashram' at Jesawada in March 1923. Along with him, his friend Ishwarlal Chimanlal Vaidya began a dispensary in the village. Jesawada, which was one of the most notorious places of this region due to temperamental and offensive of Bhiloda and Bhil communities residing there, but Dada Vanikar was able to get students from these communities and even transformed this malevolent community into benevolent friends.⁸⁸

In these *ashramshalas* students were brought from far off places, and from forest tracts of Devgadhi Baria, in 1923 the boys from Devgadhi Baria were taught at village 'Rozam', nine miles away from Dohad. Gyanshankar Pranshankar Oza became in-charge of this new *ashramshala*.⁸⁹ Later with the efforts of Shri Laxmidas Shrikant Mirakhedi the *ashramshala* of Rozam came under the *Bhil Sewa Mandal* on 29th Dec. 1924. From 1924 onwards *Gujarat Prantik Samiti* started taking care of one third of the expenditure of Bhil Mandal. When Laxmidas Shrikant became main in-charge of the Bhil Sewa Mandal in 1925 Thakkar Bapa left Bhil Sewa Mandal to help the tribals of the other regions.⁹⁰

Educating Tribal Girls

The education of tribal girls was the major challenge for the workers of Bhil Sewa Mandal. The tribal women are generally understood to enjoy equal status with men but genuinely and in many instances they are looked merely as commodities. Education of girls among tribal societies is

⁸⁸ *Progress Report of Bhil Sewa Mandal -Dahod, 1922-1945*, Ahmedabad, Navjivan Press: 1945, pp 7-8

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14

discouraged as apprehend that investment in girl's education is waste of time she should better get married rather than invest her precious time of youth in studying. With prevalence of such hurdles, girl's education often became very difficult. Gandhians have constantly worked for women's education, as they believe that educated tribal women will definitely bring social change. The Gandhian volunteers made several efforts to encourage the tribals to send the girls for education but there was tough resistance on that count. At last two girls of Bhil -Patelia community Hiraben and Motiben were admitted in *ashramshalas* of Jesawada and Mirakhedi in 1930-31. Later four more girls Kasmiben, Kamuben, Puniben and Makniben joined the Jesawada *Yashvatika Kanya ashramshala*. In Mirakhedi the first five girls who started studying were: Kamuben Vacchhalaben, Valiben, Chandanben and Vijayaben. Wives of Dahyabhai Naik and Vanikar Dada in Mirakhedi and Jesawada *ashramshalas* looked after the girls respectively.⁹¹

In the year 1939, Shrikant Sheth bought four acres of land at Dohad and with capital of 13 thousand rupees constructed a building for Bhil *Kanya Ashram*'. In 1943-44 Shabari *Kanya Ashram* were began in Jhalod and Jesawada villages. This way prior to independence, three *ashramshalas* for girls of Bhil community began under Bhil Sewa Mandal. Savitaben, daughter of Somabhai Chowthabhai, was the first women Graduate from Bhil community in 1932.

Expansion of Educational activities

Up till 1960 eight *ashramshalas* had been established in Panchmahals, where primary education up to seventh standard was

⁹¹ Dhramadev Shastri, 'Kanya Shikshan ka Mahatva', *Progress Report, Bhil Sewa Mandal, 1965*. p. 14

imparted. The Mandal decided to extend the facility of secondary education and from June 1960 secondary schools were started at Mirakhedi of Jhalod *taluka* and Jesawada of Dahod *taluka*. *Buniyadi* education was given with a view to providing education useful for life. Ever since the numbers of classes and students have been increasing in both these schools.⁹² After starting a separate *Uttar Buniyadi Vidyalaya* (U.B.V.)⁹³ for girls in Dahod, a *Kanya Vidyalaya* (Girls School) was also started at Jesawada. A separate *Uttar Buniyadi ashramshala* also began to run at Jhalod for the girls where 120 girls stayed in the *Chhatralaya*. Moreover *Uttar Buniyadi* schools are run at Jhalod of Dahod *taluka* and Karath of Jhalod *taluka*. In these schools agriculture and cow breeding is taught as the main craft. At both the places boys and girls are imparted educations till class 8th to 10th. Thus at present this Mandal runs two UBA, two high schools and seven *Buniyadi* schools (BV) in Dahod division. There is also provision for higher and basic education in three schools.⁹⁴

A List of Uttar Buniyadi Vidyalaya (UBV)

S. No.	Name of UBV	Village	Year
1	Rashtriya UBV	Mirakhedi	1960
2	Yashvatika UBV.	Jesawada	1960
3	UBV, Mirakhedi	Mirakhedi	1965
4	UBV, Dahod	Dahod	1968
5	Pandurang Vanikar UBV.	Abhlod	1972
6	Kasturba UBV.	Jhalod	1977
7	Yashvatika Kanya UBV.	Jesawada	1982
8	Ambalal Vyas UBV.	Jhalod	1983
9	UBV, Karath	Karath	1980

Source: *Bhil Sewa Mandal- Dahod 'Progress Report, 1980. P.58*

⁹² Hiraben Ninama, 'Adivasis Bahenno Maa Shekshanik Vikas', Bhil Sewa Mandal- Dahod 'Progress Report. Ahmedabad, Navjivan Press, 1980. P.58

⁹³ *Ibid.* p. 59.

⁹⁴ Chumilal Hathila, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

Mahila Talim Kendra, Jhalod: The tribal girls who studied below metric are trained here to be Gram *Sevikas*. This center was started in 1962 with full grant from the Social Welfare Board of Indian Government and is Governed and administered under Bhil Sewa Mandal and Bharatiya Adimjati Sevak Sangh.

Mahila Adhyapan Mandir, Limbdi: To educate and train women in teachers training programme, Mahila Adhyayan Mandir was started in Limbdi of Jhalod *taluka* in 1964.⁹⁵ The institution was later shifted to Jhalod and with the help of philanthropist bodies it sustained it self under the guidance of. Klaben Desai. Up till 2001, some 3,109 trainees had passed out from the Adhyayan Mandir of which 248 belonged to scheduled castes and 688 belonged to scheduled tribes. All these women are working as teachers in different primary schools of the state. Even though this college has benefited large number of girls, the purpose with which this college was started has not been achieved because the government has centralized the process of admission. The tribal girls do not easily get admission to the extent required for this area. The management is also dissatisfied with the admission system. They feel that the government should relax the criteria for the tribal girls in admission as it is done in the case of the minorities.⁹⁶

After India became independent, the various princely states also came under the rule of Indian Union. 'Vadodara Zillah Panchayats Varga Sewa Mandal' was formed for the welfare activities of the tribals through *ashramshala* and Gramm Sevaks in Chhota Udepur. Later Bhil Sewa

⁹⁵ Chunilal Hathila, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* p 73.

Mandal expanded its activities in Sabarkantha, Banaskantha, Broach, and Rajpipla territories as well.⁹⁷

Bhil Sewa Mandal laid the foundation of education in the Panchmahals region of Gujarat. When it was founded in 1923, the literacy rate in the region was almost zero. There were no schools in the region. Tribals in the region were content with manual work and never thought of education. Alcoholism was one of the evils of their lives. However, things have changed since BSM started serious work in this direction. The table shown below gives an idea of spread of education and literacy in the Panchmahals region of Gujarat

⁹⁷ *Progress Report, Bhil Sewa Mandal, Dahod, 1976, p. 7*

List of Ashramshalas under Bhil Sewa Mandal

S.No.	Name of Ashramshalas	Taluka	Year
1	Mirakhedi U.B.A.	Jhalod	1965
2	Kathla Ashramshala	Dahod	1957
3	Panchnada Ashramshala	Dahod	1961
4	Varuna Ashramshala	Santrampur	1954
5	Randhikpur Ashramshala	Limkheda	1957
6	Itadi Ashramshala	Jhalod	1958
7	Mora Ashramshala	Godhra	1962
8	Munpur Ashramshala	Santrampur	1963
9	Sagtala Ashramshala	Devgadh Baria	1953
10	Vangadh Ashramshala	Santrampur	1958
11	Dhanpur Ashramshala	Limkheda	1952
12	Kanjeta Ashramshala	Limkheda	1964
13	Babrol Ashramshala	Santrampur	1967
14	Chakalia Ashramshala	Jhalod	1967
15	Padhora Ashramshala	Devgadh Baria	1966
16	Jesawada Ashramshala	Dahod	1923
17	Dahod Ashramshala	Dahod	1968
18	Mirakhedi Ashramshala	Jhalod	1921
19	Katwar Ashramshala	Dahod	1969
20	Jesawada Ashramshala	Dahod	1969
21	Rashtriya Ashram Mirakhedi	Jhalod	1922
22	Tintodi Ashramshala	Jhalod	1923
23	Shabari Ashramshala	Jhalod	1955
24	Varuna Ashramshala	Santrampur	1961
25	Kantu Ashramshala	Devgadh Baria	1954
26	Santrampur Ashramshala	Santrampur	1948
27	Limkheda Ashramshala	Limkheda	1949
28	Piplod Ashramshala	Devgadh Baria	1958
29	Mandod Ashramshala	Limkheda	1954
30	Richwadi Ashramshala	Devgadh Baria	1954
31	Limbdi Ashramshala	Jhalod	1962
32	Santrod Ashramshala	Godhra	1966
33	Raniyadi Bhura Ashramshala	Jhalod	1965
34	Dahod Kumar Ashramshala	Dahod	1961
35	Dahod Kanya Ashramshala	Dahod	1939

Source: *Shri. Thakkar Bapa Janma Shtabdi Smarak Granth, 1969*

Other than academic activity the students have been trained and made to live confidently. This typically included extra-curricular activities.

Apart from regular sports, students are taken to picnics and fairs. Students also evolved themselves in agricultural activities. In the case of residential schools students are given responsibilities of hostel management. So total seats managed there comes to 2, 57,846.⁹⁸

EDUCATION UP TILL 1990

Gender	Balwadis	Residential School	Hostel	Residential School	Schools	UBV
Boys	10,887	37,170	52,431	42,00	64,83	56,808
Girls	12,430	37,170	11,542	27,83	22,97	23,645
Total	23,317	74,340	63,973	69,83	87,80	80,453

Source: *Bhil Sewa Mandal: Dahod, 'Kanya Ashram' Rajat Jayanti Prasang, 1965*

WELFARE ACTIVITIES BY BHIL SEWA MANDAL

Khadi and Village Industries

Apart from conducting educational activities BSM focused on several other socio- political action programmes. Gandhi paid a visit to Dahod to see the progress of Bhil Sewa Mandal. He addressed a large meeting of women where he said:

The protection of *dharma* is in the hands of the women as men being too much engrossed in the worldly cares often forget and sometime neglect it. It is for the women to protect it as dearly as their children. Hence, I have even believed that the salvation of India lies in the elevation of her woman. Swadeshi is a great *dharma*, which has been forsaken by most of the women of Gujarat. It is irreligious to neglect our own artisans and encourage the foreign ones. Our greatest needs are only

⁹⁸ *Bhil Sewa Mandal: Dahod, 'Kanya Ashram' Rajat Jayanti Prasang, 1965, Ahmedabad, Navjivan Press: 1965, p. 10*

two viz food and clothing. Fortunately the food we eat is produced in our own country. But the cloth we wear comes mostly from foreign countries... it is our duty to be free ourselves from this problem and the easiest way to do so is to be exactly as we did a hundred years ago. Women should mainly take to spinning wheel and men- must weave. If our poor sisters do a little spinning in their leisure hours they can have a little income of their own, and give an impetus to a most essential indigenous handicraft. At the close of the meeting many women expressed a desire to begin spinning immediately and some who knew the art volunteered to teach it to the new aspirants.⁹⁹

This shows that Bhil Sewa Mandal had been taking keen interest in Khadi and village industries from the very beginning. In all its schools spinning has been a regular and daily exercise.¹⁰⁰ In 1947, when *Sarvodaya* programme began in Panchmahals, 25 schools were opened under Mirakhedi *ashram*. Under Sagtala Intensive Regional programme, Gopaldas Dalal the Bhil Sewa Mandal volunteer of Devgadhi-Baria started propagating among tribals improved agriculture, leather work, Ambar charkhas, soap-oil Industry and education activities.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5

¹⁰⁰ See M. K. Gandhi, 'Public life in Dahod:' *op. cit.* while interviewing Ilaben Desai, Mahila Adhyapan Mandir Jhalod, I came to know about the depressing situation of Khadi and village industries in Dahod district since 1980's. Interview taken on 21st Nov. 2002, Jhalod

¹⁰¹ Dahyabhai G. Naik, *Bhil Sewa Mandal-Progress Report*, Ahmedabad, Navjivan Press: 1967, p. 7. In the year 1960 alone the labour charges paid for spinning was Rs. 3200,- per year and for weaving Rs. 4500,- per year and to the weavers Rs. 8, 00,- per year. Around 4,000 Ambar *charkhas* were distributed among the tribal people

Health, Prohibition and Social Reform

The major problems of tribals had been of illiteracy, poverty, ill health and exploitation. In order to save tribals from exploitation workers of the Mandal took keen interest in the execution of various cooperative institutions like forest labourer's cooperative societies, purchase and sale union, etc.

The workers of the Mandal also advocated and launched in family planning and social reforms, agricultural and educational development among the tribals.¹⁰² Bhil Sewa Mandal also promoted prohibition among the tribals and assiduously guided them how to exercise restraint.¹⁰³ Due to these efforts their agriculture has improved resulting in their relative freedom from exploitation. It has been the policy of Bhil Sewa Mandal, Dahod from its inception to wean *adivasis* away from liquor.¹⁰⁴

Workers of the Mandal and students picketed in liquor shops during the national movements. People were persuaded not to drink liquor, resulting in the decrease in and closure of shops. This led to severed quarrels between liquor sellers and workers of the Mandal. Such an incident of quarrel took place in the village of Mandavav of Dohad *taluka*. Sukhdevbhai was threatened. Such threats did not dissuade the Mandal from their activity of prohibition.¹⁰⁵ The impact was such that fifty village officials in the district tendered their resignations. The Bhils slowly freed themselves from the drink habit.¹⁰⁶ Govind Singh Ninama laid stress on

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 8

¹⁰³ *Progress Report-Bhil Sewa Mandal Dahod*, 2000, p. 16

¹⁰⁴ *Bhil Sewa Mandal, Progress Report: Bhil Sewa Mandal: Suvarna Jayanti Mahotsava*, Ahmedabad, Navjivan Press: 1980

¹⁰⁵ Chunilal Hathila, *op. cit.*, p. 58

¹⁰⁶ A. V. Thakkar, 'Unauthorized Firing by an Excise Peon', *Young India*, Vol. XII, No. 21, May 22, 1930

health facilities among tribals besides making *adivasis* aware of the importance of health and hygiene and futility of their superstitions remedies like witchcraft and other superstitious practices.¹⁰⁷ On these issues Bhil Sewa Mandal had been closely working with the governments' Social Welfare Department. Moreover, four mid-wife centers and seven *anganwadi* centers were being run with the help of social welfare advisory board reform.¹⁰⁸

In these districts ten centers are being run. Women workers of these centers provide guidance in health, childcare, education, income generation and become helpful in the field of family welfare. Mandal extends cooperation in health related programme organized by any public organization or government. Mandal always cooperates in eye camps, diagnostic camps or other welfare activities. In institutions at Jesawada, Mirakhedi, Jhalod, whenever such eye camps, diagnostic camps, live stock diagnostic camps are arranged student and workers of the respective campuses give full cooperation and make them successful.¹⁰⁹

After independence the law of prohibition came into force. Mandal appointed separate workers for propagation of prohibition and they propagated prohibition in villages. People were persuaded to give up liquor or other intoxicative drinks. Good result of that work was witnessed. Shri Dhurlabhbhai Parmar did remarkable work as a propagator of prohibition. The Mandal carries on work of prohibition till today. Even then among certain classes of the society this evil is reading. One reason of that is

¹⁰⁷ Govind Singh Ninama, 'Adivasi Vistaarma Arogya Sevaks', *Bhil Sewa Mandal, Dahod, Progress Report*, 1980, pp. 60-61

¹⁰⁸ *Bhil Sewa Mandal, Progress Report, Bhil Sewa Mandal, Suvarna Jayanti Mahotsava*. Ahmedabad, Navjivan Press: 1980. p. 3

¹⁰⁹ Chunilal Hathila, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-61.



election campaign in which certain candidates distribute liquor for getting votes. Evil effects of that are seen today. Some areas of Panchmahals are adjacent to the border of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. From there liquor is smuggled in this district and supplied to the ignorant people.¹¹⁰ Despite all the alternations by bootleggers the people who have become 'Bhagat' from amongst the tribals keep totally away from consumption. Bhil Sewa Mandal propagates prohibition and de-addiction. Since 1949 'Sarvodaya Yojana' also is operated by the Mandal. Worker of that Yojana also have been doing this work for years. There is a good impact of that work in the society.¹¹¹

Social reforms in tribal society were not limited to health, education, and making tribals participate in nationalist movement. With the support from Gandhi and under the guidance of Thakkar Bapa, the Bhil Sewa Mandal designed a comprehensive programme for the tribal welfare. The main features¹¹² of it were:

Improving the economic condition of the tribals through cooperative societies:

- (1) Improvement of agriculture
- (2) Liquor prohibition
- (3) Land conservation and educating tenants about land rights
- (4) Providing welfare activities during, drought, famine, and floods.

¹¹⁰ Chumilal Hathila, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-59

¹¹¹ See. M. K. Gandhi, 'Public Life in Dahod'... *op. cit.*, p 58

¹¹² Dahyabhai Naik, *Bhil Sewa Mandal-Dahod-Progress Report*, Ahmedabad, Navjivan press, 1967, p. 2

The positive signs of the work of Bhil Sewa Mandal became evident in the 1920's itself. Gandhi believed that tribal are most genuine people, the only thing they are required to do is to¹¹³

1. Abstain from eating flesh
2. To abstain from taking intoxicating liquor or drugs
3. To use homespun clothe
4. To speak the truth.
5. To live cleanly.

The Bhils in Panchmahals met at a Conference under the Presidentship of Vallabhbhai Patel and passed resolutions on social reform. These relate among other things to abstinence from drink from flesh, meat, from opium and intoxicating drugs, from the use of foreign clothes, and from evil practices of offering goats etc. before the communal deity, abstaining from extravagant post mortem and post nuptial drinks which incur tribals into indebtedness.¹¹⁴

Cooperative Movement

The cooperative movement in Panchmahals district was confined mostly to the former Bombay state area in the district. The first cooperative society was registered at Malav village of Kalol *taluka* in September 1909. By 1916, there were 12 cooperative societies and they provided agricultural credit only. In 1920, the district faced severs famine, which continued till the 1923. Necessity was therefore felt to organize relief works. A. V. Thakkar visualized that cooperation was the best agency for organizing relief works among the Bhils and other backward classes in the district and made strenuous efforts for the development of the agricultural and

¹¹³ Charles F. Andrews, 'An Aboriginal Tribe, Khaddar and Drink', *Young India*, April 30th 1925, p. 155

¹¹⁴ Mahadev Desai, 'Baria in Conference' *Young India*, June.... 1925

nonagricultural credit societies. The number of credit societies rose to 52 in 1922. There had occurred tremendous growth of cooperatives under the Bhil Sewa Mandal in Panchmahals. The workers of Bhil Sewa Mandal started cooperative banks and sales cooperatives in different villages of Panchmahals. The cooperative, which began in Garbada and Jesawada, acquired the attention of Mehta and Seraiya Committees for growth of cooperative movement in India. In 1947 Poorva Panchmahals cooperative banking Union limited was founded. At the time of independence there were as many as 255 credit societies, 221 agricultural and 34 non-agricultural credit societies.¹¹⁵ In Panchmahals area large amount of *adivasis* are parts of cooperative societies, and always the cooperatives get a recovery of 80-100 percent. This tendency has favorably reduced the exploitation of tribals in Panchmahals.¹¹⁶

Even at present Bhil Sewa Mandal plays direct and indirect role in the administration of the following cooperative institutions: Cooperative sales and purchase Union, lamp societies, Marketing societies, Panchmahals district cooperative bank, consumer's cooperative stores and employee's cooperative credit society. Consumer's cooperatives are run to be helpful to the Workers working in the centers of the Mandal to supply good quality goods. The credit arrangement is made in such a way that its members get loan on easy terms of interest.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ S. B. Rajyagore (ed.), *The Gujarat State Gazetteers: Panchmahals District*, Ahmedabad, Gujarat Press, 1961, p. 381; also see L. M. Shrikant, 'Development of Forest Dwellers and forests' in *Gandhi Yug na Rekhachitro. Dohad, Bhil Sewa Mandal*, 1955, p. 9

¹¹⁶ S. B. Rajyagore, *op. cit.*, p. 10

¹¹⁷ Narsinhbhai Hathila, *Bhil Sewa Mandal - Dahod. Ocho Parichay, op. cit.*, p. 6

Joint Forest Labour Cooperative Society

Till the 1960s the main source of the Bhils livelihood remained agriculture. Their holdings were/are generally extended to a limit of 5 acres¹¹⁸ or even less than that. Again their methods of cultivation are crude and primitive. They heavily depend on the local precarious rainfall. Hilly terrain curtails the irrigation facilities, which worsens the situation further. Thus, the output of crop they get, after the moneylenders takes away their share hardly lasts with them so to sustain for only two to three months. Unemployment increases after the harvest season. About 5 percent find employment in the forest coupe, which are managed by the forest contractors. This work lasts for about 2 to 3 months and the earning from that work is hardly Rs. 50 to Rs. 75 per person. About 10 percent might be finding employment in the collection of minor forest produce, the season for which is hardly a month and the earnings do not exceed Rs. 25 per person.¹¹⁹

With a view to eliminate the exploitation of the contractor the volunteers had to develop the inherent abilities of the Bhils to manage the forest coupe. B. G. Kher the Chief Minister of the former Bombay State evolved the concept of Forest Labourers' Cooperative Societies. This movement became very popular amongst the Tribals of the state, as they found that their exploiter, the forest contractor was no longer there to harass them and the profits made in the coupe transitions belonged to them (i.e. the member of the cooperative who worked the coupe).¹²⁰ In

¹¹⁸ In 90 percent cases among the tribals their land-holdings are less than five acres per person. Report of Tribal Sub-Plan, Dahod, 2002, p. 22

¹¹⁹ D. N. Vandekar, 'The Adivasis: Their Forest Cooperatives and the Development of These Cooperatives as Real Industrial Bodies'. *Bhil Sewa Mandal, Progress Report*, 1965, P. 98

¹²⁰ Chunilal Hathila, op. cit., p 64

Panchmahals, under the guidance of Bhil Sewa Mandal forest workers cooperative societies were setup.¹²¹ By the 1965 there were 20 JFLCS. The detail about these societies is as below:

No. of Cooperatives	20
No. of Members	8,283
Share Capital	Rs. 98,583.00
Reserve Funds	Rs. 6, 92,663.00
Other Funds	Rs. 10, 09,522.00

The profits earned by the JFLCS were fair enough which encouraged the further growth of such activities in the Panchmahals. By 1970 there were 92 JFLCS and its statistical details were as follows¹²²:

Area of Coupes	8,450 Sq. kms.
Labour Cost of Coupes	Rs. 8, 03,803.00
Loading Charges	Rs. 6, 57,824.00
Income out of Loads	Rs. 4,672,233.00
Cost of stock Goods	Rs. 97,728.00
Income used in Welfare	Rs. 17,744.00.

Dahyabhai Naik of the Bhil Sewa Mandal made a pioneering effort in this direction of JFLCS management. The forest contractors who worked as intermediaries have been replaced by the forest cooperatives and all the main coupes in the district are given for exploitation to the forest cooperative societies under the approved formula of sharing the net realization on an 80:20 basis between Government and the societies respectively. The society and the divisional forest officer jointly fix the upset price of the material put for sale. In 1969-70, there were in all 19 such societies in the district which a total membership of 9,000 members and total share capital of over Rs. 1 lakh. They exploited a total of 170

¹²¹ D. N. Vandrekhar, 'The Adivasis: Their Forest Cooperatives and The Development of These Cooperatives as Real Industrial Bodies'. *Bhil Sewa Mandal, Progress Report, 1965*, p. 98

¹²² Chunilal Hathila, *op. cit.*, p. 63

coupes during the year. The Bhil Sewa Mandal of Dohad sponsors all these societies.¹²³

The societies function with the main objective of providing full wages to forest labourers and training them for responsible positions for conducting transactions themselves. After about 22 years of their existence, they have been able to achieve these objectives. Commenting on the work of JFLCS first five-year planning commission wrote:

Useful work has been done in Bombay State in organizing cooperatives of forest tribes to replace the contractors. The number of such societies increased from 11 in 1947-48 to 17 in 1949-50. The value of forest produces handled by the cooperatives during 1949-1950 rose to 17-95 lakh. It should be the object of the State policy throughout India to organize the tribes into cooperatives for the collection of forest produce and for this a phased programme should be drawn up. The condition of working and living in or near forests involves unusual forms of hardships and the amelioration of the working conditions of the staff and labour in forests calls for special considerations.¹²⁴

In order to strengthen the economy of comparatively backward tribal forest workers forest labourers' cooperatives were established on an increasing scale so that profits, which went to contractors, should accrue to forest labourers. In many ways the penetration of forest contractors into tribal economy has been harmful. Increasingly, in tribal areas forest contractors were given to cooperative societies and they should also be

¹²³ Dahyabhai Naik, *Progress Report: Bhil Sewa Mandal*, 1967, *op. cit.*, p. 8

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9

assisted in the collection and processing of minor forest produce.¹²⁵ Dahyabhai Naik pressed for exclusive evaluation of JFLCS in Bombay state. In his report of 1959 he wrote:

The forest department should consider itself responsible for the development of the tribals as well as the forest areas. It should not think in terms of an exclusive obligation to trees and vegetation but should also accept an obligation to utilize the forest as much as possible from the angle of the economic development of the tribals residing in it. In return the tribals should recognize the need to preserve the forests. The essential a feature of this approach is that the forest department should undertake the responsibility of giving adequate employment to the tribals diving in and around the forest areas. Department of the forests and the betterment of the tribals should no longer be at loggerheads. They have to go hand in hand. With such an approach Gandhians worked for JFLCS.¹²⁶

The villages and towns, which came under JFLCS area, were provided with coke, fuel wood, building wood, and other forest products. The forest labour cooperative society of Dhanpur under Baria taluka proved to be most successful in 1966, under the able leadership of Gopaldas Dalal. The Dhanpur coupe earned Rs. 9, 39,206 with favourable wages given to its labourers.¹²⁷ With the beginning of JFLCS in Panchmahals, the activities of JFLCS also entered in Ratanmal region. Hereafter the monsoon season was over many of the tribals need to move

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9

¹²⁶ S. B. Rajyagore, *District Gazetteers of Gujarat: Panchmahals*, Ahmedabad, Government Press: 1961, p. 313

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 89

to timber cutting coupes. A few may go over to the distant Gujarat as labourers to harvest the cotton tobacco, and groundnut field of the rich *patidars*.

Forest dwellers were entitled to utilize as much timber and bamboos they needed fire fuel, free of charge, so long as they did not try to sell it outside their territories.¹²⁸ Along with grazing and utilizations of bamboo with minimum rent hunting is not permitted. Under jungle coupe monopoly, the main monopoly to harvest and auction the forest timber is with forester, which is done through coupes. Six months in a year, from November till early in June from cutting logging, handing, and carting operations besides the manufacture of charcoal. For all produce, and for all kinds of labour connected with the operation of these coupes, rate ceiling were fixed by the forest authorities under the terms of the contract itself. Even to this day the overall position remains the same, except for a few changes introduced by the operation of government sponsored forest labour cooperative. Further, since 1953, when the last of the seven year leases granted by the old Kathivada regime ran out coupes of only one or two years duration are being marked out, and forest conservation measures are being enforced with greater severity. Much of the area under discussion falls under the administrative authority of the Limkheda. Divisional forest authority (officer) stationed at Bariya is exploited in accordance with the 'working plan' laid down by the conservator of forests, Northern circle at Baroda. A small portion to the south and east of Ratanmal comes under the jurisdiction of the *taluka* division of Madhya-Bharat State. Since the regulation of these two departments seem to be mutually at variance on some details, particularly as regards the rights of foresters of timber for *hal*

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 9

(plough) and *Chavadi* (roof) replacements and grazing etc. certain confusion and anomalies could be observed in the economy of the Bhils on either side of the border.¹²⁹

However, a major portion of the non-agricultural income of a Bhil family accrues from the labour available in the timber and charcoal coupes in the jungle. The marketing center of charcoal produce is at Devgad-Baria and Chhota Udepur. Kanji Vakhla of Pipergota and his brother Bhilla on an approx earned for the season in 1952-53 about four thousand rupees between them in the same season. Nathia of Kubera though considerably elder on an average earned about two hundred and fifty rupees per season. However, most Bhils were not so industrious. Every now and then they break off their work as sensibly to replenish their food stocks but really to relieve the tedium of hard work. In fact, some of the young men of Pipergota were so notorious in this respect, which the other coupe agent had often to come in person to chase them back to their half finished work because of this often the industrious Kolis of Dhanpur and Bariya take off the advantage from Bhils in the timber allotments.¹³⁰

In 1940, there was only one society in with a membership of 530. There number rose to seven by 1941 and in 1953, there were 23 societies with a membership of nearly 14,000. These society took about three or four years to build up a sufficient reserve fund and to place themselves on sound footing laborers who had been led to expect immediate profits by the propagandist of the society, were at first disappointed, who are still popular with their system of advances and subsidies. However, these societies have started distributing dividends since 1953, and as indicated by

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10

¹³⁰ At present the JFLCS are not functioning in the Dahod and Panchmahals districts

the above figures, the societies seem to be gradually gaining ground among the Bhils especially those around of Ratanmal.¹³¹

Gandhian Impact on Tribal of Panchmahals:

The reformist activities initiated by the Gandhians in the territories of Panchmahals had widespread impact on the people. The educational expansion drew growth of ideas along with the opening of widespread avenues of social and economic prospects. The chosen community men took appropriate use of the services given. Realizing the importance education many took to further education and succeeded in creating appropriate niche for themselves in the Government service sector and mainstream.



Ditabhai Bamaniam and his wife Laliben, at Dahod

¹³¹ Even today (21st century) there is one practice among the tribals of Dhanpur that the tribals of the region during grass season simply cut the grass and in spite them on the fields. They never go to sell them in the market and it is the buyer who comes to them from the market. These things I evidenced during my fieldwork in the region in Nov. 2002

Apart from education different socio-economic welfare activities gave people an opportunity to prove their skills in management and politics and generated a sense of confidence among the tribal communities of Dahod and Panchmahals and helped them in improving their social consciousness. With the expansion of curricular activities people became capable enough to accept the challenges of the mainstream and in process many of them proved their caliber generated a sense of confidence among the tribal communities of Dahod and Panchmahals and helped them in improving their social consciousness. With the expansion of curricular activities people became capable enough to accept the challenges of the mainstream and in process many of them proved their caliber in politics. The most concrete evidence of the success of Bhil Sewa Mandal is that today eighty percent of the staff of Bhil Sewa Mandal belongs to persons of Bhil community. More than that persons like Ditabhai Bamania and Narsinghbhai Hathila who were part of BSM are now working for the betterment in their regions to improve standards of other people of their society.

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II

GANDHIANS IN SURAT DISTRICT

The study about reformist activities of Gandhians in parts of Surat district is based on secondary sources, archival sources, and materials from field study. The details are given as follows:

- (a)
 - (i) Emergence of Nationalist Ideas in Surat and Devi Movement.
 - (ii) Non-cooperation Movements failure and Antodaya in Surat district.

- (b) Vedchhi: A Movement for Social Equality.
 - (i) Founding ashrams in ranimahals and Raniparaj Conferences.
 - (ii) Socio-cultural and Educational reforms by Gandhians among tribals.
 - (iii) Tribals participation in nationalist struggle.

- (c) Impact of Gandhian Activities among Tribals of Surat.

Nationalism – Ethnicity – Nationalist Movement in Surat:

Ethnic identity and modern nationalism arise out of specific types of interactions between the leadership of centralizing states and elites from non-dominant ethnic groups. The occurrence of ethnic mobilizations and nationality formation is centralizing multiethnic states in the particular forms – they take place when different kinds of alliances which are often multiple in nature unite. Many regions in large multi-ethnic states such as India contain a multiplicity of ethnic groups, whose elite engage in conflicts or cooperation with each other.¹³²

¹³² Paul B. Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison*, New Delhi, Sage Pub., 1991, P. 9

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The two central arguments of ethnicity and nationalism are social and political constructions. Created by elites, who draw upon distort, sometimes fabricate materials from the cultures of the groups which they wish to represent in order to protect their well-being, or existence, or to gain political and economic advantage for their group as well as for themselves. The second, argument is that ethnicity and nationalism are modern phenomena inseparably connected with the activities of the modern centralizing state.¹³³

In the case of Surat the nationalist movement came as a medium which brought the ethnic communities into the foray of nationalist struggle. Gandhians in this pretext are also blamed that they made tribal people to unnecessarily participate in a movement which was of least interest to them and did not brought any advantage to them by participating in it.¹³⁴

The Beginning of nationalist movement in Surat:

The peasants of Surat district belonged to various castes such as Patidars, Anavil Brahmins, Kolis, Rajputs, and Dublas etc. Among these the Anavils and the Patidars are richer and more educated than the rest of the peasants, the political awareness among the members of the Patidars and Anavil castes came earlier than the rest of the peasants. The members of these two castes started taking part in the nationalist movement around the beginning of the twentieth century.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, P. 18, "Behavioral definitions are really a form of objective definition since they assume that there are specific concrete ways in which ethnic groups behave or do not behave, particularly in relation to and interaction without groups."

¹³⁴ See I.P. Desai, *Vedchhi Movement: A Sociological Study*, Surat, Centre for Social studies, 1982.

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There were four persons in Surat district, who had a tremendous role to play in the progress of adivasis and inculcating nationalist inclinations to them, they were; Jugatram Dave, Mithuben Petit, and the brother duo Kunverji and Kalyanji Mehta.¹³⁵

Mehta brothers were among those who participated in the Calcutta Session of Indian National Congress. Kunverji was touched by the Gandhiji's declaration that if the Indians' followed their four point programme, India would be free within a period of one year.¹³⁶

He took Gandhi's word literally and decided on the spot to give up his cloth business and devoted himself entirely to the cause of freedom, he made hectic efforts to develop Bardoli taluka as a battle ground for forthcoming struggle. He had four considerations for doing so. First, he had known taluka since 1909 and had worked as a teacher at the village Varad. Second, a number of students from Bardoli taluka had joined his Patidar ashram, at Surat, some of them whom Kunverji personally knew had turned to be social workers, teachers, and farmers, and shopkeepers. Two students of the Patidar ashram, Ranchhodbhai M. Patel, and Nathubhai D. Patel, had become popular because of their patriotic fervour.¹³⁷

After Kunverji Mehta returned from Calcutta, he conveyed a meeting of the members of management committee of the Patidar ashram. His

¹³⁵ Shireen Mehta, *The Peasantry and the Nationalism*, op. cit., p 48, The Brother Duo: Kunverji Vitthalbhai Mehta was born on 4th Dec. 1886 and Shri Kalyanji Vitthalbhai Mehta was born on 6th Nov. 1890, at village Vihan, Taluka Kamrej, district Surat. The name of their father was Shri Vitthalbhai Khushalbhai Patel and mother's name was Dhaniben Durlabbhai Patel. They were of Charotar Leuva Patidar Patel caste

¹³⁶ I. I. Desai and Ramnarayan N. Pathak, *Be Karmvir Bhaiyo: Shri Kunverji and Kalyanji Mehta*, Surat, Vallabh Sewa Mandal, 1974, p. 16-17

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.1

uncle Ranchhodji Jivanji Patel, a close associate of Gandhiji in South Africa, presided over this meeting. The meeting passed a resolution.

- (1) To persuade the electorate, do not elect any representative of the new legislature.
- (2) To ask the people not to resort to court but to resolve their internal quarrel through mediation of (Panch)¹³⁸ arbitrator.
- (3) To persuade the Patidar pleaders to give up government titles and to resign from their nominated membership in local bodies.
- (4) To urge the people to put on hand-spun and hand woven cloth, and,
- (5) To urge the students to boycott the government schools.

After failure of the Non-cooperation movement due to the incident of Chauri-Chaura, Mahatma Gandhi felt an eager need of social transformation among common masses of Indian Society.¹³⁹ After the Nagpur session of the Indian National Congress, the workers of the Surat district began to work among the Kaliparaj people. In the beginning of the 1923 they started a network of six ashrams in the Bardoli taluka. ¹⁴⁰The workers of these ashrams contributed in various form of social reforms:

1. They established the network in the remote parts of the region. In which they held weekly meetings among the adivasi region.
2. They generated trust among the adivasis of the Bardoli region.

The ashrams were initially founded at the Bardoli, Sarbhon, Madhi, Valod, Vedchhi, and Kumbhia. In order to integrate the activities of these ashrams they started an organization called the '*Swaraj Ashram Sangh*', in

¹³⁸ For meaning of '*Panch*' See Glossary of this thesis

¹³⁹ To have a detailed study in this aspect see chapter III of this thesis

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 29, Main Gandhian leaders in the region were: Kunverji Mehta, Keshavji Ganeshji Patel, and Umed Ram Naik

September 1293. Vallabhbhai Patel was appointed as the president of the *Swaraj Ashram Sangh*. Kunverji Mehta was appointed as the Vice-President and Keshvji Patel its treasurer. The ashram carried on activities of opening the national schools, training the young and the old persons for professional skills like tailoring and carpentry, providing work for the jobless, and spreading the art of spinning and weaving. The ashrams spread the swadeshi spirit among the people. One of their important programmes was to educate the people especially the tribals and untouchables, night schools were opened for their education. To enthuse and guide the ashram workers, Gandhi regularly sent the inmates of the Sabarmati ashram to the villages of South Gujarat.¹⁴¹

In 1922 Maganlal Gandhi founded, the Bardoli Swaraj ashram. The ashram was founded when Gandhi got arrested for six years at Yervada. From there Gandhi sent Maganlal Gandhi to start the Khadi and Social reform activities among the adivasis in the region of Bardoli.¹⁴² Other important person who was behind the Swaraj ashram Bardoli was Uttamchand, Chunilal Bhavsar, and Pandurang Vitthal Valame.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Shireen Mehta, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-91

¹⁴² I.P. Desai, *op. cit.*, p. 29

¹⁴³ "In 1921, at the age of 21 years Uttamchandbhai was studying in Mahavir Jain Vidyalyaya in Bombay. There he had a chance to read Navjivan of Gandhiji. In one of his articles Mahatma Gandhi wrote: "This foreign education is a destructor of our Indian culture." This statement tremendously affected and impressed Uttamchandbhai. In the same article necessary information was given for the youths who wished to quit foreign education and took national education in Gujarat Vidyapith. Uttamchandbhai along with his other friends who joined Gujarat Vidyapith were Chunilal Bhavsar, Pandurang Vitthal Valame, Harijan Sevak Parikshital Majumdar and labour leader Khandubhai Desai, were also with them. Uttamchandbhai became Vanijya Visharad¹⁴³ in 1923 and according to orders from Gandhiji reached Sarbhon village of Bardoli taluka. There he met his friends Narharibhai Parikh, Jugatram Dave, Ishwarbhai Amin, Tribhovandas Shah, Chhaganlal Joshi etc. and stayed in Sarbhon ashram and kept fire of constructive activities burning. In 1924 Uttamchandbhai joined Swaraj ashram; as its permanent member.", Jitendra Desai and Niranjana Kalarthi, *op. cit.*, p. 3

VEDCHHI: An Attempt to Social Equality:

Vedchhi movement believes in providing equal status to tribals with non-tribals. This way it is unique and significant than other movements of tribal welfare. Equality is a wide concept in itself, therefore whenever we speak about equality in social status of tribal and non-tribals, we must understand in what forms we require equality in social status. The initial months of Gandhians in Vedchhi were spent in knowing about the regional heritage.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ R. B. Lal and Siddharaj Solanki, 'Adivasi Vikasna Swatantra Na Palo', *Adivasi Gujarat*, Vol. II, No. 1, 1979, pp. 92-93

and is drained by the river Valmiki. Valod being the smallest Mahal of Surat district, with 185 Square meters of area, the length (east-west) of the taluka is 13 Kms and breadth north-south is 15 Kms. Only a marginal eastern part of the taluka is hilly in terrain. The rest of the taluka is plain in nature. Except village Hathuka which lies on a hill of fifty feet height. From Valod taluka passes river Purna, river Zhankhari and river Mindhona. During rainy season these rivers contained water and in rest of the periods, they remained same. The climate of Valod taluka is partially cold during winters and in summers it remains warm, the variation in temperature is 14.7°C in winters and 41°C in summers. The rainfall in these areas ranges between 1000 mm to 1200 mm; taluka is divided into 40 villages in total to 20,228 hectares of land.¹⁴⁵

The growth and success of Vedchhi Movement in the region is because of various reasons. Among which was the adequate situation of the Vedchhi village in the Valod taluka, Vedchhi is situated in even where borders of Baroda State and British State meet, and it was situated between hill tracts and plains, containing both the element of non-tribal and tribal societies. Though the British State did not support social reform movement, but with the influence of Baroda State, social reform could evolve in the Vedchhi and associated area.¹⁴⁶

The Bardoli congressmen took the initiative to build a proper growth of Gandhian activities in the region. They organized a Kaliparaj Conference at which Vallabhbhai Patel was to preside. They informed the adivasis that Gandhi himself was now in jail, but that his gadi (throne) was occupied in his absence by

¹⁴⁵ Allu Shah, *Valod Taluka Vikas Yatra: 1954-1998*, Surat, 1997, P.13

¹⁴⁶ I.P. Desai, *The Vedchhi Movement: A Sociological Study*. Surat, Centre for Social Studies, 1982, P. 32

Vallabhbhai Patel, and they invited them to come to the conference to hear Vallabhbhai and Gandhi's wife Kasturba. Large numbers promised to come. The first Kaliparaj conference was thus held at Shekhupur in Mahuva taluka of Baroda State on 21st January 1923. About 20,000 adivasis attended it. A large number of it is considered that their population was scattered and not very great (the total Chodhri population of Valod was for example only 8000). The conference was very significantly divided into two separate sections. One of these was devoted in formal proceedings with speeches by Gandhian leaders addressed to a disciplined audience. The nationalist promised to give full support for a vigorous campaign to improve the condition of the adivasis and resolutions were passed advocating the cutting of toddy trees, the closure of liquor shops and propagation of Khadi.¹⁴⁷ In the other section of the conference a large number of Devi medians were brought together. They had been kept apart over it was feared that they might disturb the work of the formal conference. After the formal conference was over Vallabhbhai and Kasturba came to address the Devi-mediums. As soon as they entered the mediums they went into a state of mass-possession, nodding their heads violently and waving red clothes with their hands. After ten minutes they quieted somewhat and Vallabhbhai began to speak, they heard him they became once more possessed. The meeting was considered a great success by all concerned.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ *Bombay Chronicle*, 7th Feb. 1923. Report by Baroda Police Commissioner, 25th January 1923, Confidential Department, BRO, Baroda

¹⁴⁸ I.P. Desai, *Raniparaj Ma Jagruti*, Surat, 1971, pp. 25-26

The first kaliparaj conference symbolized democracy with least interference of the authority and more voice given to the tribals. In these meetings they openly expressed their opinions and grievances to the leaders concerned. In addition at this juncture the emergence of a new leadership among the adivasis also became evident. They evolved a trust on these Gandhian leaders.¹⁴⁹

Once accepted by the adivasis, the Gandhians tried to modify the Devi¹⁵⁰ movement. They believed that the chief value of the movement lay in the *atmashuddhi*¹⁵¹ or self-purification, of the adivasis. By turning an incident into opportunity, the Gandhians may said to have anticipated the Sanskritization. They therefore, poured cold-water on that aspect of the movement which they not only felt to be less important but also locally divided and hence unhelpful for national integration, namely the adivasis challenge to the dominance of the Parsis. When some Parsis came to complain about being boycotted, the Gandhians responded by telling the adivasis that while they were right to refuse to carry out impure work for the Parsis, such as serving in liquor shops and tapping toddy trees, they were wrong to refuse labour in their fields. When a second Kaliparaj Conference was held at Dosvada at Songadh taluka on 25th February 1923, Vallabhbhai Patel sent a message to be sent out as follows: "Everyone is surprised to see the awakening in your community. But you should be very careful. If you try to run too fast, you are likely to fall. Your decision is not to work as labourers for Parsis and Muslims is very serious. Whatever step you take should be well thought out".¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ I.P. Desai, *Raniparaj Ma Jagruti*, Surat, 1971, pp. 25-26

¹⁵⁰ For details regarding Devi Movement Sec. Part (B) of this chapter

¹⁵¹ For meaning of *Atmashuddhi* see Glossary

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 70

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Kasturba Gandhi who was presiding over the conference was blunter: She told the adivasis that they should go back to work for the Parsis.¹⁵³ The adivasis did not accept this advice. They argued in reply that the Parsis were extremely ruining and that they had been tricked by these many times in the past when they tried to give up liquor. They feared that once they put themselves in the Parsis power by labouring for them they would be forced to drink. The Parsis were prepared even to handout free drinks so as to entice them. No longer were they prepared to be servant to the Parsis. The complete boycott continued.¹⁵⁴

In the second Raniparaj Conference it was Kasturba, who presided, but tribals were not satisfied with her presence, and they were more eager to see Mahatma Gandhi. The reason they gave was they saw Gandhi in wells as spinning.¹⁵⁵ In other respects however a significant number of adivasis continued to show enthusiasm for Gandhians and the Gandhian programme. They demonstrated more interest in Khadi. It came to be believed by the adivasis that spinning of cotton on the wheel was a kind of ritual which would hasten both national independence and their own liberation.¹⁵⁶

In January 1925, The Third Raniparaj Conference was held at Vedchhi Gandhi now out of jail, was President of this conference. The conference gathered a large amount of crowd, constituting both of tribals

¹⁵³ Loc. Cit., "It must be quoted here that, Kasturba during all these Raniparaj Conferences was staying at one Jivandada Chodhris house, and his Grand-daughter Dasriben was her great companion. Dasari was at that time five or six year old and in her later years of life she remained one of the main workers of Vedchhi movement. Her later contributions to the movement will be given in the following texts". Interview with Dasriben Chodhri taken on 18,02,2002 at Village Vedchhi, Surat

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Dasriben, *op. cit*

¹⁵⁶ David Hardiman, 'Adivasi Assertions in South Gujarat' *op. cit.*, p. 228

and Gandhian nationalist leaders.¹⁵⁷ Mahatma Gandhi when came to the meeting he was highly impressed by the gathering and its enthusiasm for Khadi. In praise of the meeting he wrote; "Whilst the arrangements for the conference at Sojitra were simple and effective. Those at Vedchhi surpassed all expectations".¹⁵⁸

The meeting was held on the bank of river Valmiki, at Village Vedchhi, where Gandhi addressed the entire gathering.¹⁵⁹ Further appreciating the conference Mahatma Gandhi wrote: "The remark immediately escaped my lips that I have not seen a conference so large as at Vedchhi for its simplicity, naturalness, and artistic beauty. He who selected the site and conceived the whole arrangement was undoubtedly an artist's child of nature. The spot selected lays on a river bank. The river ran between a row of homely hills shaded with trees and shrubs. The bed of river was sandy not muddy. The main platform was erected, in the waters of the river. It rose nearly eight feet high. A sandbag was the first step to the platform. The people occupying even the ridge of the hill opposite. The decoration was full of bamboo and green leaves. The effect was soothingly beautiful. The business was also natural and simple in the extreme. Nothing was to put before the people that did not suit to their needs".¹⁶⁰

Swaraj Ashram – Vedchhi:

In Vedchhi village of Valod taluka works of social transformation were raised by Jivanbhai Babarbhai Patel of Chodhri community. Jivandada as he was better known among his community people was a

¹⁵⁷ See David-Hardiman, *Loc. Lit.*, and reference from interview by Dasriben Chodhri. The speech which Mahatma Gandhi gave in this conference is been published in book I. I. Desai, '*Raniparaj ma Sudhara*', Vyara, 1951.

¹⁵⁸ M. K. Gandhi, 'Kaliparaj', *Young India*, Vol. VII, No. 4, January 22, 1925

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Dasriben, *op. cit*

¹⁶⁰ M. K. Gandhi, 'Kaliparaj', *op. cit*.

reformed tribal. He was part of the earlier educational reform, prevalent in the Vyara taluka under the auspices of Sayajirao Gaekwad of Baroda State. Jivandada started a primary school at village Vedchhi, and one more school was started by British Government at Valod.¹⁶¹

In year 1919, Jivandada went to Sarbhon ashram of Bardoli taluka and there at Bardoli the atmosphere was full of nationalist fervour. Mahatma Gandhi had come to Bardoli to see the preparation of the campaign. On getting the news of the Gandhiji's arrival at Bardoli, Jivandada of the Vedchhi village reached there in his own bullock cart. He met Gandhiji bowed down to him and requested, "Send your men in our Vedchhi village."

Gandhi got impressed with Jivandada within a moment; he was impressed with the spirit of social service. Gandhi was in search of such volunteers. He approved the demand of Jivandada and promised to send some volunteers to village Vedchhi.¹⁶² In 1924, Gandhi sent a full-time Khadi worker Chunilal Mehta, from a village near Ahmedabad City. There he stayed with Jivan Chodhri. He started a training class in Vedchhi and propagated Khadi in the surrounding villages.¹⁶³ The khadi activity which began from Jivan Chodhri's house gradually went on to spread and reached up to Umarpada village at a distance of fifty kilometers from Vedchhi.

The annual report of work of Vedchhi khadi ashram published in 1926 Khadi edition of Navjivan brings out full facts and figures, tangible

¹⁶¹ Interview with Dasriben, *op. cit*

¹⁶² Madhubhai D. Chodhri, Khansukh Z. Bhabor, and Bhikhubhai Vyas, *Swarajya Ashram Vedchhi - Vol. 16: Social Transformation through Nai-Talim, Success Story Series*, Ahmedabad, Gujarat Vidyapith, 2002, p. 1.

¹⁶³ Jugatram Dave, *Khadibhaktha Chumibhai*, Ahmedabad, 1966, p. 13-20

enough to convince the most confirmed skeptic of the essential place that Khadi occupied place of pride in the economic life of tribals. Chunilal Mehta with the help of local workers reached the sixty five villages in the region. The initial years, were spent in persuading people to buy and in teaching them to work on the *charkhas* (spinning wheel)¹⁶⁴

Jugatram Dave was working at Bardoli ashram; he realized that there should be some educational institute for adivasis in the region, which he started at Bardoli, later he realized that it should be opened at some adivasi region. Therefore, he shifted himself to Vedchhi in 1928, where he started his 'Raniparaj Vidyalaya.'¹⁶⁵

Raniparaj Community Participating In Nationalist Struggle:

The Gandhians had been working among the adivasi of Bardoli taluka and Valod Mahal since late 1921. During that year Gandhi had insisted that before a campaign of Civil Disobedience Movement, participation of tribal communities should come up. Until that time these communities had shown no interest in the cause. As a result the congress leader Kunverji Mehta became more sympathetic to the tribal welfare movement.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ "They also noted down against the name of spinners, the quality of yarn they produced and the amount of yarn they spun within a certain period, on an approx they found that the promises were fulfilled. They had a magic lantern also, which was shown in twenty-one villages. In one meeting 3100 men attended the lecture, the subjects being the value of charkha as an economic factor and as a moral level for the spread of temperance. Many people addicted to drink took advantage of these lectures and as a result of the campaign every family that had taken to the *Charkha* became free from the curse of drink. The disappearance of drink has naturally been followed by more thrifty habits of life and consequent freedom from the clutches of the sowcar (money lender) and the public servants.", Mahadev Desai, 'A Successful Experiment', *Young India*, Vol. VIII, No. 34, Aug. 26, 1926

¹⁶⁵ David Hardiman, 'Adivasi Assertion in South Gujarat, *op. cit.*, p 225

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 39

As in case of Baroda State, in the Navsari town there had been strong support for the Gandhian movement in 1920 to 1923. In early 1923 the leading nationalists of the town started a body called the *Kaliparaj Sankat Nivaran Mandal*, (Kaliparaj Grievances Relief Association). As part of promoting Civil Disobedience movement Sumant Mehta (a leader from Baroda State) agreed to go out of the villages in order to protect the adivasis from harassment by the authorities. In March 1923 he came to Navsari to investigate the repression being carried on by the state against the adivasis.¹⁶⁷

With the rise of awakening of tribal solidarity movement among tribals of Surat and their consciousness for nationalist struggle, the Gandhians working with adivasis decided to form a committee, which was Shekhupur committee. The Shekhupur Committee was a giant step in welfare of adivasi of Bardoli-Surat region, it was held at Mahuva taluka of Surat district.¹⁶⁸ With the advent of Gandhians there was remarkable awakening among the general mass of tribal people. The local workers took steps for the amelioration of these people. The conference of such order and other allied communities was held in Shekhupur in Mahuva taluka under the Presidentship of Vallabhbhai Patel, where almost 20,000 tribal people were present. The congress resolved to begin *Sewa Sangh* an association for their religious, moral, social, and economic uplift and to

¹⁶⁷ David Hardiman, 'Adivasi Assertion in South Gujarat', *op cit*, p 221, "With advent of Gandhians in Vedchhi, spirit for nationalist struggle was seen". The Jalalpore Sub-inspector reports: "foreign cloth worth about a thousand rupees was burnt by the people of Chandvasan Suba. On December 25th in obedience to the command of the "Mata" expressed through her votaries the 'possessed'. This new feature of the Kaliparaj movement was religious and social in character" Inspector Report, Surat – 30th Dec. 1922, F. No. 637, HD (SPL), MSA, Mumbai, P. 33

¹⁶⁸ I.P. Desai, *op. cit.*, p. 30

start *ashrams*. A committee 'Kaliparaj Sewa Sangh'¹⁶⁹ was also appointed for the purpose of taking the necessary steps on the above resolutions.¹⁷⁰

As a result of these nationalist struggles and the Raniparaj Conferences, the participation of tribals in nationalist struggles increased. The journal 'Chingari' which was released from Vyara South Gujarat read as follows: "The adivasis of ranimahar area enthusiastically participated in movement against liquor, after call by leaders among adivasis, the main leaders out of them were; Dalpatram Bhavani Shankar, Ghelabhai, Ambalal, and Dahyabhai."¹⁷¹

Vedchhi Movement during 1922-1927

Programmes for educational and social reform, before 1922 the Congress was hardly in touch of the aboriginal tribes of the Surat district. The Parsi liquor settlers, and the Hindu and Jain moneylenders, by and large did not look favourably to the spread of education among themselves. These groups saw in the education of the poor a danger of their own business. As late as 1922 Narhari Parikh an inmate of the Sabarmati had undertaken a fast to protest the general indifference of the nationalist people towards the Kaliparaj population.

¹⁶⁹ "In a similar way, a meeting of about 3000 Kaliparaj people of the Mandvi taluka and of the frontier villages of the Baroda and Rajpipla State was held at Devgadhi in Mandvi taluka, on 4th Feb. 1923. Several resolutions touching social reforms were passed unanimously. The audience was advised not to cultivate the lands of Banias. An association called the 'Kaliparaj Sewa Sangh' was to carry out religious, economic and social reform among the Kaliparaj people. Keshavji Ganeshji advised the people not to salute them to follow Gandhi, to use Khaddar, and to send their children to national school", *Ibid.*, p 54

¹⁷⁰ *The Kaliparaj Awakening*, 'The Report by Director of Public Instruction', Dt., 3rd Feb. 1923, F. No. 637, Year, 1922, HD (SPL.), MSA, Mumbai, p 51

¹⁷¹ *Chingari*, Dated: 17th Oct. 1923, Further in the Journal is written, 'The Panchayat decided on those who will be caught during the help in arresting a liquor drinker will receive a reward of Rs. 1.25'

It was in 1922-1923 that the Congress as an organization began systematic work for the social and economic advancement of the kaliparaj. The Congress workers of Surat district like Mehta brothers, Dayalji Desai, Khushalbai Patel, and Keshavji Ganeshji Patel operated through the network of the six ashrams which had been founded in the Bardoli taluka in 1923. Not infrequently the Congress leaders from various parts of Gujarat such as Narhari Parikh, Shankarlal Banker, Ansuyaben Sarabhai, Ravishankar Vyas, Mohanlal Pandya, and Chunilal Mehta visited the ashram with a view to guide and assist the ashram workers in their efforts to educate the members of the Kaliparaj Community. In 1923, an organization known as the 'Kaliparaj Sevashram' was formed in Mandvi Taluka in Surat district. In 1927 an institution exclusively for the education of the Kaliparaj children was started at Bardoli town.¹⁷²

The Congress workers saw in the young educated tribals the potential to become social reformers. They made efforts to create a band of devoted workers within the community. The Congress workers tried to acquaint themselves with the caste organizations and social structure of the tribals. Persons like Kunverji Mehta and Kunverji Ganeshji learnt the tribal dialects. The educated members of the tribals, Gomtilal Chaudhari, Nanji Babar, Arjun Bhagat, and Kesrisingh Gamit developed 'Kaliparaj literature,' they wrote poems and simple prose, decrying the Hali-system, expenses incurred in the use of intoxicating liquors, and propagated the Gandhian Constructive Programme, several *bhajan mandalis* were also started. These *bhajan mandalis* propagated social reforms. In 1924, there were more than 500 *bhajan mandalis*.¹⁷³

¹⁷² L.P. Desai, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-79, also see Jugatram Dave, *Mari Jivan Katha*, 1975, pp. 6-7

¹⁷³ Ramnarayan N. Pathak, *Be Karmvir Bhaiyo*, *op. cit.*, P. 22-25

The volunteers working for the Vedchhi movement were not merely involved in *ashram* and people around, they had a broader vision about tribal life their work was conducted in two levels; whenever the political atmosphere was quite they conducted extensive reform works. During times of political movements they dedicatedly worked with nationalist leaders and participated in the movement.¹⁷⁴ In the beginning Vedchhi began as an affiliation or sister ashram, and survived on the donation and finances received by Bardoli ashram. Gradually it evolved itself on its own, with numerable followers in the area around Vedchhi and began its own working strategy in form of promotion of Khadi and education among adivasis, and in process it continued to expand its influence on the adivasi areas.¹⁷⁵

Beginning of Bardoli Satyagriha:

In 1927 came a natural calamity of floods in Surat district which caused famine in the region. To assist people in this terrible condition, workers like Ratanlal Khandvana, Manibhai Punachand Shah, Mithuben Petit, Ratanben, Thakkar Bapa, and Sumant Mehta joined the welfare activities for the flood affected people. Against such activities the Government increased the land-revenue by 1/11th for the peasants of Bardoli¹⁷⁶ As a result protest against Government began Vallabhbhai became the leader of the Satyagriha, he strategically made a disciplined division of the authority structure in the hands of experienced, reliable and devoted congress leaders. They were advised to tour the area and apprise

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Narayan Desai, 18,02,2002 at Village Vedchhi, Valod, Dist. Surat

¹⁷⁵ *Annual Report: Vedchhi Swaraj Ashram. 1967*, pp. 3-4

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p 4

the innocent peasantry of the Bardoli taluka for the no-tax campaign under the leadership of Sardar Patel.¹⁷⁷

Later it was announced that the agitation against the enhanced assessment would commence on 12th Feb. 1928. The Government gave a warning that all land-revenue dues must be paid by 15th February and the defaulter was to be punished by the Collector who had the power to attach and sell or auction his property.¹⁷⁸

At this point of time, Sardar Patel advised the Patels to resign enmasse. In a public speech he stated: "Tapti operation cannot be conducted without the assistance of the Patels and the Talatis. I request the Patels to give up the government jobs. I cannot ask the Talatis who had no other source of livelihood."¹⁷⁹ By the beginning of the June the rural administrative machinery of the government had begun to crumble though Government tried its best to keep it intact. It appealed to the village officials to hold their guns proved in vain. The Bardoli resolution; was proposed by Bhikhabhai Khandubhai Desai, a leading Anavil landholder of the village Puni, and seconded by the following twelve proprietors representing different villages and castes of the taluka.

Mahatma Gandhi in Bardoli Satyagriha:

On 29th July 1928 instant the sixth Raniparaj Conference was held at village Purna of the Mandvi Taluka with. Vallabhbhai presiding. It was an impressive gathering, with a well organized and instructive khadi

¹⁷⁷Patel, S.R. Bakshi, *Peasantry and the Raj*, Delhi, Akash Deep Pub. House, 1988 ,pp. 20-21

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, P. 23

¹⁷⁹ *Loc. Cit.*; Patels' Speeches were not without their effect. About forty Patels and eight *talatis* left their jobs and joined hands with the Satyagrahis. By the end of May 1928 more Talatis resigned from their jobs.

exhibition. A special message from Gandhi was read before the conference. In this message he regretted his inability to attend: "It is not merely satisfactory but highly commendable that the women of Raniparaj were taking part in the fight which began. This fight in any belief is an education in fearlessness and self-purification". The message ended with hopes that Raniparaj would free itself entirely from the prevalent sinful habits and would take to *charkha*.¹⁸⁰

Gandhi accompanied by some prominent local workers went to Sarbhon there the representatives from 25 villages workers gathered in Swaraj *ashram* to meet him. In explaining the object of his visit Gandhi said that he had come only to congratulate the Satyagrhis and to learn more about their achievements. Dr. Sumant Mehta introduced the local volunteers to Gandhi. The volunteers assured Gandhi that they were prepared for any emergency. Reporting about their work they told that picketing the places of liquor auction and imported goods, and parties of propagandists were going from village to village exhorting the backward communities not to drink and not to give any help to toddy shop-keepers by tapping trees.¹⁸¹

In the same time Gandhi visited Bardoli and addressed a meeting of the *talatis*, in which he said: "I hold that the Talati's have shown greater spirit and valour in this fight, than any other section. May I express the

¹⁸⁰ "Sarbhon leader arrested", *The Bombay Chronicle*, 02, 05, 1928, F. No, 637, Year, 1928, HD (SPL.), MSA, Mumbai, p 117, Arrests during Bardoli Satyagriha: "Mr. Shivanand, Captain of the Valod Volunteer Corps, Mr. Amrutlal Hargovind, and two other volunteers of Valod have been surrounded on 10,05,1928, under section 183 and 353, Indian Penal Code, and a leading Bania, Mr. Sanmukhlal of Valod, under section 189, Indian Penal Code, to appear before the resident magistrate of Bardoli on Saturday Ravishankar Vyas, and Chimanlal Chinoy were sent to Sabarmati Jail on 11,05,1928.", In "Satyagriha in Bardoli" *Times of India*, 12,05,1928

¹⁸¹ 'Picketing Campaign', *Times of India*, 30,07,1928, F. No: 584-E, HD (SPL.), MSA, Mumbai , p.209

hope that you will maintain yourself in the same fine spirit when peace comes as you have shown in this fight? For I have noticed that Talatis often tyrannize over the poor villages and harass them. It is up to you to set them at their ease, so that they might learn to regard you as friends and helpers, not as objects of terror. For the rest, the people have understood the secret of unity and combination, and once that lesson is learnt victory becomes the easy matter.¹⁸²

Bardoli Satyagriha and Anti-liquor Movement:

With the Bardoli satyagriha, the tribals were raised against anti-liquor movement. A meeting of the members of the Koli community from about twenty eight village of Chorasi taluka had resolved not to tap trees and to abstain from rendering any help to toddy shop keepers and from drinking till the Bardoli dispute settled,¹⁸³ In wake of such incidents of such vehement opposition to liquor, the Pathan liquor distillers imported by the Government left Bardoli one by one.¹⁸⁴ Liquor shop owned by Nawajbai and Dorabji of Valod was put for sale by auction, and was taken by Jehangir Cowasji of Valod for a nominal price of Rs. 99 liquor was worth nearly Rs. 2000¹⁸⁵The auction of toddy trees booths for Mandvi taluka came off in Mandvi in one such day, but despite the efforts made by the excise officials only 2 out of 141 Mandwas could be knocked down. Parsis of Mandvi in pursuance of a resolution that they had passed previous to the auction not to bid at the auctions of toddy trees booths as a token of

¹⁸² "No Peace with Dishonour", *Bombay Chronicle*, 07,08,1928, F. No: 584-E, HD (SPL.), MSA, Mumbai, p.235

¹⁸³ 'Picketing Campaign', *Times of India*, 30,07,1928, *Ibid.*, p 209

¹⁸⁴ *Bombay Chronicle*, 05,05,1928, *Ibid.*, p.111

¹⁸⁵ *Bombay Chronicle*, 05,05,1928, *Ibid.*, p.111

sympathy with the Bardoli Satyagrahis till the Bardoli question was satisfactorily solved, refrained from bidding.¹⁸⁶

A vigorous campaign had been launched by the Bardoli Satyagriha workers against the auction of toddy shops and volunteers were being entitled for picketing the places of auction. Parties of propagandists were also going from village to village exhorting the backward communities to abstain drinking and not to give any help to toddy shop keepers by tapping trees.¹⁸⁷

Raniparaj Peasants' Plight

With the success of the Bardoli the people could realize that the Satyagriha of power can challenge British Empire and made it to surrender. So, the voice of 'Bardolize India' began to rise all over India, Bardoli became the experimental land of *Ahimsa* (non-violence). The Bardoli Satyagriha gave self-confidence to people.¹⁸⁸

With the impact of Bardoli Satyagriha in the Raniparaj villages, the policy of maltreatment of the tribals by the petty landholders had been resorted. To guard against such maltreatment to the people, the leaders had issued an appeal to the educated men in the neighbouring villages to protect their weaker colleagues.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ *Bombay Chronicle*, 25,07,1928, F. No: 584-E, HD (SPL.), MSA, Mumbai, p.197

¹⁸⁷ 'Picketing Campaign', *Times of India*, 30, 07, 1928. F. No. : 584-E, HD (SPL.), MSA, Mumbai, p 209

¹⁸⁸ Sh. Jitendrabhai Desai, and Smt. Niranjnanaben Kalarthi, *Sardar Kanya Vidyalaya – Bardoli*: Vol. 25, Amdavad. Gujarat Vidyapith, 2002, p 56

¹⁸⁹ Sub: Bardoli non-payment of land-revenue in Newspaper report on; (a) The agitation, (b) Resignation of MLCs', *The Bombay Chronicle*, F. No. 584,E, HD (SPL.), MSA, Mumbai, 1928, p 210

Civil Disobedience Movement and Tribal Talukas of Surat District

During Civil Disobedience movement in 1931-1932, Vedchhi Swaraj ashram remained closed. In this phase Chunilal Mehta was arrested for twelve months. Rupla Adhla Chaudhary a tribal of Vedchhi village donated thirty acres of land; Sardar Patel collected Rs. 30,000 as donation. The movement of Civil Disobedience inspired the students of Jugatram Dave to participate in the Swaraj *ashram*, Vedchhi. He educated and motivated his students to work for the nationalist movement. The Gandhian ideals spread the purpose of nationalist struggle among the tribals of Surat. The self-esteem of tribals and their world view also increased with participation in the nationalist movement.¹⁹⁰ The reopening of the Vedchhi Swaraj ashram, at Surat was performed by Vallabhbhai Patel on 09/05/1937 in the presence of about 250 people, in his opening speech to this movement he said the ashram was taken possession by them without any effort on their part, it indicated their strength. Then policy is gaining swaraj as based on non-violence and truth and they wanted to show to the world that everything can be conquered by love and not by force. He advised them to keep the prestige of the Congress by wearing khaddar and encouraging village industries.¹⁹¹ In a confidential report Collector of Surat Shri Mangaldas Pakvasa wrote:

I am elected to the Bombay legislative Council in the last election from the Broach, Panchmahals, and Surat district. I started making inquiries on the spot and learnt that no care was taken of them and they were neglected and in a very bad and dilapidated condition. I do not see why the Government should not return them to the persons from whom they were taken possession of. I do not think that it can

¹⁹⁰ I.P. Desai, op. cit., p.3

¹⁹¹ 'Reopening of the Vedchhi Swaraj Ashram, F. No: 800 (84) A-II, Civil Disobedience Movement, MSA, JD, YEAR 1935, p.100

be the intention of Government that instead of destroying the ashrams by direct method that they should be destroyed by indirect means of complete neglect. I should like you to view the ashrams personally. To allow these ashrams to further deteriorate or to be destroyed by neglect would be considered by the people as an act of vandalism on the part of Government. I think and feel that it is the duty of Government to preserve the ashrams in good condition till they are returned to the owners thereof.¹⁹²

The Governor-in-Council was pleased to direct that the following wards occurring under the Surat district in the scheduled appended to Government notification; Bardoli Swaraj Ashram Sarbhon, Bardoli taluka, Swaraj ashram, Surat, Madhi ashram, Bardoli, Vedchhi Swaraj Ashram, Vedcchi, Valod Mahal, Bhumbhia, Swaraj ashram, Valod.¹⁹³

After the decline of Civil Disobedience Movement the nationalist movement came to ebb. Later during Quit-India Movement of 1942 again participation of people of *ranimahals* became evident in nationalist struggle. In this reference S.B. Vaidya Collector of Surat wrote to the secy. of Government that Mr. Vallabhbhai Jhaverbhai Patel and four others are entitled to compensating for the occupation of the Bardoli Swaraj Ashram, by the military. Vallabhbhai Jhaverbhai Patel and four others are entitled to compensation for the occupation of Bardoli Swaraj *ashram* by the military. Vallabhbhai Jhaverbhai Patel had been detained by Government

¹⁹² Ibid, pp. 146-147, list of the immovable properties seized under the unlawful association ordinance, 1932. (II of 1932) or the corresponding sections of the social powers ordinance, 1932 (X of 1932) and the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1932 (XXIII of 1932), and which have not been restored. Source: Civil Disobedience Movement, F. No: 800 (84) A-II, JD, MSA, Mumbai, pp. 5-6

¹⁹³ No. S.D., Dt. 5th Jan. 1932, published at pages 21-29 of the Part-I of the Bombay Government Gazette, HD (POL.), MSA, Mumbai, p 29

being a member of the All India Congress Working Committee. Other trustees of the Bardoli and other ashrams of ranimahals were confined in the various jails and the District Superintendent of Police; Surat had requested to trace the whereabouts of other persons involved in the movement.¹⁹⁴

Due to its involvement in Quit India Movement, the Government of Bombay declared the Bardoli swaraj ashram as an unlawful association and has notified its premises.¹⁹⁵ Subdue of Vedchhi ashram also took place because of its involvement in nationalist movement Government of Bombay was of opinion that, "the body of persons here to fore had their headquarters in or were operating from the place known as the Vedchhi ashram at Vedchhi, in Valod mahal of the district of Surat, here in after referred to as, "there said associations", were engaged in or organizing or promoting a movement which had its object the breach of certain laws for the time being in force, or in interference with the administration of the law or with the maintenance of law and order and with that it constitutes a danger to the public peace".¹⁹⁶

The Government of Bombay had declared the Vedchhi ashram at Vedchhi in the Valod mahal of Surat district an unlawful association and notified the premises of the ashrams. After declaring the *ashram* at Vedchhi illegal, its possession was taken over by the *mahalkari* of Valod. The *mahalkari* was aided by a special Police party who arrested Manubhai, Bhikhubhai and Jinabhai Darji, so they refused to quit the ashram

¹⁹⁴ From, S.B. Vaidya, D.M. Surat, to: The Secy, to the Government of Bombay, No. LAQ, 392-B.A. Dt. 12,09,1942, Pl. Surat, Sub: Requisitioning of Bardoli Swaraj Ashram for the use of the military, F. No 1110 (3) 1, HD (SPL.), MSA, 1942

¹⁹⁵ Times of India, Dt. 07,11,1942. F. No. 1110 (3) 1, HD (SPL.), MSA, 1942

¹⁹⁶ *The Bombay Government Gazette*, Thursday, 12th Nov. 1942. Part V, Notifications, Bombay Castle 12th Nov. 1942, HD (SPL.), MSA, Mumbai

premises. They were, however, subsequently released. One person has been arrested at Sultanpore for being in possession of alleged objectionable literature.¹⁹⁷

With the closure of Bardoli and Vedchhi ashrams, several reformist activities were conducted for welfare of tribals and also got disclosed as a result. In a letter to Surat Collectorate M.I. Mashruwala from Bombay wrote:

“I have the honour to address you the following; perhaps you are already aware that, I am conducting the ‘*Sarwajanik Dispensary*’ at Swaraj ashram Bardoli, for the last eleven years. But in October last, I was arrested in taking part in a procession organizing to protest against the arrest of Mahatma Gandhi. Thereafter, the dispensary which was a boon to the farmers and the poor for the years was confiscated only because it was situated in the ashram premises. I may draw your attention to the fact that it was a rented place. I was released from the Jail four months back and since then I have tried my utmost to find some other place in the town but to no avail as there are no buildings suitable for a hospital and hence I am prevented from doing my work. So far I have utilized my knowledge in helping the poor and needy. I have dedicated my life to the services of the poor and needy. I have dedicated my life to the services of the poor and ameliorating the sufferings of humanity and hence you will understand how I must be feeling when during this critical time of cleanliness and starvation I am not able to be of any help to my poor countrymen. When I was inside the jail now I am out of jail and still in this

¹⁹⁷ ‘Vedchhi Ashram Declared Unlawful’, *The Bombay Chronicle*, Dt. 13,11,1942, F. No: 1110 (3) 1, HD (SPL.), MSA, 1942

helpless condition it makes me more disappointed. Hence, I wish that any dispensary with its equipments and my place of residence be returned to me so that I can conduct my usual humanitarian work to my satisfaction. Hope you will be kind enough to return me the same.”¹⁹⁸

The above letter reveals the dedication for tribals shown by the ashram workers. The ashrams of ranimahals evolved with their activities through regular relations with tribals of the region because of which several new avenues in education had been opened for primary, secondary, and higher education. The main contributors in building educational institutions at Vedchhi are mainly initiated by people like Narayan Desai, Mohan Parikh, Jyoti and Malini Desai, Bhikhubhai and Kokila Vyas etc. their dedicated workmanship makes the life in the region far better than those of other learning institutes in Gujarat.¹⁹⁹

Education for Social Reform:

Education both formal as well as informal is one of the important agents of social change. It is more so among the scheduled tribes who are relatively isolated from the larger society and exposes them to the outside world, widening their horizon and providing them with information about man matters relevant to life in our age. A learning of three R's opens up an opportunity to know, of course in their own way, about others outside their own village. This is a prerequisite for social transformation in a welfare state. Education also opens up an avenue which enables them to enter the non-agricultural sector for earning their livelihood. Now, most of the states

¹⁹⁸ From: M.I. Mashruwala, Bombay, To: S.B. Vaidya, D.M. Surat, No: (), Dt: 2nd Aug. 1943. F. No: 1110 (3) 1, HD (SPL.), MSA, 1942

¹⁹⁹ *Annual Report, Vedchhi Swaraj Ashram*, 1967, pp. 3-4

of the world have accepted their obligation to provide at least free elementary education to their citizens, Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, declares: "Everyone has the right to education; education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be complementary. Technical and professional education shall be generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all the basis of merit."²⁰⁰

Three types of educational institutes are found to work in educating tribals of Gujarat. They are (i) Day Schools, (ii) Schools run by the Department of Public Instruction and later by local boards; (iii) Ashram pattern of education run by Gandhian organizations.

Efforts were made by the Government to open more schools in tribal areas. In the year 1929, Surat school board came into existence and the primary schools were handed over to the Board. In the tribal areas of whole of the Bombay State it was reported that "the evolvment of pupils from the scheduled tribes increased from 12,131 in 1921-22 to 29,105 in 1936-1937, of these 28,668 were in primary schools. The number of special primary schools (Day Schools) started for these tribes also increased from 117 in 1921-22 to 206 in 1936-37 and their enrolment from 3360 to 8865. Besides the Central School (of craft based Godasamba pattern) also increased and stood at 15 in 1936-37. They continued to do their useful work of preparing the pupils of the scheduled tribes for appointment as teachers in primary schools."²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ Ghanshyam Shah, Vidyut Joshi, Tara Patel, S.P. Punalekar, Vimal P. Shah, *Tribal Education in Gujarat*, New Delhi, Ajanta Pub., 1985, pp. 1-2

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, pp. 3-4

By its Education Act (1923) the government had decided to handover the administration of primary schools to district level boards. But because of the problem of the financial responsibility the same was accepted by various boards in 1929 only. The early local boards and school boards were composed of co-opted member. It was after the election of 1938 that the Indian National Congress captured local Boards in Gujarat. The Surat local Board became the stronghold of the Congress. Both the persons who came to power as President of the Surat District Local Board, and as Chairman of the Surat District School Board (SDSB), and as Chairman of the (SDSB) had worked as teachers in ashram schools was that of basic education. Surat was also the stronghold of the freedom movement where people were ready to follow their leaders. It was under such circumstances that the provincial government of Bombay decided to introduce basic education, on an experimental basis in Surat district.²⁰²

Ashram Schools in Surat District:

Around 1922 some Gandhian workers settled in Bardoli area and started *ashrams* in 1924 Narhari Parikh and Jugatram Dave went to Sarbhon *ashram* and started teaching Halpatis. This was first and short-lived ashram school of Surat district, which was established in 1928. The school in Vedchhi was named as '*Ashram Udyogshala*.' Jugatram Dave the main force behind Vedchhi was committed to basic education, in praise of the ashram education, Jugatram Dave wrote: "The work of education that I did in Sabarmati ashrams and the scheme of education that we adopted in accordance with the local situation, here at Vedchhi is mostly in this basic

²⁰² *Ibid*, p. 37

pattern. The system is now known as 'basic education', and now it is recognized by the people and the state".²⁰³

Development of Nai-Talim Institutions and Educations through Ashramshalas in Ranimahals:

Nai-Talim programme started in Gujarat even before 1937, when Gandhi conceived a conference of Indian Educationists in Wardha to discuss the programmes of Nai-Talim in India, with the establishment of Gujarati Shala in Sabarmati ashram in 1915 and Gujarat Vidyapith in 1920. Sincere efforts were undertaken by educationists to implement the experiments of basic system of education advocated by Mahatma Gandhi, by eminent educationists like Nanabhai Bhatt (Ambla, District Bhavnagar), Jugatram Dave at Vedchhi (Dist. Surat), and such many other places. Based on the above mentioned experiments, Mahatma Gandhi conducted educational experiments himself in South Africa and Ahmedabad; he gave candid expressions to his views on his scheme of education in the conference in 1937. Since then and particularly after 1947, Gujarat Nai-Talim Sangh had a long tradition of more than fifty years. Dedicated and constructive workers working in all the constructive programmes in Gujarat State are the life members of this Sangh. The members meet and discuss the problems and issues faced, and find out solutions in order to guide the life members and member institutions to implement Nai-Talim activities in annual conferences, seminars, shibirs (camps) and workshops

²⁰³ *Ibid.* pp. 39. These ashram schools were also the center of the freedom movement. Between 1922 and 1936 the main role of such ashram schools was not that of imparting literacy. This was considered to be a secondary role. The main role was to prepare freedom fighters and social workers. The ashrams of Surat district participated in 'no tax campaign' as mentioned in earlier part of this chapter.

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up till not the Sangh is self-supporting and has not received any grant from the State Government or Government of India.²⁰⁴

Genesis of Ashramshalas:

Before Independence the State was not worried about the welfare of people residing in backward interior forest areas. Gandhiji and other leaders and public servants of the country having similar thinking had much worry about the welfare of such people. So all their efforts in that direction, they linked education with constructive programmes and started experiments of ashram education. On 1922, Shri Jugatram Dave and Shri Narharibhai established ashrams at Sarbhon (Surat district). In the year 1928, a school was started at Vedchhi, which was named as 'ashram Udyogshala'. In these ashramshalas education was imparted.²⁰⁵

According to scheme of Thakkar Bapa, such ashramshalas were started at many other places, after that the education department of the Bombay Government appointed the State Committee in the year 1928. This committee was required to give recommendations regarding development of weaker societies and adivasis by examining their educational, financial and social conditions. This committee prepared a report making sound recommendations for spread of education among adivasis. They informed about the education of tribal children that, in the interior-remote adivasi villages where there would be no possibility of school up to Std. 4 for small children; there it would be essential to start schools with hostels near their homes. Moreover, for those children who would desire to study in upper primary schools attached to it? At present, three types of schools have

²⁰⁴ Vinayak K. Dhotre, *Social Transformation through Nai-Talim. Study of the Present Status of Nai-Talim Institutions in Gujarat, Report: I, Ashramshalas*, Ahmedabad, Gujarat Nai-Talim Sangh, 2002, PP. 1-2

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6

achieved unprecedented results. Its illustration could be the schools at Godasamba in Surat district. He recommended increasing the number of such schools. The Starte Committee also recommended that, the responsibility of conducting hostels should be entrusted to the institution doing aid for that work. Thus, the committee gave encouragement to develop schools of ashramshala type and abdected to entrust the responsibility of conducting them to the voluntary organizations (institutions).

After this Symington Committee was constituted, they presented their report in the year 1937. They also recommended to make primary education compulsory and to impart education to adivasis in their own dialect. Thus, in the year 1928, the Starte Committee and thereafter, in the year 1937, the Symington Committee was constituted. Both of these committees had put much emphasis on adivasis education.²⁰⁶

Experiments in Basic Education in Vedchhi Surat:

In any activity started by Jugatram Bhai, there was essentially scientific view-point. He thought of education system according to age-group of children in child-education. A Bal-Mandir was started under a tree for children of the age-group 2 ½ years to 5 years of the village and ashram. Activities like washing of clothes, cutting of nails, bathing on Bhimkoova, combing hair, playing games, gardening etc. were being done in the Bal-Mandir, children were always at the center of these activities.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. 8, 'In terms of education what has been done in a small section of the Raniparaj district, was later expanded in the entire south-Gujarat. For this purpose the ashram at Bardoli and Vedchhi trained Raniparaj Youth with a view to supply that need.' For details see, Chunnilal Mehta, 'Raniparaj Weavers', *Young India*, Vol. X, No. 8, Feb. 23, 1928

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Dasriben Chodhri and Kanjibhai were the pioneer couple who firstly started teaching in the balwadi of Vedchhi Swaraj ashram. They aesthetically planned the activities of the balmandir under the guidance of Jugatram Dave. Thereafter, Bhagvatiben Shelat who was experienced in the child teaching methodology came. All the three bal-teachers gave a stunning shape to the balvadi, and drew a new type of design in child-education.

Jugatram Dave was insistent not on *ramakada* (toys) but on *kamakada* (toys likely for learning), for children to play. Education methodology should be adopted taking into consideration the life-useful works, in education for *Sanskar* building in the child activities like cleansing with broom in the balmandir, cleansing of courtyard, fetching water in the pot, in gardening digging up with small space, weeding out with nickel etc. were given importance. Activities like making clay-toys, drawing of pictures etc. were also arranged at proper time.



Jugatram Dave, as on 1965

Annapoorna Mehta also started such a Balwadi in Madhi. She strongly believed that no basic educational institute should be without balwadi the form of balwadi has remained the same since its inception in Vedchhi. The Vedchhi ashram runs balwadi independently.²⁰⁷ Jugatram Dave also created literature useful for Balwadis e.g. Balwadi Part 1-2, 'Bahadur Chakli Galli Maari Ghawarar Jaye,' 'Bhag Bava,' etc. This way Balwadi is an invaluable gift to Gujarat from Jugatram Dave and Gijubhai Shah of Vedchhi family.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ For meaning of 'Chotras' see Glossary, "The Balwadi run by Vedchhi ashram was being founded in memory of Chunilal Mehta, life mate of Mrs. Annapoorna Mehta, Mr. Chunnilal Mehta's contribution to adivasis progress was immense. With his Gandhian ideology they crossed miles to spread message of social transformation among tribals of his working region. For details see: *Raniparaj Sewa Sabha: Ek Sanstha Sath Sanyojit Swaraj Ashram Vedchhi, 1958-1959 to 1960-1961 - Triennial Report*, pp 1-2

²⁰⁸ Madhobhai Chodhri, *op. cit.*, p.8, "In the entire educational activities of Vedchhi one problem which prevailed was of education and language formula, initially when people like Jugatram

Gram-Sevak Training Vidyalaya:

Shri Ramjibhai, a member of the *Gram Udyog Prachar Samiti* proposed to organize a training course for Gram-sevaks in Vedchhi. The course began in 1948. Youths mostly joined this course. These trained youths are spread in the entire Gujarat. They are trained to fulfill responsibility of village reconstruction works. Constructive activities were at the center of Vedchhi *ashrams*. These trainees were seen as living identities of Gandhian thoughts.

The second step in the experiment of education was the primary school. The primary school of the district local board was going already in the village; Jugatram Dave got that local Board primary school shifted to the ashram with the sanction of the Government for experiments in basic education. The local board was changed and it was renamed as Gram Shala. In order to carry out the experiment of Nai-Talim Jugatram Dave specially invited his two friends, Shri Narayan Desai who took training in Nai-Talim and other Mohan Parikh who had become an engineer with self-help, intelligence and experience. They changed the Gramshala as a model school of nai-talim, humming with life and various school activities and innovative experiments. Education was started not in four walls of the class-room, but in natures lap, in farms, in plains and meadows, in jungles,

Dave and Chunibhai Mehta came to teach tribals of Surat, they came with the idea of Nai-Talim and infused its thoughts among tribals. But later on when the new generation of Gandhian workers came from other parts of India who already had the experience of working with tribals, specially among them were Narayan Desai, Jyoti Desai and Malini Desai. Three of them had working experience with tribals of Arunanchal Pradesh and Maharashtra with such approach they had tremendous respect for tribal cultures with respect for tribal cultures with that of mainstream culture. As a result, Narayan Desai suggested the multiple dialects education system for tribals but to its little dismay Chunilal Mehta refused to adopt such a criteria as he felt that the teaching tribals in their own dialects, will not at all be feasible but it will break their connections with the global society'. For details see, Narayan Desai (ed.), *Vedchhi No Vadlo*, Vyara, Gram Sewa Samaj, 1984, pp. 297-298. The Quote is part of my interview with Narayan Desai at Vedchhi, Tal. Valod, Dist. Surat. Dt. 18,02,2002

in correlation of the craft and subjects. Education was not bookish but of experience and commitment, not sitting idly but education with productive labour.²⁰⁹ The education programme of Vedchhi was started by 1947 and it continued till 1967 successfully the system was based on Wardha System of Education and Balwadi in Villages.²¹⁰

The Vedchhi educational institution was started in 1947, with Government funding, under Ministry of Human Welfare, later on persons who had received ashram education now began to establish educational institution in different talukas in cooperation with local workers, e.g. Bhikhu Vyas and Kokila Vyas under their organization 'Vedchhi Pradesh Sewa Samiti,' have established more than twenty five *ashramshalas* in different parts of Surat district, in these ashramshalas hostels were started for tribal children's according to the Government schemes. The overall educational institutes of Vedchhi and associated ranimahals regions of Surat district were working under 'Raniparaj Sewa Sabha', since its inception Raniparaj Sewa Sabha has been constantly engaged in activities like education, hostel facility to students, and health facility to tribals, credit cooperative societies, self-help groups, prohibition campaigns, Bamboo craft industries and Daru rehabilitation activities of Ukai. The main details of the educational institution are as follows:

1. Balwadis – Kindergarten were located at (i) Baba Balwadi (Ambach), (Tal. Valod.), (ii) Gram Balwadi Siletwel, (Tal. Songadh), (iii) Navnirman Balwadi, Bordi, (Tal. Songadh).
2. Ashramshalas at (i) Borisavar, (Tal. Songadh), (ii) Gopalpura, (Tal. Songadh), (iii) Bordi, (Tal. Songadh).

²⁰⁹ Narayan Desai, *Vedchhi No Vadlo*, op. cit., pp. 9-10

²¹⁰ For detailed information on education system of Vedchhi See, Jugatram Dave, *Atmarachna ane Ashram Kelvani*, Ahmedabad, Navjivan Pub., 1961

3. Uttar Buniyadi Vidyalayas, (Higher Secondary Schools) (i) Borisavar Wadi, (Tal. Songadh), (ii) Bordi, (Tal. Songadh).
4. Adivasi Hostels (i) Vallabh Kanya Ashram, Varad, (Tal. Bardoli), (ii) Varaj Kanya Ashram, Siletval, (Tal. Songadh), (iii) Vauraj Kumar Hostel, Borda, (Tal. Songadh).²¹¹

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF VEDCHHI²¹²

GRAMSHALAS

TABLE-1

Std	1958-1959	1959-1960	1960-1961
3 rd	—	2	—
4 th	1	2	3
5 th	5	8	3
6 th	8	11	6
7 th	5	11	8

UTTAR BUNIYADI OR HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOLS

TABLE-3

S.No.	1958-1959	1959-1960	1960-1961
1	16	35	30
2	17	13	34
3	10	6	7
Total	77	78	90

²¹¹ Madhubhai D. Chodhri, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13

²¹² Raniparaj Sewa Sabha – *Ek Sanstha Sathe Sanyojit Swaraj Ashram. Vedchhi, 1958-1959 to 1960-1961, Triennial Report*, pp 1-6

**THE TRIBE-WISE NUMBER OF THE STUDENTS STUDYING IN
THE ASHRAM SCHOOL**

TABLE-4

Tribe	1958-1959	1959-1960	1960-1961
Chordhi	31	36	42
Dhodia	26	25	19
Gamit	2	4	7
Halpit	1	1	2
Konkani	3	—	1
Harijan	5	4	5
Nayaka	1	1	1
Vasava	—	1	3
Savarna	8	6	10
Total	77	78	91

THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS AT BALWADI

TABLE-5

Year	Adivasi Girls	Adivasi Boys	Upper Caste Boys	Upper Caste Girls	Total
1958-1959	18	24	2	4	48
1959-1960	19	23	1	3	46
1960-1961	13	17	3	2	35

LITERACY PERCENTAGE IN SURAT DISTRICT

TABLE-7

Taluka	Scheduled Tribes Population	% of ST Population	Total Literacy % in Taluka	Tribal Literacy %
Vyara	136297	89	24	20
Songadh	98429	73	19	11
Mangrol	85122	66	29	15
Bardoli	62573	52	37	16
Mandvi	90944	76	24	14
Mahuva	65980	80	38	32
Nizar	54416	76	22	14
Valod	37933	73	34	23
Uchchhal	43344	97	11	9

Referring to educational activities of Shri Jugatram Dave, Kanta Shah and Harvilasben Shah of Pindval Sarvodaya Parivar Trust wrote as follows: "If you wish to see a saint as mentioned in the ancient texts of India then must visit the land of swaraj ashram Vedchhi. There we find shady grove, cleanliness of high order. He is the teacher of teachers, dedicated for the cause of education. He is the true visionary of Gandhian cadre. His services are gleaned from every nook and corner."²¹³

Khadi-Activity in Vedchhi Raniparaj Sewa Sabha:

As mentioned in earlier part of this chapter, the khadi-activity in the Vedchhi region began due to efforts of Chunilal Mehta and his wife Annapoorna Mehta. Later on the impetus to khadi activity was given by the Raniparaj khadi karyalaya, Vedchhi, which was established in the year 1948.²¹⁴

With the formation of Raniparaj khadi Karyalaya, Khadi now became an economic activity whereas in other places khadi production and its setting was not only profitable but also supportive to all the masses involved in it. It provides employment to the adivasis on 36 paisa wages daily and with profitable increase in production.²¹⁵

The production of khadi helped the people to have better wages and earnings. It included spirit of swadeshi, swashraya, and self-reliance

²¹³ Kanta Harvilas, 'Vedchhi Ma Sewadin' (A day of Service of Vedchhi), *Bhoomiputra*, year 32, No. 2, Dt. 16,10,1984, p. 13

²¹⁴ *Swaraj Ashram Vedchhi, Annual Report. 1948.* pp. 15-16

²¹⁵ I.P. Desai, *op. cit.*, p. 53



among the tribals. Statistics showing the production of khadi under Vedchhi ashram:²¹⁶

Khadi in Ranimahals

S. No.	Khadi Center	Villages	Spinners	Spinning Wheels	Self Reliant people in clothing
1	Vedchhi	2	15	216	304
2	Ambach	3	6	100	133
3	Kasvav	2	8	99	111
4	Bhimpore	4	6	94	153
5	Alghat	2	9	148	119
6	Bazipura	3	9	241	494
7	Titva	3	4	121	110
8	Madhi	3	11	146	233
9	Bhatlav	2	4	50	80
10	Balda	3	4	176	168
11	Kalamkui	3	8	138	111
12	Sarbhon	8	5	122	139
13	Ambapani	4	6	253	166
	Total	42	95	1904	2121

The ashram is also running khadi activity in the Vedchhi where twenty Kendras are running for the benefit of tribals.²¹⁷ However, 1946, Vedchhi left khadi movement because in the years 1942-1946 due to Quit India movement khadi activity suffered a long break and after that it probably declined.²¹⁸ According to I.P. Desai, "The production of khadi

²¹⁶ *Annual Report, Swaraj Vedchhi, 1967, p.4*

²¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 4.

²¹⁸ I.P. Desai, *Op. cit.*, P. 54. The general statistics about the production of Khadi Vedchhi:

should remain as an individual task and everyone as part of its movement must work for it but follows among themselves, made it a commercial practice and managed it so that they could earn more money out of it, which did not resolved the purpose of making people self-reliant. But, the production units of khadi created hierarchy within them.²¹⁹

The Raniparaj people had taken up the khadi obliviously because it was for them a paying proposition; it helps them to eke out a scanty living, it had helped them to clear their debts, it had taught many, the lesson of Gandhian ideology. By the year 1930 around 682 raniparaj families in 49 villages took up the self-spinning, 783 took up wheels, and 220 of them took carding bows and 69 had hand gins.²²⁰

While examining the khadi activity in ranimahals of Surat Mahatma Gandhi wrote about the Raniparaj Conference as follows, this was the third year of their conference. At all their conferences only a limited number of resolutions were adopted. There was one about drink which is the curse of these (raniparaj) people, another about khaddar and third about discarding stone ornaments worn by their women. The resolutions about drink and khaddar were in the nature of vows. The audience solemnly undertook themselves not to drink and gently to persuade their neighbours to do likewise. The other vow bound them to ply the wheel and to wear handspun cloth to the exclusion of all other kinds of textiles and to see that all others will do the likewise. Volunteers were sent to the farthest ends of the meeting to ascertain weather they were following the proceedings. The wild

Year	Production level	Employees	Year
1936	3650 yarns	185, 9 vill.	1937
1942	36650 yarns	1160, 7 vill.	1941-42
1946	42609 yarns	—	—

²¹⁹ I.P. Desai, op. cit., p. 54

²²⁰ Jugatram Dave, 'Khadi in Bardoli', *Young India*, Vol. XII, No. 9, Feb. 27th, 1930

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being favourable the voice carried exceptionally well without much effort. They both men and women took the vows with God as their witness. About use of Khaddar by these tribals Mahatma Gandhi wrote: "Almost all of them had some part of their dress in khaddar. They had taken to it readily and intelligently. Hundreds had learnt how to spin. Some of the young men trained at the ashram at Bardoli to become expert carders, spinners, and weavers. A few even earned their livelihood by the vow regarding khaddar and spinning is was regarding intoxicating drinks.²²¹

The khadi activity in Bardoli was mainly self-spinners affairs. During the 1930 under report Mr. Chunilal Mehta, who was the soul of khadi activity amongst the raniparaj community in Bardoli conceived a novel idea, via that of khadi pledged families. There were the teetotaler families already, now there was to be a new class of khadi spinning families. A regular register of these families was maintained and workers paid periodical visits to see that they stored sufficient cotton, that then spinning tackle was in proper trim, and that all the members of the family gave all their idle hours to fulfilling their pledge of spinning enough yarn to able to adhere to the exclusive use of khadi for all purposes. The idea was taken up enthusiastically 93 villages responded to the call, 651 families, that is 3082 persons, taking the pledge of 402 families fulfilled the pledge, 242 could not fulfill it in its entirety. That is to say, they had to purchase other clothes as some could not sin a sufficient quantity, some could not get their yarn woven in time and some misunderstood the latter or the spirit of the pledge. They purchased 328 rupees worth of khadi and Rs. 875-6-0 worth

²²¹ M. K. Gandhi, 'Their two Vows', *Young India*, Vol. VII, No. 4, January 22, 1925

of mill cloth in spite of their pledges per head. The bulk of cloth they used was thus mainly homemade and partly market made khadi.²²²

The Vedchhi area had 11 khadi centers where 79 workers drawing a total annual salary of Rs. 1674 were engaged during the under report. The center sold in 335 villages 1821 spinning wheels, 1159 carding bows, 156 hand gins and 32 looms.

Progress statistics of khadi activity in Vedchhi

Year	Wheels	Bows	Gins	Looms
1925	388	14	23	1
1926	70	25	14	3
1927	612	132	30	2
1928	362	110	29	6
1929	1821	1159	156	32
Total	3253	134-	252	44

12,397 meters of yarns spun by 3236 families was brought to the centres for weaving and 34706 square yards of khadi was produced. That gives an average of 23/4 mtrs of yarns per wheel and 33/4 meters and 1034 yarns per family. The small average was due to 1821 wheels having been brought into operation in 1927.²²³

²²² Jugatram Dave, 'Khadi in Bardoli', *op. cit.*

²²³ *Ibid.* The figure for production of khadi between 1927-1929.

Year	1927	1928	1929
No. of villages	119	118	294
Families	1062	721	3236
Lbs. Of Yarns	8339	5240	12796

The following table shows the number of various apparatus of the spinning and weaving industry hold to the Raniparaj people from the Vedchhi ashram from year 1927 to 1929:²²⁴

Yarn bought to various centers:²²⁵

Name of Article	Vedchhi	Barad	Bardoli	Total
Spinning wheel	441	126	45	612
Spindle	607	200	50	857
Carding bows	23	2	7	32
Hand gins	16	—	14	30
Handlooms	1	—	1	2

Earning by Weaving:

The beauty of weaving was that all the spinners in Ranimahals were cultivators, who in several cases were tilling many more bighas of land than the pounds of yarn they spun in spite of their responsibility of cultivation they earnestly did their decided spinning.²²⁶

The raniparaj were entirely new to weaving as to spinning. In such case some of them who took to weaving were paid some what higher rates than the ordinary weavers. Thus, in 1927 there were 21 weavers belonging to families of cultivators who eared total wages amounting to Rs. 1731-4-0, the average monthly earning being Rs. 12, one of them earned as much as Rs. 19/- per month. A young cowherd boy of 15 years earned Rs. 69 in six

²²⁴ Chunilal Mehta, 'An Eye Opener', *Young India*, Vol. X, No. 7, Feb. 16, 1928, p. 54

²²⁵ *Ibid.*,

²²⁶ *Ibid.*,

months. cultivator Maganbhai who also took to weaving earned Rs. 75 in eight months as weaver with a family strength of eight members he tills 19 bighas of land, spun 17 pounds of yarn and earned as a weaver an average monthly wage of over Rs. 9 for 8 months from Kartik to Jyeshtha,²²⁷ showing that a farmer can take not only to spinning during his leisure hours but also to weaving.

A conference of Raniparaj was held in 1927 at Rupwada where the qualification for membership of the reception committee was that the candidate should be weaving cloth woven from Vyara spun in his own home, and there were as many as 1152 persons who satisfied this stringent test.

If we examine the balance sheet of raniparaj as far as their spinning and weaving activities are concerned we find on the credit side Rs. 9122 (the value of khadi woven) plus Rs. 820-12-0 (the value of cotton seed) plus Rs. 1731-4-0 (earned as weavers wages), total Rs. 11674. On debit side we have Rs. 4170 (the value of cotton stocked) plus Rs. 2280 (weaving changes). Total Rs. 6450. Thus there was a clear gain of Rs. 5224. This sum will be multiplied several times when there are spinners in all the 110 villages, not only in 25 or 30 of them at present, and when all the spinning families put their heart into the industry. For many of the 1062 families spun only 2-5 pounds of yarn each when they could have spun in his own home, and there were as many as 1152 persons who satisfied this stringent test.²²⁸

²²⁷ 'Kartik' and 'Jyestha' are name of two months according to lunar calendar of India. Kartik is equivalent of November and Jyestha to June.

²²⁸ Chunibhai Mehta, *op. cit.*, p 54

Another important khadi center of Vedchhi region was the Ambapardi village ashram in Mandvi taluka in the year 1942. The main activity of the village ashram was khadi. The following statistics shows the status of khadi production village Ambapardi:

Khadi Specifics	Numbers
1. Village	7
2. Spinners House	231
3. Spinning Individuals	404
4. Members who are self-reliant in clothing	166
5. Number of spinning wheels	293
6. Spinners	9
7. Spindles	11629
8. Pounds spun	1019
9. Khadi worked	3819
10. Value of khadi lost while spinning	Rs. 1639-7-3
11. Government aid	Rs. 761-14-6

The Government aid activities in this village were raised by Shri Ramchandra Upadhyaya, the main work which he has raised is assumed by the cooperative credit societies. This way Ambapardi began several cooperative activities in the village.²²⁹

To promote khadi among raniparaj people regular promotional activities were done such as organizing spinners conferences, khadi exhibitions making different articles of khadi and crafts dying etc. With such tremendous growth of khadi because of influence of Gandhians work in Surat and Baroda state territories, a khadi center was founded in Puna village of Mahuva taluka of Baroda State in 1924, it worked as the cooperative khadi village center with registration under Baroda State

²²⁹ *Swaraj Ashram Vedchhi, Annual Report, 1948. pp. 15-16*

administration. Under this registered body the recorded production of khadi in the region is as follows:²³⁰

KHADI-PRODUCTION

Year	Weight	Spinning Yarn	Price
1924-1925	830	1760	650
1925-1926	2688	3976	2250
1926-27	8339	19768	7510
1927-28	5280	14178	5250
1928-29	-	-	-
1929-1930	15302	72468	55150
1930-1931	-	-	-
1931-1932	-	-	-
1932-1933	-	-	-
1933-1934	-	-	-
1934-1935	1528	4590	2950
1935-1936	1159	3657	2374
1936-1937	1483	5588	3195
1937-1938	1999	6689	4240
1938-1939	1852	6989	4750
1939-1940	4149	17318	5110
1940-1941	3775	14701	12150
1941-1942	8206	36650	30235
1942-1943	6665	30657	35470
1943-1944	4798	22371	30174
1944-1945	2526	11751	15875
1945-1946	5504	24494	32043
1946-1947	-	-	-
1947-1948	-	-	-
1948	-	-	-

When the Vedchhi ashram was started in 1923 AD, the production of khadi was adopted as the main plank of this programme. The ashram

²³⁰ Annual Report, Swaraj Ashram Vedchhi, 1947. pp. 19-20

persuaded the people to spin and weave, and also the training for the purpose. In the beginning, the programme was devised with a view to serving the national aim of attaining independence through developing self-reliance, at least in the matter of clothing. Later on khadi became an occupation which enabled some people to earn their livelihood. By the time the Valod group started working independently. The enthusiasm of khadi achieving self-reliance in clothing declined. It became a commodity, like any other, to be sold in the market.

In order to boost the production of khadi, the union government formed, the khadi and village industry commission – an autonomous organization in 1952, the State Government also appointed khadi boards in their respective states in the early 1960s. During the 1952, the State Government also appointed khadi boards in their respective states in the early 1960s. During the 1950s, the khadi commission gave grants to the Valod Intensive Area Scheme (VIAS), for the purpose of encouraging spinning activity. It also gave Charkhas (spinning wheels) at subsidized rates and offered marketing facilities as well. The government also subsidized khadi to boost its sales. The VIAS distributed charkhas either free or at a subsidized price to the spinners. It also distributed Ambar charkhas (spinning wheels) at subsidized rates and offered marketing facilities as well. The government also subsidized khadi to boost its sales. The VIAS distributed charkhas either free or at a subsidized price to the spinners. It also distributed ambar-charkhas, either free or at a subsidized price to the spinners. Ambar charkhas were also distributed to increase the production capacity of labour, with the financial support from the state khadi board, the VIAS conducted several training courses for the spinners and weavers.

Despite such a huge effort, financial support and managerial skills the khadi programme has not taken off in Valod even after fifty years. At the end of the 1970s the number of spinners had not increased by more than four hundred. Their number also fluctuates from year to year. For instance there were 106 spinners in 1974-1975 in village Alghadh, where the VIAS had organized the khadi center in 1956. In 1977-1978 the number of spinners had gone down to only 52. Every year some spinners were recruited but some were dropped out. Very few continued to work, as spinners for many years. The spinners who dropped out reported that they could not spare any time for spinning. The spinners who dropped out reported that they could not spare any time for spinning. Almost all the spinners have been, and are cultivators. They can only spin their spare time. Moreover, farm labour was more remunerative than spinning, and, in contrast, to a spinner, a farm labourer could hope to secure loan from the farm owner in case of need. During the year 1975-1976, a spinner in Alghadh earned, on an average Rs. 102/-, whereas in Degama a spinner earned Rs. 705/- per year. The difference between Degama and Alghadh arises from the fact that the spinning wheels supplied to these two villages were not of the same model. In Degama, the spinners used the Ambar charkhas whereas in Alghadh they used the traditional spinning wheel. Moreover, the VIAS started a workshop in Degama, where all the spinners spin together under one roof for eight hours a day. Their work is supervised and the spinning wheels are repaired as soon as they go out of order despite these facilities of supervision and organization a spinner does not earn even a subsistence income. Weaving is linked with spinning, as it depends on the availability of years. Spinners in the taluka do not spin regularly and do not spin enough yarn to provide employment to many weavers like spinning,

weaving is also not an attractive occupation as it does not provide even a subsistence income.²³¹

Forest-Labour Cooperative Societies:

Forests and tribals have inseparable links from very early times. The tribals have been depending for their existence on forests which is very much reflected by the song given below:-

The weather is dry and cold
 We are very poor
 And do not have the means so,
 Protect ourselves
 Let us go to the forests
 To bring firewood
 Cook for our children
 And warm our bodies.²³²

The basis of the tribal economy is agriculture and forestry. Where the latter has an upper hand. But the forest resources were exploited in unorganized and random ways resulting in deforestation of various parts in Gujarat particular. It has been mainly in this context that the movement of the Forest Labour Cooperative Societies was launched. Under which attempts were made to eliminate the contractors and to treat tribals as partners in the matter of exploitation of forest wealth.

²³¹ Ghanshyam Shah, 'Decentralizing Planning In a Centralized Economy: A Sarvodaya Programme In a Taluka'. In Peter Robb (ed.), *Rural South Asia: Linkage, Change, and Development*. London, Curzon Ltd, 1983, PP. 204-206 The weavers who worked in their spare time earned on an average Rs. 379,- in 1978-1979 with Algodh. In Buhari they worked as full-time weavers, they earned an average Rs. 1349- in a year. Consequently weaving is not an attractive substitute for agriculture. In whole of the taluka one could hardly find even 50 persons who had taken to weaving as a full time occupation, in fact there is no full-time weaver today. The VIAS however exports khadi to Amsterdam, London, Aden, and Geneva through its contacts with aid giving agencies. In 1941, Maha Gujarat Khadi Mandal was established. Since 1924 khadi work is continuing in Gujarat with a lingering pace

²³² Prabodhbhai Joshi. *Interview taken at Vyara on 19th Feb. 2002*, Prabodhbhai Joshi was General Secretary of Surat Forest labour cooperative Society, during his secretary ship he raised 45 forest societies only in Ukai area of Songadh Taluka, Surat

The movement of forest labour cooperatives (FLC's) started in Gujarat around 1947, when it was part of erstwhile Bombay State. In 1949, FLCs used to be allotted coupes under the formula of sharing profit losses on 50:50 Ratios. This formula was replaced in 1959 by a new formula of 80:20 Ratios. The operational expenses are borne by Government and the net revenue is shared between Government and society in the ratio of 80:20. The societies are also projected against the losses. After the formation of Gujarat State, the state government laid down a firm policy in 1973 that no exploitation of forest areas should be carried out through private contractors or by individuals but that the entire exploitation work should be done by the FLC's and if these cooperative did not took up the work of exploitation. Then such areas should be exploited departmentally. An exception has been made in Dangs district where exploitation of 50% of the forest area is entrusted to FLCs and 50% to the forest department.²³³

The forest labour cooperative societies were most important societies for adivasis. In 1967 there were 60 forest working cooperative societies. All of which were managed by the 'Raniparaj Sewa Sabha'. The society took up contract of logging of the forest area, with time when profits of society improved many senior officials helped in its growth. Gujarat Vidyapith

²³³ Masavi Mustali, 'Cooperative Movement among Tribals of Gujarat'. District wise No. of FLC's in Gujarat: 1980

S.No.	District	No. of FLC's	Members
1.	Surat	45	19117
2.	Dangs	29	7051
3.	Valsad	17	23728
4.	Panchmahals	17	10298
5.	Bharuch	15	3365
6.	Vadodara	1	4416
7.	Sabarkantha	3	430
8.	Banaskantha	2	99
	Total	138	68504

donated Rs. 70,000/-. The FLCs also contributed in social welfare and around 10 ashramshalas were funded by it in Songadh taluka.²³⁴

Land-Reform Activities of the Raniparaj Community of Gujarat:

The problem of land reforms in the tribal areas different from the other parts of the country, there was a kind of community ownership among the tribal. Gradually indebtedness and poverty forced a good proportion amongst the tribals first to hypothecate and then to part with their land. They came to be tenants of their bonds or mortgages. The problem of land reform in tribal areas, is therefore is a mixed one of security of tenure, protection against rack-renting and protection against the usurious methods of the money-lenders. In the plain areas the landholder was the owner or held directly from the Government and the tenants were those who got their title from him. Unhappily the state government had not fully appreciated the difference between condition in the tribal areas and in the plains. The scheme of land reforms have been by and large based upon a land-lord tenant relationship which cannot help the tribals who have leased, mortgaged or otherwise hypothecated their land against their land and become tenants of their bonds or mortgages in respect of their own land. This is one major deficiency in the approach of the question of land-reform movements.²³⁵

Consciousness about Land-Rights among tribals of Gujarat:

Since first decade of twentieth century consciousness for land-rights became evident among tribals of Gujarat, though previously they were

²³⁴ Siddharaj Solanki and Gaurish Pandya, 'A Note on Sarvodaya Yojana in Surat.' Also see, Satyakam Joshi, *Forest labour Cooperative Societies in South Gujarat*, Ph.D. Thesis. Centre for Social Studies, Surat 1982. I.P. Desai, *op. cit.*, p. 85, The Ambapardi ashram of Mandvi taluka of Surat has a forest labour cooperative society, which works for the coup cutting at kalibel region of the nearby Dang district

²³⁵ U.N. Dhebar, *Report of the Scheduled Tribe Areas and Scheduled Tribe Commission*, p 266

more vagrant and practiced shifting agriculture but by the twentieth century many of them became settled agriculturists specially in the region of Valod, Bardoli, Vyara, i.e. ranimahals of Surat district and Baroda State.

During 1903 there was an epidemic in Vyara-Valod region of Surat district, due to which several tribals lost their lands (to money lenders) against which a movement was raised by tribal leaders like Kotla Mehta, Nanjibhai Raisingh Chodhri, they initiated movements for tribals' land-rights. To raise voice on this regard, these leaders released a journal from Vyara taluka which was entitled 'Chingari'. Chingari was the voice of educated tribals who were conscious of tribal rights and were interested in tribals' socio-economic welfare.²³⁶ Due to declining condition of tribals and constant pauperization due to epidemic many of these elitist tribals donated their lands to their landless brethrens e.g. Nanjibhai Bhabar during this movement donated 250 acres of land. Similarly, Hirjibhai Chodhri participated in Sardar Patel's Bardoli Satyagriha mainly to safeguard rights of tribal people, and accrue them justice.²³⁷

In 1934 tribals of village Dolvan of Vyara taluka raised a march towards Baroda State to get concessions in land-revenue. Then His Highness Maharaja Sayajirao granted the concessions to tribals and so the tempo of tribals got elated since then active movements in ranimahals of Surat began under able leadership of tribal leaders and associated benevolent persons from mainstream society.²³⁸ In later phase of land movements, the leaders of Surat ranimahals joined 'All India Kisan Sabha',

²³⁶ Interview with Ashokbhai Chodhri, Village Vedchhi, Valod, Dist. Surat on 18,02,2002. Ashok Chodhri is an activist of South Gujarat and founding member of 'Adivasi Ekta Parishad'

²³⁷ *Ibid.*,

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, For details on 1934 Dolvan land Reform Act See Chap-II of thesis with special reference to Tribals under Baroda State.

under leadership of Indulal Yagnik. This organization raised several questions of tribals regarding their land-rights and their oppression by high caste patidars and moneylenders.²³⁹

In a letter written by Shri Indulal Yagnik to the Collector of Surat, he wrote: "I deem it my duty to bring to your notice the most urgent problem of reducing the exorbitant rents generally levied by the landlords on the raniparaj tenants on the Mandvi taluka:

As you are aware, the new Government of Bombay have published their Draft Tenancy Bill and promised to put it through the legislative within the next few months. I deem it therefore necessary that all tenants should suspend delivery of crop share or payment of cash rent for the present so that they might be enabled to avail themselves of the provision of the new law. I have to adduce other considerations in support of his view. The present congress ministers would naturally be guided by the resolutions of the responsible Congress Committees and Congress leaders in the mater. Now the Gujarat Provincial Congress Committee had adopted a resolution calling for reduction of rent in two ways: reduction of crop-share to the 1/3rd of the produce and cash rent to a figure not exceeding twice the amount of land-revenue assessed by Government. I submit that either way the rents of Mandvi tenants would have to be subsequently reduced to meet these standards.²⁴⁰

²³⁹ 'All India Kisan Movement: Alleviating Peasants Problems in Surat District', F. No. 800,53-B, Pt-III, HD-(SPL), JD, MSA, Mumbai, 1939, p. 1

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.9, "In view of all these consideration the Kisan Sabha and its workers were advising the tenants of Mandvi taluka to suspend all payments of rent in cash or kind pending the passage of the rent bill and the establishment of the administrative machinery that might be devised for fixing just rents."

But this resolution was improved upon at a Raniparaj Conference held at Vedchhi in 1939 and presided over by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel president of All India Congress Parliamentary Sub-Committee. The Congress resolved to prohibit the levy of crop-share as rent and to demand that rent should not exceed 1 1/2 times the land-revenue. In the meanwhile, the urban Sabha leaders came to a collective equitable agreement with the tenants, such as they would leave enough wages for the maintenance of the tiller of the soil. Kisan Sabha leaders also urged the authorities that they should not allow land lords or their agents to invade the huts, the farms or the threshing grounds of the tenants and forcibly remove any crops or parts of crops that were legally in possession of the tenants, also tenants will be preserved intact in the Mandvi taluka during the period of suspension of rents.²⁴¹

From 1938 onwards Kisan Sabha became an active organization in South-Gujarat and many tribals became its members, also it organized several no-rent campaigns which were more equally effective like the Bardoli – Satyagriha. Kisan Sabha workers were mainly active in the Mandvi taluka of Surat district where they were vigorously exhorting the Raniparaj peasants to pay rent to the land holders until the passing of the Tenancy Bill. The land-holders had formed their own union and had raised a fund to combat the activities of the Kisan Sabha workers. The land lords put forged complaints of theft house-break and trespass in Kisan workers

²⁴¹ From: Indulal Yagnik, Joint Secretary – All India Kisan Sabha, to: The Collector, Surat district. Dt. 10th Oct. 1938. F. No: Ibid, p. 10. Against the petition of Mr. Indulal Yagnik, The Commissioner Northern Division remarked; 'Mr. Yagnik is apparently about to launch in 'no rent' campaign of his own land and that it seems that serious attention will have to be paid to the illegal action which he now threatens to take. If Mr. Yagnik's activities should result in a breach of the peace or disturbances of public tranquility, it may be necessary to deal with him under section 144 of 107 C.P.C. For the present however there do not appear to be sufficient grounds for action. The District Magistrate no doubt keeps us fully informed of developments. A further communication may be awaited.' *Ibid.* pp. 13-14

which further strained the relations between the two fractions. As a result, Indulal Yagnik issued a leaflet in which he raised the cause of peasants and invited the peasant's leader Swami Sahjanand to boost the morale of tribal peasants so that they could continue to persist on their struggle for land rights.²⁴²

In one such meeting a local Kisan Sabha leader Narsi Akha addressed the Raniparaj in Chodhara language and explained to the audience that the object of holding the meeting was to accord a fitting race from jail and was visiting Mandvi town after a lapse of about 2 ½ years. Continuing to it he stated that on account of imprisonment of some of the Kisan leaders and putting a ban upon others the Kisan movement got a set back on account of which zamindars and moneylenders spread all sorts of rumours by stating that the Kisan activities were never declared illegal but on the contrary Government recently released Kisan workers from jail unconditionally and lifted ban which proved that Kisan activities were quite legal.

He assured peasants that the Kisan Sabha would strive for ameliorating the miserable plight of the peasants and advised the peasants not to believe false rumours. Lastly he exhorted the peasants to unite and organize and asked them to stop all unnecessary expenses and sustain from drinking liquor, toddy and other vices.

Jivan Kalia and Lakhara Master the other tribal leaders then addressed the meeting in Chodhsara language and in their short speeches practically reiterated the views of the former speaker. They advised the

²⁴² *Ibid*, 'Extract from the Bombay Province Weekly letters' No. 44, Dt. 5th Nov. 1938. P. 21

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peasants to strengthen the Kisan Sabha so that they could effectively ventilate their grievance and hardships.²⁴³

With the rise of consciousness about their land rights among tribals, the activities of Kisan Sabha also got extended in the tribal territories of Surat. On behalf of the Halpatis in South Gujarat, who were agricultural labourers permanently attached to their masters and bonded servants, the Kisan Sabha also put forward the demands that the Halpatis should not be treated as bonded slaves but as human beings.²⁴⁴ To bring into notice the condition of Halpatis I. K. Yagnik wrote: "The slavery of the Hali labourers has now been admitted on all hands. But it is less known that the Chodhara, Gamit, Dhodia, and all Raniparaj people, as well as the Bhils and Talavias are virtually treated as slaves, how else would a Sahukar, abuse, slap, and assault an old Raniparaj peasant in Vadeshia village of the taluka on his gentle refusal to deliver the half-shave of crops." The assault on Hari Bhagat, a valued Kisan worker and other peasants on 22nd instant should be deemed and even grave offence. There was no question of demanding rent from them. The bhagat was beaten because he was carrying on a no-rent campaign. His campaign was hammered as he happened to belong to the rebellious raniparaj community.

²⁴³ From: CID, Ahmedabad, To: DSF Surat, No. Dt. 18,06,1942. Pl. Mandvi town, Sub: Report of Kisan Sabha conference, F. No. : 800 (53) BC-II, HD (SPL), MSA-Mumbai, 1942. PP. 407-415. "Effect: The Chief object of holding the meeting at Mandvi town was that a weekly is being held at Mandvi town on every Wednesday where peasants from different adjoining villages came to make purchases. It was for that very reason that the programme of holding it on Wednesday 17th June 1942 was fixed so that the peasants might avail of the opportunity of attending the meeting. This being the first meeting in Mandvi Taluka after a lapse of about 2 years, attendance was meager. There was not perceptible effect of the speeches upon the audience.' Details of the meeting presence are as follows: 'Meeting who held under the auspices of the Kisan Sabha at place called Gharedi Zampa, Mandvi town. Sub: Kisan activities, president: No one presided. Speakers of the meeting were Narsi Akha, of village Amba-Pardi, Mandvi Taluka, Jivan Kalia, Dharwadi, and Lakhura Aka Master from Songadh - Vyara, Vasant Mukhale, Nanubhai Pragji Desai, and D.M. Pangarkar from Surat. About 150 peasants, including 25 children and 25 women attended the meeting.

²⁴⁴ L.S. Vishwanath, 'Gujarat Kisan Sabha 1936 1956', *EPW*. Vol. XX, No. 28, Jul-13, 1985, pp. 1193-1194.

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The sahumars declared a violent war, on the raniparaj community for committing the heinous offence of going on a rent strike and standing up for their rights in a peaceful manner. Mangrol sahumars have advised their Mandvi brethren to keep out the raniparaj peasantry with an iron-rod lest Mandvi is turned into another Mangrol. Indulal Yagnik wrote:

I respectfully warn the Sahukars that they should understand the sings of the times and remember the policy of the Congress administration that prevails. I should also remind the higher officials and the local Congress leaders of their serious responsibility in the matter. The officials will be deemed unfit and Congress would lose its reputation for fair play if the sahumari terrorism is all owed to flames unchecked any longer in this area. Finally, I exhort my raniparaj friends to prosecute courageously the campaign on which they have embarked justice and truth is on their side, and their victory is already assumed.²⁴⁵

Due to various movements raised by Kisan Sabha in the ranimahals of Surat district, certain steps were taken by the Collector of Surat.²⁴⁶ In response to which Indulal Yagnik wrote:

If however the landlords are induced by you or other leader to come on a collective equitable agreement with the tenants, such as would leave enough for the proper maintenance of the tiller

²⁴⁵ From: Indulal Yagnik, Joint Secy, All India Kisan Sabha, To: The Collector, Surat District, and Dt. 10th Oct. 1938. F. No. *Ibid.*, P. 17.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.* P. 17. In a report by district magistrate of Surat, a meeting of raniparaj was held at Vedchhi in Valod Mahal on 30,10,1938, one Mr. Muljibhai Rudabhai of Mandvi Taluka presiding. The strength of the meeting was about 200. It was resolved that the Kaliparaj should call themselves as kshtriya samaj. As the projected tenancy bill leaves much to be desired, the authorities should be approached for improving it in such a voice that the law to be passed be beneficial to the Kaliparaj. They should not drink and give up flesh-eating. They should also spin and weave for their requirements. An executive committee of 11 was appointed to carry out the above resolutions, with headquarters at Vyara

of the soil, my Sabha and I shall be only too happy to render all possible help in effecting such a settlement. In the meanwhile, I have to request you to see that no landlords or their agents are allowed to invade the huts the farms or the threshing grounds of crops that are legally in possession of the tenants. I also trust that the safety of the lives freedom and property of all tenants will be reserved intact in the Mandvi taluka during the period of suspension of payment of rents".²⁴⁷

The Kisan propaganda had been very active in kaliparaj villages of Mandvi taluka notably in the villages Amba-Pardi, Untewa, Parvat, Toked, Kasal, Nandpur etc. I had hoped that the arrest of Mr. Pangarkar by the Baroda authorities would perhaps stem their activities. But it appears that as a result of Baroda territory being effectively barred against their agitation, the Kisan sabhaites have concentrated their energies in the Mandvi taluka. As regarding the action to be taken against such propaganda appears to be possible so long as a breach of the peace is not imminent. Nor do I think any such action will be wise for it will merely flare up the agitation. I have advised the deputation to apply for assistance by the use of precautionary and other measures under section 86 of land revenue code. If a few such cases occur the development of general default may perhaps be checked and the situation prevented from deteriorating.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷ From: Indulal Yagnik, To: The Collector of Surat, Dt: 10,10,1938. Sub: Situation in Mandvi Taluka, F. No: 800-53B - Pt-III, HD (SPL), MSA, Mumbai, 1939, p. 7.

²⁴⁸ From: S.G. Barve, Collector of Surat, To: Rao Bahadur, No. (), Dt: 20,10,1938, Pl: Bardoli, Sub: Tenants in Mandvi, F. No: F. No. 800,53-B, Pt-III, HD-(SPL), JD, MSA, Mumbai, 1939, p 12

Activities of Kisan Sabha for Halis:

With the rise of consciousness about the land rights among tribals of Gujarat, the activities of Kisan Sabha also got extended in the tribal territories of Surat. On behalf of the Halpatis in South Gujarat, who were agricultural labourers permanently attached to their masters and bonded servants, the Kisan Sabha also put forward the demands that the Halpatis should not be treated as bonded slaves but as human beings. After 1946, the demands on behalf of agricultural labourers recede into the background, and tenants and peasants, mostly small land-owning tenants with up to five to seven acres who were evicted in the wake of land reforms legislation came to dominate the Gujarat Kisan Sabha.²⁴⁹

The leaders of Kisan Sabha, tried to focus their attention on various issues concerning peasants by holding meetings at different places, talking out processions to the venue of the Congress Session Swami Sahjanand agreed to come from Bihar for the march. The programme relating to the march was printed and distributed. As February 18th 1938, the day the march to the venue of the Congress Session drew near, the Kisan Sabha leaders heard that section 144 had been proclaimed at Vitthalnagar, the venue of the session. Enquiries were made from the Congress office, but there was no confirmation regarding imposition of section 144.²⁵⁰

On the day of procession, some 10,000 to 12,000 peasants and halpati, mainly from Bardoli, Mandvi, Mangrol Songadh and Vyara assembled. They carried with them red flag and shouted that the practice of taking half-share rent be abolished and *Halipratha* (system of bonded agricultural labour) should be banned. Till the procession reached

²⁴⁹ L.S. Vishwanath, *op. cit.*, p. 1194

²⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p 119

Vitthalnagar no one stopped them when news of the march reached the Congress leaders. Sardar Patel made an angry speech and criticized the Kisan Sabha at the Congress General Body Meeting. But the president of the Haripura Congress Subhash Bose said that the Kisan had become well established in the country and could not be disturbed. Indulal Yagnik, Swami Sahajanand and N.G. Ranga spoke to the assembled kisans and Halpatis. Swami Sahjanand said that kisans supplied, "food, milk and ghee and their grievances must be redressed".²⁵¹

Gandhians took over Halpatis issue between 1924-1927 which resulted in their confrontation with petty zamindars and sahuikars. Thus, whole work with Halpatis land had some of its limitations. This was sensitive issue for it required government intervention to tackle the exploitation imposed by some sahuikars on Halpatis whereas Gandhians were already in good terms with the Government due to the khadi and educational work among adivasis.

Thus, Sardar Patel came with a solution he organized a conciliatory meeting of the Halis and their master. *sahuikars* and *zamindars*. The results of this meeting were; (a) If a Halpati works for his masters for 12 years. Then he should be set free to work wherever he wants. (b) The payments of wages should be made in cash. (c) After Halpatis being relieved from his masters services the master is required to give the persons land where he could build his house.²⁵²

For the service of Halpatis Gandhians of Bardoli and Vedchhi regions were also active. As far as work among Halpatis is concerned due to

²⁵¹ *Ibid*, p 1198

²⁵² I.P. Desai, *op. cit.*, p. 71

population of halpatis are more in Bardoli taluka, Chhotubhai Desai of Puni village and Jhaverbhai Patel of Varad were working for bringing awareness among Halpatis. The problem of exploitation of Halpatis was so great that it was like a challenge to public servants.

There were disagreements and quarrels in respect of labour and wages with Patel Farmers. Halpatis were labouring hard for livelihood; even then sometimes they had to starve for food. Hali tradition was such terrible that the Halpatis could not come up throughout life. In the morning, the Hali would to Kanbis. He had to work in farms or at his place. In case he committed any mistake then he was thrashed and beaten. In such situation, Jugatram decided to launch a programme for welfare of Halpatis,²⁵³ and he prepared workers to work for them. It was resolved to form organizations for development of Halpatis and to abolish the Hali-system, but the work could not go ahead due to lack of coherence among people.

Under the Halpati Sewa Sangh the Halpatis were taught to learn other skills other than agriculture such as tinsmith, ironsmithry etc. The labour cooperatives of them were formed so to get them appropriate wages and safeguard their labour rights. Measures were taken to increase the daily wages of Halpatis for which negotiations were made by Halpati Sewa Sangh. With the implementation of the Ganot Act efforts were made to allot Halpatis some land somewhere Halpatis became owner of land. The organization was required for solution of such problems of Halpatis. For that in the year 1961 Halpati Sewa Sangh was established. An enthusiastic

²⁵³ Previously 'Halpatis' were known as 'Dublas', it was Jugatram Dave who gave them the name 'Hali' or the person who carries the plough or Hal in Gujarati language the carrier of plough is Halpati.

Special ashramshalas were being opened for Halpatis such as Varad ashramshala. Also fair price shops were opened for these people under this ashram, the cooperative credit societies were opened which had following number of people as members; Varad – 128, Akoli – 19, Rajpura – 23, Sankadi – 21, Trimbarva – 30, Rayam – 36, Palvad – 18, Singod – 30, Haripura – 24, Bhamaiya – 7, Mori – 1, Kandod – 1, Rajpura – Nasura – 9, Samthana – 4, Ishanpur – 1, Bamni – 32.²⁵⁶ The Halpati Ashram of Varad is not only serving ashramites but together the ashram people are helping the common village halpatis to fight out the atrocious moneylenders and improve their standard of living.²⁵⁷

Rent Policies and Movements for Land-Reforms in Surat District after Independence

After India got independence a major movement against indebtedness was started. Objectives of these movements were fruitful for both adivasis and non-adivasis. Vedchhi movements incorporated this task against indebtedness because among adivasis the problem was its extreme and due to adivasis were not educated; therefore changes of them being cheated from sahkars were more critical. Before independence Vedchhi leaders made efforts in this direction but could not gain much success. But in later decades after independence leaders of Vedchhi could effectively raise momentum against indebtedness among adivasis which continued from 1947 to 1967 and several adivasi leaders who were working independently on these grounds also associated themselves with the

welfare activities were generated. Under land Tenancy Act of 1950. Halpati Sevak Sangh also distributed several acres of land to these Halpatis and such support is still continuing, quote from; Narayan Desai, *Vedchhi No Vadlo (Guj.)*, Vyara Gram Sewa Samaj. 1984, p. 293

²⁵⁶ *Annual Report, Swaraj Ashram – Vedchhi, 1950*, p 26

²⁵⁷ *Annual Report, Swaraj Ashram Vedchhi, 1948*, p 28

movement e.g. Jinabhai Darji was one such person. Jinabhai Darji a veteran Gandhian from Vyara belonged to rich feudal lord's family but influenced by Gandhian ideals he left his home and joined the nationalist struggle later he felt impressed by Jugatram Dave and with him he joined welfare of tribals of Gujarat. During land reform movements after independence, he actively participated in these movements and could avail several tribals to have land rights.²⁵⁸

The land reform movement in ranimahals of Surat was raised by being within the limits of constitution. Firstly tribals were made to realize that they must not mortgage their lands against debts otherwise in most cases they lost their land for they were not able to release it from Sahukars or creditors.²⁵⁹

For all the land-reforms the government support was required. When the legal reforms for these purposes were started then Government policy was to remove all the intermediaries and make the tiller of the soil, the occupant of land. The various attempts so far made to the Bombay Tenancy and Agricultural Land as Act, 1945, have all been directed towards achieving this object. But in its working the Act had disclosed certain defects and deficiencies. It has found to be inadequate to translate into practice the idea of 'ceiling area' and 'economic holding', which hold the fields as the most important means of solving the agrarian problems of the India.

²⁵⁸ *Interview with Jinabhai Darji at Vyara on 19th Feb. 2002*, Jinabhai Darji believes that only enlightened tribals could achieve success in land reform movement after independence and only such people could ascertain their land rights in long term.

²⁵⁹ I.P. Desai, *op cit.*, pp. 70-72

The Amending Act, of 1955 defines 'Ceiling Area', 'Economic Holdings', and also fixes the minimum and the maximum limits of rents and prices at which a tenant can purchase occupancy rights from his landlord. It also limits the rights of the landlord to evict the tenant and restricts rent to cash payment only.

All permanent and protected tenants and other tenants subject to the rights of the landlord to recover possession for personal cultivation or for non-agricultural use would be deemed to have purchase the land cultivated by them for their land-lords on 1st April 1957, called the Tillers' Day, at prices to be fixed within the prescribed limits. In fixing these limits, the market rates at which the lands are generally sold, the need for maintaining the land as a security, the demand for land and the capacity of the tenant to pay have been placed on the tenant in respect of his evicting a tenant from a holding which is below the 'economic holding'.

Certain provisions of the Act are not applicable to areas under cultivation of sugarcane and fruits. This has been done with a view to providing for the special nature and requirements of the lands and government have taken power to regulate leases of such lands. Similarly the provisions are not applicable to municipal or cantonment areas in order to protect their industrial and non-agricultural development. But the rights already acquired by tenants are protected. Provisions had been made for construction and regulation of water course and for taking power of lands under management and certain other incidental matters. The object of the Amending Act of 1955 is to take the peasantry of this state several

steps forwarded on the road to the achievement of socialistic pattern of society.²⁶⁰

The benefits of certain provisions are entitled not only to scheduled areas but generally to areas which are declared to be 'backward areas', of the fact that those areas predominantly consisted of persons who are socially and educationally backward. They also include areas declared to be a scheduled area under Para 6th of the 5th schedule of the constitution of India. Though there is a general prohibition of discrimination grounds of religion, race, caste or place of birth etc., the state government is permitted under clause (4) of Article 15 of the constitution of India to make any special provision for the advancement of socially or educationally backward classes of citizens or for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. In the original bill, the benefits were restricted only to 'scheduled areas.'²⁶¹

To organize the agricultural labourers of Raniparaj community the ashramites of Vedchhi took the initiatives it was on 2nd March 1947 that the meeting was organized in which 3188 persons from 37 villages came and participated. The head of the meeting and organization was Shri Jesingbhai Dhuriabhai Chaudhari Balda; the vice president was Shri Jugatram Dave and Minister Shri Veljibhai Kanji of village Vedchhi. The organization took initiatives in regard to land reform credit cooperative societies and education with favourable results.²⁶² Since its inception the Vedchhi people have tried to implement on agricultural programme on a

²⁶⁰ K.S. Gupte, *The Bombay Tenancy and Agricultural Land Act, 1948, as Amended by Bombay Act - XIII, of 1956*, pp. 1-2

²⁶¹ *Ibid*, P-2

²⁶² U.N. Dhebar, *Report of the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission, Vol. I, 1960-1961*, pp. 106-107, and *Swaraj Ashram Vedchhi, Annual Report - 1947*, pp. 26-27

continuous basis in addition would mainly depend on the suitability or otherwise of the soil on which depends the success or failure of the cooperative movement.

Beginning Of Cooperative Movement in Surat

Nearly a century elapsed when the cooperative credit society was started in the Surat district. The first, society came into existence on 23rd May 1906 in Degam, a village of the Chikhli taluka. In the same year another society was registered on 20th August in a village called Tarsada in the Mandvi taluka. Two more societies were registered in the next year, one at Sukhesh in the Pardi taluka and one at Rander in the Chorasi taluka. All these societies were started on Raffeisen Model.²⁶³

Cooperative Societies in Mandvi Taluka:

Mandvi Taluka stands by itself. It has been mostly inhabited by ignorant and illiterate backward classes. So it was extremely difficult to find good local members of the managing committee or a secretary. In case of that difficulty most of the societies were placed in the hands of Talatis as secretaries. They had managed to run the societies mostly with non-members deposits.²⁶⁴

²⁶³ P.T. Parikh, *op. cit.*, p. 6, The Raiffeisen Model: The Raiffeisen type of village cooperative credit society is a small bank, with its area & operation generally limited to a single village or a group of neighbouring villages with in a small radius and the number of membership restricted to one hundred. These two restrictions considerably help the smooth working of the society based on the Raiffeisen model

²⁶⁴ "The total amount of bank loan was Rs. 72,663,- on 31,03,1934; but if the figures of loans advanced to Varethi, Tadkeshwar, Bhatkol and Kavanj societies amounting to about Rs. 55,000,- were deducted out of it, it would appear how small the financial help these societies got from the Bank. The bulk of the members of the societies came from backward classes who naturally could not or did not take any intelligent interest in the working of the societies. Studying the financial status of these societies P.T. Parikh wrote: "Tarsada Society, the first society to be traced in the Mandvi taluka in the year 1906 illustrates completely what we have been observing about the other societies in Mandvi Taluka. It was in charge of a group secretary for several years that had ceased to take any genuine interest in the movement as such, and had done nothing to develop it in the neighborhood. At the end of 28 years its

Cooperative Societies in Bardoli Taluka

Bardoli taluka including Valod Mahal had in all had 13 societies in 123 villages of which two namely those Nansad and Nalotha had been cancelled, of the remaining 11 those at Puni and Sarbhon were under the management of Anavil Brahmins of the villages and have been doing well. They work independently of any financial aid from the Bank. Malekpore and Valod Societies were mainly Mohammedan in their complexion and the rest mainly composed of members of the chodhara caste. They were subject to the Mandvi societies of the tribal communities. There is no doubt that the cooperative movement has not spread as widely as it should in the Bardoli taluka firstly because no real efforts were made to popularize the movement amongst the tribal classes, and secondly they ordinarily get their finance quite as cheap if not cheaper from the Sahukars there has been no inducements to them to endeavour of their own accord to form cooperative credit societies. Societies were easily formed amongst needy people who were eager to seize the opportunities of getting cheap finance, even though most of them did not understand the principles of co-operation.²⁶⁵

Similar such societies were raised in Valod Taluka, the following statistics of different cooperative Credit Societies in the years 1946-1947 is as follows:

membership was 40. Working capital Rs. 8961,-, members deposits Rs. 2136,-, reserve fund Rs. 2731- and advances to members Rs. 8813-." P.T. Parikh, *op. cit.*, p. 6

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 22

Cooperative	Members Society's	Shares (Rs.)	Loans (Rs.)
Vedchhi	448	2088	11136
Madhi	669	1769	7668
Algadh	180	901	2244
Khoz	620	1385	—

Cooperative societies were also started by Chhotubhai Desai in Sarbhon and by Makanji Motabhai at Ambapardi villages of Bardoli taluka.²⁶⁶ Cooperative Agricultural Societies; at village of Valod, Ambach, and Vedchhi Raniparaj Halpati – Khedut Mandalis were established to have organized agricultural activities among these tribal communities.²⁶⁷ To form a new society based on nascent economic system of corporate society was incorporated as Gandhian ideology. As a result Vedchhi Movement participated in the Cooperatives and Trade Unions. Before independence there were several cooperative movements.

In 1948 at Valod taluka the Agricultural cooperatives were formed these were; Fatuja Mandali, Ambach Mandali and Konkanvad Mandali. The working of Mandali was not an easy process and there were several constraints which these mandalis faced:

- (i) The landlords and sahuks put several hurdles and in an instance took over the lands of adivasis for many of them did not know different legalities imposed by the landlords and sahuks.
- (ii) 1950-1953 were curse for agriculture as drought brought poor harvest for agriculturists.

²⁶⁶ *Swaraj Ashram Vedchhi, Annual Report, 1947, p. 28*

²⁶⁷ *Ibid. p. 28*

(iii) These Mandalis did not have goods which could be said as economically beneficiary.

But above constraints made one thing clear that for eradication of above ills survival and further growth of corporate ²⁶⁸

Work-Force of Vedchhi

This way the community based programmes of Vedchhi kept on increasing their fields of work. In all such activities the work force came from different parts of India either of Gandhian Sarvodaya Parivar, or newly based university students from Mumbai, Ahmedabad, and Vadodara and also from far off places like Rajkot, Bhavnagar, and Rajasthan and all of them settled themselves in Vedchhi and Valod areas. This Valod group also constituted many a young graduates from Valod town. The Valod group is an offshoot of the activities of the Vedchhi ashram, though initially it developed independently. It was formed by some of the natives of Valod, the headquarters of the taluka, which is about four kilometers from Vedchhi. The group consists of six persons. Born in late 1920s, they all belong to the same age group. They played and studied together in the schools situated in outside the village. They are, the sons of Banias and Brahmins whose fathers were absentee landlords or moneylenders-cum-traders. Like many school boys of pre-independence era they were influenced by the Gandhi and the freedom movement. They organized student activities such as distribution of books, performance of drama, cleaning of the streets and celebration of Gandhi Jayanti (Mahatma Gandhi's' Birthday) like many other Gandhian Youths, they romanticized

²⁶⁸ I.P. Desai, *op. cit.*, p. 82

village life and decided to settle in Valod itself to reconstruct the village according to the Gandhian model.

However, they could not afford themselves to engage in full-time voluntary work without financial support. Hence, they had to take to some employment to enable them to earn their livelihood. For this purpose they could either take up the traditional family occupation – agriculture, business, or money-lending or they could become teachers in the village school. Business and money lending were automatically ruled out, because the young boys thought that these occupations were exploitable. On the other hand, they lacked the knowledge and experience which are necessary for purchasing agriculture as an occupation. The only other alternative was service in the village school. Teaching could give them a living and at the same time enough leisure to enable them to pursue constructive activities.²⁶⁹

There was only one primary school in the village, managed by the district school board. The three members of the Valod group approached the office-bearers of the board and offered their services. The boards were convinced about their abilities and sincerity towards the school, and were willing to appoint them as teachers. But the local village leaders did not want competitors in the public life of Valod and therefore succeeded in preventing the Board from giving over the responsibility of running the school. At this juncture the leaders of the Vedchhi ashram, Jugatram Dave who was in touch with these young men came to their rescue.²⁷⁰ He invited them to join the ashram as teachers. Two members of Valod group

²⁶⁹ Interview with Allubhai Shah 11th Feb. 2002 at Valod, also refers to Jugatram Dave, *Mari Jivan Katha*, *op. cit.*, and Chap. VIII

²⁷⁰ Interview with Mr. Bhikhu Vyas, village, Vedchhi, 15th March 2003, Also see; Ghanshyam Shah, *Decentralizing Planning*, *op. cit.*, p. 205

immediately accepted the invitation and joined the ashram in 1948. The other four joined at a later stage, while working in the ashram, they received lessons in Gandhian ideology and programmes. The ashram helped them to establish contacts with Gandhian workers who were taking part in the constructive and political activities in various parts of the country. Slowly, the Valod group began to feel that their employment as teachers did not offer them a wide enough field of activities. They were, therefore, in search of an opportunity to get involved in rural economic development programmes.

At this time (1951), the planning commission prepared the first five year plan for the whole of India. The plan adopted the Community Development (C.D.) and National Extension Service (N.S.E.) programmes for rural reconstruction. The first programme owes its origin to the west. It was influenced by the 'extension work' programme of the U.S.A. and the village-uplift movements of the Great Britain. The programme is based on 'self-help', and the utilization of local human natural resources. It had been started symbolically on Gandhi's birthday, 2nd October in 1952, with 'American Technical and Financial Assistance'. The khadi and village industries commission managed by Gandhian Constructive workers and financed by the Government launched the intensive Area Planning Scheme adopting the Gandhian version of the community development approach in fourteen blocks. One of them was Vedchhi, where the commission handed over the project of Jugatram Dave, the leader of the ashram. Dave asked the Valod group to carry out the project. Under the guidance of Zhaverbhai Patel of Khadi Commission, the Valod group accepted this responsibility in 1953. Later on, in 1957, the Valod group set-up the formal organization known as Vedchhi Intensive Area Scheme (VIAS), under the chairmanship

of Jugatram Dave. Under the main scheme, the commission provided the funds necessary for the payment of the salaries of the full-time workers. It also provides a small fund for undertaking economic programmes. The scheme ended in 1961. Thereafter, the Vedchhi scheme itself prepared five-year plans for the taluka, plans entitled 'Buildings from Below'. The Planning Commission in New Delhi, postponed its planning, exercise at one stage; so did the Valod group. The Planning Commission prepared a rolling plan for 1977-78. So did the Valod group, claims to have adopted in Janshakti Jagruti that is consciousness of peoples power. The plan aims at using local resources and mobilizing people for participation in the execution of the programme. It is an attempt at 'establishing' a decentralized co-operative economy and thereby at building a Sarvodaya Society on the Gandhian model.

PROGRAMMES UNDER VALOD GROUP

The Valod group has undertaken a variety of programmes with a view to build rural society from below during the last two and a half decades. The group is a creative agent in a process that increasingly establishes links between the local rural societies and outside forces. The outside forces are not monolithic. They are complex and often pull in opposite directions. The intermediaries' do not get swept away by all kinds of outside forces. They try to be selective and strengthen certain forces. They dilute or modify some and ignore others. Their selection guided by their 'ideology' and subjective interests. If the ideology is not well defined or if it is utopian the intermediaries become more vulnerable to subjective interests and the forces conducive to them. Precisely this has happened to the VIAS.

The VIAS was greatly influenced by national and international forces the government policy market and the availability of financial assistance in formulating the programmes whether for Khadi or a paper plant. The VIAS had limited options in the selection of the programmes. Whenever it tried to ignore the market forces, the programmes came to a stand still soon after they remained non-starters. Besides the market forces, the response of the local people also influenced the VIAS programmes.²⁷¹

In 1954 the Valod group organized 'Vedchhi Gram-Udyog Vikas Kendra'. By now they had implemented their own two five year plans, the third one is being implemented to achieve the goal of total development of the taluka. 'Valod group' has been functional in the taluka since 1954. The 'Valod Group' in charge of implementation of Vedchhi Intensive Area Scheme (VIAS) is officially known as Vedchhi Pradesh Sewa Samiti, Valod.²⁷² Under the auspices of Vedchhi Pradesh Sewa Samiti, by now five educational institutes, 26 small industrial units under Khadi and village industries 53 cooperatives had been established in the region. Development institutes like planning center, Sarvodaya Scheme and Antodaya Centres were also running under its collaboration and supervision. Most of the institutes are directly managed and controlled by Vedchhi Pradesh Sewa Samiti.

A network of educational institutes and cooperative societies in the Valod taluka is the result of the efforts of Vedchhi Pradesh Sewa Samiti. Industrial cooperatives, poultry and 'Nira Sahkari Mandali', Milk Producers Cooperative Farmers Development Cooperatives, Agricultural

²⁷¹ Ghanshyam Shah, in Peter Robb (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 225

²⁷² Satish Bhakta, 'Uplift of the Poor Tribals: A Case Study of the Voluntary Organisations', *Adivasi Gujarat*, Vol. I, No. 1, 1998, p.38

laborers Cooperatives Irrigation Society and Cooperative Consumers Sector has enabled Valod to develop faster than other backward talukas. Vedchhi Pradesh Sewa Samiti realized after experience of implementation of its two five year plans and also after drafting the blue-print for the third five-year plan for rural reconstruction of Valod taluka that even after their consistent work for all round development of tribals in the taluka, then still existed families who were not much or at all affected by their programmes for the development of Valod taluka. Valod group decided to concentrate on the below poverty line families to level up their socio-economic standard and at last bring them up to so-called minimum standard of living, lifting up rather the process of uplift of the poorest of the poor has been renamed as 'Antodaya'.

In a predominantly tribal taluka, it is but natural that most of the beneficiaries' are bound to be tribals – particularly for such programme. About forty percent of the beneficiaries are landless labourers.

While implementing schemes for the development of individual families it was felt that for such a massive task institutional as well as community support is inevitable. Identified families have to be organized for collective solution of the individual family problems connected with their socio-economic upliftment. Three such centers are at; Bajipura, Degama, and Vedchhi which are functioning. These three centers *Antodaya Kendra*, serve the purpose of community centers which are registered under Public Trust and Societies Act, training Classes for small scale or cottage industries and new occupations as well as social education classes for adults are conducted at Vedchhi. It serves the purpose of small industrial unit also by providing work to a person or persons who do not

have accommodation at home to pursue their occupation such as carpentry and tailoring for which they were trained at their center. Fifteen such centers are planned and will be set up covering the entire taluka. It is hoped by the organizers of the Vedchhi Pradesh Sewa Samiti that in future, growth centers or service centers would no-doubt emerge from such small humble beginning.

The implemented economic programmes mentioned above have started giving results to the participant beneficiaries' families depending upon their pains, labour, and favourable circumstances for the operation of the accepted activity scheme. The rise in the family income can be vitiated or nullified by the growth of the family in terms of persons to be fed, supported and to be employed or engaged in work. The danger of the overgrowth of the family was equally identified and steps were taken to keep the size of the family planning as small as possible. Family planning was propagated to seek the equilibrium with the growth of the population and pre-capita income of the family.

Enrolment drives to increase literacy and levels of literacy, environmental sanitation. Personal hygiene, *Gram Safai Works*, maximum utilization of primary Health Centre Services has been also undertaken and positive results were achieved. 'Vikas Sewa Dal' comprised of secondary school students from the educational institutes run by Vedchhi Pradesh Sewa Samiti does plays it's role on weekends for extension, demonstration, and provides voluntary services to the villagers. As a result, Bhagtai i.e. healing cure and treatment of village quack had been minimized propagation of abstinence, use of khadi cloth and spinning have become a regular feature of the programmes for social development.

Looking to the economic viability, now there is a good demand by identified families for projects, activities, programmes in the field of agricultural development, animal husbandry, and dairying, cottage industry and training and help for diversification of the occupation. Efforts are concentrated to develop the programmes/ activities in the above sectors. Recently Vedchhi Pradesh Sewa Samiti has planned to launch an ambitious multipurpose sugarcane (sugar factory) processor project which will cover about 5 to 7 hundred families. Now-a-days Valod group is busy in helping Voluntary Workers, and leavers in organizing 'Antodaya' work in their talukas. Their entire instance this work is getting extended in sixteen other talukas of Surat and Valsad districts.

The Organisation

Chief organizers of Vedchhi Intensive Area Scheme are at the apex of the organizational structure to implement or operate 'Antodaya Programme'. Educational and other centers established by Vedchhi Pradesh Sewa Samiti serve as the nucleus for proliferation and extension of the programme for lifting up the poor tribals. All the villages of the taluka are grouped into six operational group areas in charge of one full-time paid worker exclusively for 'Antodaya' work to assist the full-time workers and to involve the participants at grass roots in planning and implementation of 'Antodaya Programme' a village level committee is formed. Taluka level Committees in group meetings. Organizers, Coordinator and paid workers regularly meet once in a week for review and planning. Monthly *shibirs* are also held where in all concerned with 'antodaya' work participate, the venue for such *shibirs* change in rotation so as to cover all the areas. A

quarterly meeting of Vedchhi Pradesh Sewa Samiti is convened to review the work done and chalk out the plan for future development activities.

Vedchhi Pradesh Sewa Samiti aims at more employment, more production, and more income for rural poor, especially for the poorest of the poor tribals who are psychologically depressed about any positivism for their own development.²⁷³ Valod group could undertake the experiment of evolving grass-root growth model of the integrated rural development because of its social background. Two forces have played part in preparing this social background. For a stretch of over year, the devoted Gandhian constructive workers Shri Jugatrambhai Dave had been steadfastly preparing the adivasi population to aspire for a better life and to learn to live and work in cooperation and to imbibe the spirit of self-respect. During this long period of stay at Vedchhi (1926-1986) he trained thousands of adivasi boys and girls and prepared the ground for social reconstruction.²⁷⁴

GRAM-SEWA SAMAJ

The banyan tree of Vedchhi ashram went on spreading more and more with 'Passing time', workers and institutions kept on growing as off schools of Vedchhi activities. One such activity was constituted by workers like Mr. Jinabhai Darji and Prabodhbhai Joshi under the same auspices of 'Gram Seva Samaj', at Vyara. Jugatram Dave was its motivator and supporter since its inception, and he became its first president, under him were working Jinabhai Darji²⁷⁵ and Prabodhbhai Joshi as school master

²⁷³ *Ibid.* p. 41-46. A detailed interview with Allubhai Shah and Babubhai Shah also helped me in structuring this part of the chapter, Dt. 19th Feb. 2002, Pl. Valod

²⁷⁴ Jhaverbhai Patel and Allubhai Shah, *The Grass Root Growth Model*, Surat, Sarvodaya Ayojan Kendra. 1965, p. 7

²⁷⁵ While my field works in Vyara I interviewed Shri Jinabhai Darji and Prabodhbhai Joshi. Unfortunately Jinabhai was reluctant to give his biographical interview in detail so I could get only partial accounts of his life. Dt. 19th Feb. 2002. Pl. Vyara, Gram Sewa Samaj Office.

and coordinator of forest labour cooperative society, respectively. Before dedicating their energies for Gram Sewa Samaj both these young men were freedom fighters and were close associate to the activities of Jugatram Dave in the ranimahals of South Gujarat. Jinabhai Darji also activated a tenant's movement in village Borkhali of Vyara taluka.²⁷⁶

As an educationist with Gram Sewa Samaj, Jinabhai Darji did not keep himself tied with activities solely working in Vyara proper. He expanded the concept of Nai-Talim to other regions of the Vyara taluka. As an empowered witness of Jugatram Dave, he did not sit idly and expanded works of village education and service by making it a medium.

The education wing of Gram Sewa Samaj extended up to higher secondary schools and Matula Adyapan Mandir (woman's teacher training college) for training of primary school teachers. Jinabhai Darji was cautious that schools may not become stale in their teaching style so ever new programmes were being added in its thirty seven vidyalayas, chhatralayas and ashramshalas run through this institution.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid*, Gram Sewa Samaj was established in 1961.

UKAI NAVNIRMAN SAMITI

When Ukai Dam was constructed on river Tapi at taluka Songadh, district Surat. Ukai Navnirman Committee was established in 1966 by Shri Rameshbhai Desai under the guidance of Jugatram Dave and other Vedchhi members. When in 1968 flood came in Tapi River then several activities were generated by Shri Ravishankar Maharaj and his associates in the region in association with Ukai Navnirman Samiti.²⁷⁸ Under the Samiti villages submerged were made to displace and the Ukai Navnirman Committee played an important role to erect new colonies, Educational institutions, hostels, kindergartens, were started in these new colonies. Presently (2004) three ashramshalas, four girls' hostels, and two higher secondary schools are working in the region. Mrs. Manjulaben Rameshbhai Desai looks after the administration of Ukai Navnirman Samiti she has been doing Herculean activities of social uplift in the remote areas of the jungle through prohibition, social service and cultural activities.²⁷⁹

As an offshoot of Ukai Navnirman Samiti – Nesu Sewa Ashram Harod was established by Shri Govindbhai Vasava. Shri Vasava himself belonged to displaced tribal community due to construction of Ukai dam at Uchchhal taluka. So, he was quite enthusiastic to work in his won tribal area. He became MLA of the region in 1975 and kept his ambition alive to work in this region. Today, about eight ashramshalas, five primary schools, 1 girls' hostel, and 7 boys' hostels are working under its auspices.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁸ Narayan Desai, *op. cit.*, PP. 299-300.

²⁷⁹ Madhobhai D. Chodhri, *op. cit.*, PP. 45-46.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid*, PP. 51-52, visited the place during my field trip of Uchchhal Taluka – 18th March 2003, Tal. Uchchhal. Received feed back of the ashram activities from the local taluka settlers.

Referring to services of Shri Rameshbhai Desai under Ukai Navnirman Samiti, Jayaben Shah wrote: "Rameshbhai Desai is the true servant of tribals who has dedicated all his life for the service of tribals for which he had to fight against high caste people and the government officials. He dedicated his entire life for the decolonized masses of Ukai dam and worked for their welfare."²⁸¹

GANDHIANS IMPACT ON TRIBALS OF SURAT

Compared to other states in Indian Union, the Gandhian influence found wider expression in different sectors of activities among tribal regions of Gujarat. From the reform orientation of tribal societies of earlier stage, the focus gradually changed to what got labeled as constructive activities, Mahatma Gandhi emphasized on the development of self-reliant village communities, with its major components being production of one's own cloth, establishment of village industries (Gram-Udyog), basic education, removal of untouchability and maintenance of basic hygiene and sanitation. Linked with the nationalist movement, these principles became major components of the progressive outlooks of late Gandhians, initiated by Gandhi and influenced by his thoughts during the freedom struggle. Many individuals dedicated their life towards rural reconstruction.

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century Gandhian workers launched various programmes for mobilizing these groups towards adopting various social reforms and productive economic activities for their overall upliftment. They also came forward in different types of relief works. Amrutlal Thakkar, popularly known as Thakkar Bapa, and members

²⁸¹ Jayaben Shah, 'Adivasina Ananya Sevak': (The dedicated servant of adivasis), *Bhooniputra*, Year 37, Vol. 19, No. 112, Dt. 16,06,1990. P.23

of Servants of India Society carried out relief work in the State during the 1990 famine subsequently he started the Bhil Sewa Mandal in the Panchmahals district in 1919 A.D. On the advice of Mahatma Gandhi people like Jugatram Dave, Chunnilal Mehta, Uttamchand Shah etc. moved into tribal areas and while working towards making them conscious about literacy, basic education, social reforms and taking to economically constructive activities rooted within their own contexts also continued to mobilize them for participating in the nationalist movement.



Dasriben Chodhri and Manoj Chodhri, Vedchhi Swaraj Ashram, 11/02/2004

4

The influence of Gandhian ideals contained to effect associations even during the past-independence era, though towards later decades changes began to appear among some of them. Such changes were often caused by debates on:

- (i) Whether or not a newer or more efficient technology in the traditional spinning wheel is adopted.
- (ii) Whether strategies of responding to the new market situations, even if they appeared to be in contradiction with Gandhian prescription up, and
- (iii) Whether programme of rural reconstruction could will be carried but without comprising with the fast changing agrarian, scene in the country.

Under this some organization chose to remain at one extreme of this spectrum with continued attempts of reviving Gandhi's concept of rural self-sufficiency. With such initiatives by these activists several factors are responsible for the change in the ranimahals of Surat which can be classified as follows:

- (i) Constitutional amendments and development planning made for tribals after independence.
- (ii) Role of voluntary agencies in tribal development.
- (iii) Expansion of education.
- (iv) Improvement in transport and communication facilities and acculturation.

The rapid change is more apparent in food and dress but change in attitude and social traditions is gradual. In the following passage the folklores of Dhanka tribe of Gujarat are taken into consideration so to

understand or record the large cultural changes that had taken place in the tribal societies. Towards modernization in the trend of thought and aspiration and in the manner of expression, naturally the tribal people who came into the contact with non-tribal rich peasants and urban people absorb their culture enough to represent it in their folklores. The folk songs also reflect the spirit of freedom patriotism which evolved during 20th century especially under Mahatma Gandhi:

Ame khadi no Pyjama Paheria

Gulam Pandu na kariaye

Ane Mandini Nankari kariye

*Sansunina kariye Gulam Pandu Na Kariye.*²⁸²

In these folklore tribals sing their endurance, during natural calamities or their bliss in the various festivals and ceremonies. Even activities of social reform and educational importance are in the form of folklores.

Limitations of Gandhians' Work

After taking lengthy interviews of social reformers inclined with Gandhian ideology and tribal intellectuals, I acquired various views about cultural transformation in the tribal societies of Gujarat with special reference to ranimahals of Surat district. In one such view, the Gandhians were unable to imbibe the tribal culture in complete so the reform activities they initiated were not satisfactory from both the fronts. Secondly, there was lack of appropriate volunteers who could spread the reformist activities and its ideas till the far-flung region.

²⁸² The above stanza of folklore means; "Dressed we in khadi Pyjama, tolerate we no service, serve we not in schools, and serve we never as Halis, tolerate we no servitude," as quoted in: P. G. Shah, Tribal life in Gujarat – Chap. X – folklore Art, Mumbai, Popular Prakashan, 1955, P-224

About the culmination of social reformist and economic reform tendencies of Vedchhi in Surat area many a tribal leaders, activists and commoners feel that it were only landed gentry among tribals which got benefited and not the landless poor tribals.²⁸³ According to Jinabhai Darji, the economic reforms and land reforms which were raised by the Gandhians in the ranimahals of Surat could not be benefited to a very large extent the primitive and landless tribal groups, further he said that the main groups of tribal communities who got benefited most were chodhris as they fell directly in the jurisdiction of the Vedchhi's reformist activities.²⁸⁴

Secondly Gandhians themselves failed in many grounds to inculcate spirit of the grounds to inculcate spirit of the true Gandhism among tribals. The approach of the Jugatram Dave was more Hinduized than secular. So, he could not appreciate the tribal culture in its entirety.

²⁸³ Interview taken of Manoj Chodhri (A tribal folk lorist) and Madhubhai Chodhri (Former principal Kumar ashramshala – Swaraj Ashram Vedchhi) Dt. 17th Feb. 2002, Pl. Vedchhi, Tal. Valod, Dist. Surat

²⁸⁴ Interview with Jinabhai Darji, *op. cit.*



Narayan Desai at Gandhi Vidyapith, Vedchhi, Valod, 14/02/2004

Narayan Desai believes that due to Governments policies, and limitations of funds Jugatram Dave and his associates at Vedchhi could not expand their work and could not reach out till the 'unto the last' of tribal communities. Altogether with it there was scarcity of selfless workers who could dedicatedly work for the cause of tribals.²⁸⁵ Apart from that due to entrance of outside agencies in the tribal society's range of ideas have also entered and so the differences also evolved in their society and the tribal people, started saying for different political groups. In the present scenario we come across a range of changes in the tribal societies of northern and southern Gujarat. In these areas the people have become educated and to a great extent the credit to their educational expansion could be given to these organisations. Even today the young men of tribal communities take lessons from the works done by the leaders of Bhil Sewa Mandal and Vedchhi. The persons who were associated with these organisations are role models of ethical leadership.

²⁸⁵ Interview with Narayan Desai, *op. cit.*