



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### The Kisan Sabha and Adivasi Struggles in Thane District after 1947

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**Abstract:** This article traces the history of the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) in Thane district, Maharashtra, after 1947, that is, after the Warli Adivasi revolt of 1947. It is based on oral narratives by AIKS activists and leaders and on secondary sources. After the Warli revolt, the AIKS in Thane district mobilised the people around issues of land, forests, water, wages, and other livelihood issues. The article documents and analyses the nature of this mobilisation, the demands raised by the AIKS, and the extent to which these demands achieved success. Our evidence suggests mobilisation was successful because the people posed continuous challenges to multiple forms of exploitation by means of mobilisation by the AIKS on issues of Adivasi livelihood, and as a result of the initiation of welfare programmes through participation in local-level electoral politics.

**Keywords:** Adivasi struggles, Thane district, All India Kisan Sabha, oral history, agrarian relations in Maharashtra, Scheduled Tribes, land rights, Forest Rights Act.

#### INTRODUCTION

Historically, during the period of British colonial rule as well as after India gained Independence, the Adivasi people of India have been victims of economic and social exploitation and marginalisation. A recent contribution to the literature has characterised the principal means of exploitation of the Adivasis as being alienation from land and the denial of access to common property resources by violent, coercive displacement, and a corresponding loss of livelihoods (Karat and Rawal 2014, Shah 2004).

British colonialism effected and aggravated the alienation of the Adivasi people from land and forests in a number of ways (Desai 1979, Prasad 2006–7, Chattopadhyay 2012). The period of colonial rule was characterised by depeasantisation of the Adivasis, and the conversion of large sections of them into landless, often bonded,

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labourers (Kela 2006, Desai 1979, p. 130). A process of subordinating Adivasi labour to the needs of capitalist accumulation was set in motion by colonial rule (Ambasta 1998).

The period of colonial rule was, of course, also characterised by Adivasi resistance. Early movements of the Adivasis were led by elites among them who invoked the notion of a common identity based on a communitarian past. By their very nature, these movements were local and restricted. But most Adivasi movements, both before and after Independence, took place in conditions of severe deprivation and socio-economic oppression; they sought (and achieved) a measure of relief and some restructuring of the socio-economic relations (Prabhu 1998, p. 234).

Among these were a spate of activities and struggles in the 1940s led by the Communist Party of India (CPI) in several areas of the country with a sizeable Adivasi population, particularly Tripura, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra. The successful struggles of the Tripura-based Ganamukti Parishad, and the work done by the Kisan Sabha and the CPI among the Warli Adivasis of Thane in Maharashtra are well known in the history of India's peasant and Adivasi movements (Prasad 2003). These struggles raised issues such as ownership of land by Adivasis, their lack of access to forests, the low wages paid to landless labourers and the low prices their products fetched, and the system of forced labour. Movements led by or inspired by the Communist Party raised new issues and slogans, and consciously attempted to integrate these with the struggle for a better socio-economic order. In that sense, these struggles represented a distinct phase in the history of Adivasi movements of the colonial period.

Before the formation of the Kisan Sabha, the peasant and Adivasi movements of Maharashtra were scattered and lacked organisational unity (G. Parulekar n.d.). The Maharashtra Kisan Sabha was formed on January 12, 1945, at a conference held in Titwala in Thane district. More than 7,000 peasants from various districts of the State attended the conference, which elected a state committee with Buwa Nawale as president, Shamrao Parulekar as general secretary, and Godavari Parulekar as one of the joint secretaries. Among the delegates to the conference were Adivasis from Umbargaon tehsil of Thane district.

The struggles of the Kisan Sabha in Thane district began with the Warli revolt of 1945-7. The revolt, which was led by the Kisan Sabha, formed the basis for the organisation of the Adivasis of Maharashtra (Singh 1978, Prasad 2006). It was a wide struggle against exploitation and oppression that sought to change production relations, and it provided the Kisan Sabha with a base among the Adivasis of the region, enabling it to take up issues affecting the Adivasi people even after the revolt was over (Upadhyaya 1980).

There is, however, a dearth of studies highlighting the role played by the Kisan Sabha in mobilising Adivasis in Thane district, Maharashtra, after the Warli revolt, especially after the 1960s. Scholars like Kude (1978) and Ambasta (1998) have argued that the Kisan Sabha was unable to consolidate the gains of the Warli revolt and sustain the momentum of the movement. D. Saldanha (1984) pointed to a shift in focus in the activities of the Kisan Sabha, from “confrontation” (as seen during the Warli struggle) to “reconciliation” (through participation in the electoral process). Similarly, it has been argued that the militant character of the Kisan Sabha changed to assume a “developmental” nature (Ambasta 1998, Heredia and Dandekar 2000).

This article traces the history of the Kisan Sabha in Thane district, Maharashtra, after 1947. It deals with Adivasi struggles in Thane after the Warli revolt and the role played by the Kisan Sabha in these struggles. It is based on oral narratives and interviews with 20 Kisan Sabha activists and leaders from Thane, and from secondary sources. The article attempts to analyse the nature of mobilisation of the Adivasis and the demands raised on their behalf by the Kisan Sabha, and the extent to which these demands were met over a period of time. It also assesses the participation of Kisan Sabha members in elections at different levels, and the ways in which they highlighted the demands of the Adivasis as elected representatives. The article thus draws attention to the significant factors underlying the Kisan Sabha’s mobilisation of the Adivasis in Thane district, Maharashtra.

#### *THE WARLI REVOLT AND AGRARIAN STRUGGLES OF THE 1950S AND 1960S*

The Warli revolt of 1945–7 is a critical watershed in the agrarian history of Thane district, and has had a lasting significance (Ambasta 1998). The demand for land and the demand for higher wages were two important pivots of the movements led by the Kisan Sabha from the 1940s through the 1960s. Such movements included struggles against slavery and forced labour, landlords and moneylenders, and for land, tenancy rights, and forest plots; the issues raised ranged from higher wages for grass-cutting to the question of autonomy of the Adivasi people.

#### *Conditions of the Adivasis during Colonial Rule, the Warli Revolt, and the Emergence of the Kisan Sabha*

During British colonial rule, the Adivasis of Thane district lived and worked under wretched and exploitative conditions marked by forced labour (*veth*), high rents, low wages, usury, and extra-economic coercion (Symington 1939). Landlords, moneylenders, forest contractors, and state officials played a key role in perpetuating these conditions (Symington 1939, G. Parulekar 1975, S. V. Parulekar 1979). By the 1940s, most Adivasis in the region had been reduced to the position of tenants or agricultural labourers, bonded to landlords and moneylenders one way or another (I. M. Saldanha 1986). As tenants, they had to pay high rents as well as pay back to

landlords the advance of grain (*khavti*) made to them during the preceding year for their subsistence (*ibid.*, p. WS-42).<sup>1</sup>

Historically, the rural labour process in Thane was marked by two dominant forms of control — *veth begar* and *lagna gadi* (Ambasta 1998, p. 416) — which led to brutal exploitation of Adivasi labourers. *Veth* or *veth begar* was the term for the system of forced labour extracted from tenants by landlords. The system was a consequence of the tenants' dependence on landlords not only for cultivation but also for subsistence, for not less than five months in a year (Symington 1939, G. Parulekar 1975). The landlords extracted such forced labour for as many days as they wished, with many Adivasis having to contribute as much as a fortnight's labour in a month (I. M. Saldanha 1986). Adivasi labourers were paid either one *anna* or rice barely sufficient for one meal as wages for forced labour.<sup>2</sup> *Lagna gadi* was the term for the labourer as a permanent hereditary servant of the landlord, bonded to him in consideration for loans taken for meeting his marriage expenses. The servant had to serve his master until the debt was repaid, which often passed from one generation to the next (G. Parulekar 1975, Upadhyaya 1980, I. M. Saldanha 1986, D. Saldanha 1984). The worker's wife and children were also bonded to the landlord (I. M. Saldanha 1986).

It was in this context that the Kisan Sabha began its activities in Thane district. In the years immediately before Independence, 1945-7, Thane witnessed the famous Warli revolt led by the Kisan Sabha in Umbergaon, Dahanu, and Palghar talukas (sub-districts). Shamrao Parulekar and Godavari Parulekar, communists, freedom fighters, and Kisan Sabha activists, were closely associated with this struggle. The basic reasons for the revolt were the "Warlis' abominable condition of wretchedness and their suppression by tyrant landlords" (S. V. Parulekar 1979, p. 569).<sup>3</sup> The Warli revolt resulted in major gains for the Adivasis of Thane: an end to the system of forced labour (*veth begar*) and bonded labour (*lagna gadi*); fixed wages for grass-cutting and other forest-based work of four and two *annas* a day respectively; and payment of substantial rent arrears (G. Parulekar 1975). Landlords were forced to pay Rs 3.50 and Rs 4.00 as daily wages for grass-cutting in jungles and the coastal strip, and a system of wages was devised by the Kisan Sabha whereby all labourers, irrespective of whether they did piece work or were daily workers, would receive Rs 1.25 a day as wages for daily casual work. The revolt also led to an "awakening of the Warli's pride and self-consciousness as a human being" (*ibid.*, p. 188).

<sup>1</sup> It has been argued that though the Adivasis were reported to have been indebted and bonded to the oppressor castes even before British rule, the process of their alienation from land and their conversion into tenants accelerated during colonial rule (Munshi 2007, p. 4).

<sup>2</sup> 1 *anna* = 1/16th of a rupee.

<sup>3</sup> G. Parulekar (1975) and Shamrao Parulekar (1979) have written detailed accounts of the Warli revolt, highlighting the active role played by the Communist Party of India and the Kisan Sabha.

## STRUGGLES FOR LAND AND WAGES

### *Tenancy Laws and Movements for Land, 1940s to 1950s*

The Warli revolt left a lasting legacy and posed a serious challenge to the prevalent agrarian structure. The organised nature of the struggle played an important role in shaping the structure of capitalist relations in agriculture by forcing the state into legislating agrarian reforms (Ambasta 1998, p. 282). The threat posed by the Warli revolt, which raised the issue of exploitative tenurial conditions, the rise of a large class of tenants by the mid-1940s, and the government's anxiety regarding the adverse impact of absentee landlordism on the rural economy all led the Government to promulgate the Bombay Tenancy and Agricultural Lands Act of 1948 soon after Independence (Dewan 1990, cited in Ambasta 1998).

One of the most important provisions of this Act was the category of the "protected tenant," a tenant who could claim ownership rights upon furnishing proof that he had cultivated the land for six years (Fukuzawa 1982, cited in Ambasta 1998, p. 283).<sup>4</sup> The Act did not, however, end the power exercised by landlords over tenants. The physical eviction of tenants and deletion of their names from land records by landlords continued unabated; the only gains from the Act for tenants who escaped such eviction were a lowering of the share they had to pay as rent and a gradual transition to rent in cash (Ambasta 1998, p. 283).<sup>5</sup> Even as a large number of Adivasis did obtain land in the process of enactment of the legislation, the majority of them were to lose land and join the ranks of "free" agricultural workers (Upadhyaya 1982).

The struggles led by the Kisan Sabha in this period centred on effective implementation of the 1948 Act (Upadhyaya 1982). This included protecting tenants from eviction, preventing rack-renting, registering the tenants, and calling for claims to ownership of land to be made by April 1, 1957 or Tillers' Day (*ibid.*, p. 165). Thus, by the time the Land to the Tiller Act of 1957 was passed, rent-paying tenants became legally independent owners of land (Ambasta 1998, p. 283).

### *Struggles for the Implementation of Tenancy Laws, 1950s*

The mobilisation and struggles conducted by the Kisan Sabha in the decade of the 1950s played an important role in the enactment and implementation of the Act of 1957. Large numbers of Adivasis were mobilised to attend the 13th national conference of the All India Kisan Sabha, held on May 19–22, 1955 at Dahanu in Maharashtra, with slogans like "Land to the tiller" (*kasel tyachi jamin*) and "Now we want to be owners of the land" (*aam hala ata jaminiche malak zale pahije*). Preparatory meetings were held in Adivasi hamlets by Kisan Sabha leaders, including Godavari

<sup>4</sup> Though the Tenancy Act of 1939 granted "protected" status to tenants holding land continuously for six years, it was restricted to few talukas (Ambasta 1998, p. 282).

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the number of ways by which landowners scuttled this Act, see Lobo (2011).

Parulekar, Shamrao Parulekar, Laxman Bapu Dhangar, and others. Dhangar, who joined the Kisan Sabha in 1949, recounted that the Adivasis were greatly inspired by the slogans of the Kisan Sabha and the Communist Party of India.<sup>6</sup>

In 1956, the Kisan Sabha mobilised Adivasis on the twin slogans of “Land to the tiller” (*kasel tyachi jamin*) and “He who works should rule” (*rahel tyache rajya*). Implementation of tenancy legislation (*kul kayada*) was one of the demands put forward at that time, and the first of the two slogans was raised in this context. The other slogan reflected a larger demand, for a change in the nature of the state itself. “He who works must rule” meant that the peasantry and the working class, who worked hard for the nation, should have a decisive say in state power.

The importance of the Kisan Sabha’s mobilisation can be gauged by its contribution to ensuring the effective implementation of tenancy laws and tenants’ rights. In view of these agitations, the government decided to transfer possession of land to Adivasi cultivators, and to celebrate April 1, 1957 as the first “Agriculture Day.” Later, by paying a specified amount in instalments, these tenants were able to become the owners of the land.<sup>7</sup>

The Tenancy Act of 1957 was successfully implemented in the Adivasi-dominated talukas of Thane district, Maharashtra, due to the efforts of the Kisan Sabha (Munshi 2007, p. 50). Dhangar estimated the number of tenants in Thane who received land to be more than 150,000.<sup>8</sup> It has been held that, in contrast to the Act of 1948, the Act of 1957 was successful in transferring land to erstwhile tenants, particularly in Thane district (Ambasta 1998, p. 284). Laxman Bhuyal, who joined the Kisan Sabha in 1957, said that the Kisan Sabha’s struggle for the implementation of tenancy laws brought about a change in the oppressive conditions of tenant cultivators. Extreme exploitation by landlords and forceful evictions stopped, and land was transferred to the working people.<sup>9</sup>

There were, however, some serious limitations in the tenancy laws, apart from problems in their implementation. Both the Acts of 1948 and 1957, while ensuring that sections of Adivasis received land, also led to the alienation of Adivasis from land; these sections then became landless agricultural labourers.<sup>10</sup>

### *Struggles for Distribution of Forest Land, 1950s*

From the late 1950s, the Kisan Sabha organised struggles demanding the transfer of plots of forest land to their actual tillers and regularisation of encroached forest

<sup>6</sup> Interview with L. B. Dhangar, Dahanu, May 4, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Laxman Bhuyal, Palghar taluka, August 9, 2012.

<sup>10</sup> See Ambasta 1998, Prabhu 2002, 2009, Lobo 2011.

land: “Give ownership of captured forest plots to the actual tillers” (*atikramit forest plot kasnarya shetkaryachya naave kara*). This was a crucial issue, one on which struggle continues today. It had its roots in the policy of the British colonial regime of establishing a Forest Department and forcibly dispossessing Adivasis of forest land they had been tilling for generations. Agitations led by the Kisan Sabha led to a government resolution in 1960 that stated that “encroachments” that had occurred between 1955 and 1959 would be regularised (Ambasta 1998, p. 289). Secondly, in 1960, the Kisan Sabha took up the question of fallow government land that lay spread over Thane and other parts of Maharashtra. Under the Kisan Sabha’s leadership, Adivasis in Thane district took over and cultivated fallow land that was not classified as forest land.<sup>11</sup>

### *Struggles Against Land Alienation, Indebtedness, and Usury, 1950s and 1960s*

The 1950s and 1960s were decades marked by twin processes of alienation from land and usury-based indebtedness for the Adivasis of Thane district. Low incomes from agricultural crops grown in poor-quality soil and lack of support from banks drove small Adivasi peasants to the doors of moneylenders and landlords in search of credit.<sup>12</sup> They obtained loans from moneylenders on difficult terms; they had to give an undertaking in writing and on court paper to the effect that if the loan was not returned in time, they would surrender their land in payment. On the revenue record (*saat-bara*) the ownership of land remained with the peasant, but on the stamp paper it was recorded that the land belonged to the moneylender. Thousands of small landholders availed of such loans from moneylenders from 1958 to 1968.<sup>13</sup>

Consumption loans to tide over grain shortages were also part of the annual economic cycle of Adivasi peasant households. The rates of interest for these kinds of loans, known as *pale mode* in Thane district, raised by mortgaging crops, labour, or land were in the range of 200 to 300 per cent for every four months (Ambasta 1998, p. 292).

Demonstrations were organised by the Kisan Sabha to bring to the notice of the government that small peasants should be given cheap loans to rescue them from the *pale mode* system. It demanded that the state give loans to small landholders to meet their food requirements for two to three months. The Kisan Sabha regularly organised meetings in the Adivasi hamlets, and made the Adivasis aware of their rights by explaining the need for agitations against *pale mode*. In July 1965, the government tried to tackle this menace of debt dependence by instituting the *Pale Mode Eradication Scheme*, which replaced informal credit sources with institutional

<sup>11</sup> Interview with L. B. Dhangar, Dahanu, May 2, 2012.

<sup>12</sup> See also Upadhyaya 1982.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with L. B. Dhangar, Dahanu, May 2, 2012.



sources (Ambasta 1998, p. 292).<sup>14</sup> Through the 1960s, activists of the Kisan Sabha and the CPI formed themselves into groups and conducted raids in the villages to put pressure on the moneylenders to take 10 per cent more grain than had been lent rather than all the grain that the Adivasis held.<sup>15</sup>

### *Struggles for Grass-Cutting Wages, 1950s and 1960s*

Workers who cut grass were paid extremely low wages by landlords in Dahanu, Talasari, Palghar and Umbergaon talukas. The Kisan Sabha had already initiated a struggle on this issue in the second phase of the Warli revolt, in October 1945 (G. Parulekar 1975, A. Dhawale 2007). At that time, a strike by Adivasi workers in Dahanu and Umbergaon talukas had forced landlords to pay higher wages for grass-cutting, of Rs 3.50 and Rs 4.00 as daily wages for grass-cutting in jungles and the coastal strip (G. Parulekar 1975, p. 107).<sup>16</sup>

The struggle for increasing grass-cutting wages in the post-independence period began in 1953 with periodic negotiations on wage rates. According to Lahanu Kom, who joined the Kisan Sabha in 1959, the wages for grass-cutting and making bundles of grass were very low in the 1950s. As far as he could recollect, a whole day of such work in 1959 in Dahanu fetched a wage of merely Re 1 or Rs 1.15.<sup>17</sup> Even in 1961, workers were getting only Rs 1.15 as daily wage for grass-cutting. The Kisan Sabha, through modes of protest like boycott of work and long marches against landlords in Dahanu, Palghar, and Talasari talukas, pressed for a higher daily wage of Rs 2.50, which some of the landlords finally agreed to give.<sup>18</sup>

Then, in 1965, when the prevailing daily wage was Rs 2, the Kisan Sabha demanded that it be increased to Rs 5. Public meetings were organised and workers were asked to work only for those landlords, moneylenders, or grass traders who were ready to give Rs 5 as daily wage. As a result, a number of landlords finally had to agree to give Rs 5 as wage.

Two years later, in 1967, the Kisan Sabha demanded a further increase in the grass-cutting wage. Taking inflation into account, it increased its demand three-fold, to Rs 15 as daily wage. Government officials agreed to a daily wage of Rs 12 for grass-

<sup>14</sup> According to this scheme, “a loan of Rs 100 was to be given of which not less than 50 per cent would be in grain. It was to be disbursed in two instalments, in June and in August. Its rate of interest was 7.5 per cent. Initially Rs 120,000 was sanctioned to Thane Zila Parishad (ZP) for this” (D. Saldanha 1984, p. 377). Though this loan represented only a nominal amount, involved procedural difficulties, and was to be returned in the next season on harvest of the crop, it was a great relief to the Adivasi peasants when compared to the *pale mode* system.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with L. B. Dhangar, Dahanu, May 2, 2012.

<sup>16</sup> However, this was not necessarily true for all other areas and cases, and wages for grass-cutting were still quite low.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Lahanu Kom, Talasari, July 31, 2012 and August 16, 2012.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*



cutting workers and Rs 25 for those making bundles of grass. These struggles for grass-cutting wages also helped the Kisan Sabha to expand its base and work in Thane district.<sup>19</sup>

### *Autonomy for Adivasis, 1950s and 1960s*

Another demand raised by Kisan Sabha leaders like Shamrao Parulekar in the 1950s was regional autonomy for the Adivasis through constitutional means. Autonomy for the Adivasis, however, was not seen by the Kisan Sabha merely in terms of enactment of legislation. It was integrated with the need for overall development of the Adivasis of the region, and for reducing the gap between Adivasis and non-Adivasis. The core argument underlying the Kisan Sabha's demand for regional autonomy and development in favour of the Adivasis in the 1950s and 1960s was that resources from the Adivasi region were being used to develop other areas of the State, but by neglecting the Adivasi region itself.

### *NEW DEMANDS AND MOBILISATION, 1970s TO 1990s*

This section of the article deals with the Kisan Sabha's struggles from the 1970s onwards. According to Kisan Sabha activist Chaitya Mere, land struggles led by the Kisan Sabha in Thane district grew stronger from the early 1970s.<sup>20</sup> The demands raised by the Kisan Sabha in the struggles of the late 1950s and 1960s included the transfer of forest plots to the actual tillers and regularisation of encroached forest land. From the early 1970s it led mass mobilisations of Adivasis for gaining access to forest plots, against evictions, and against the damage of crops on these plots. As a result of campaigns of passive resistance (*satyagraha*), "fill the jail" (*jailbharo*) movements, and public demonstrations (*morcha*), "encroachments" were regularised and plots redistributed at various intervals. Despite the repression of the Emergency years, the Kisan Sabha worked to ensure the implementation of Acts like the Minimum Wage Act and the Bonded Labour Abolition Act. From the 1980s, it was also involved in freeing the land (besides forest plots) of Adivasis that had been taken over by landowners through various means; it gave a call to occupy fallow government land, forest land and private land across Thane district. In the late 1980s and 1990s, it was involved in "capturing" and establishing the control of Adivasis over various types of land.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the struggles for minimum wages expanded to incorporate demands for minimum wages in paddy cultivation and chiku groves as well. There were differences in the way the Adivasi question was articulated by the Kisan Sabha in Thane district in the 1970s and 1980s, and in the 1950s and 1960s. The demand for Adivasi autonomy was no longer in the forefront as in the

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Chaitya Bikhar Mere, Dahanu taluka, July 28, 2012.

earlier decades. By the 1990s, the Adivasi question came to be linked with the Kisan Sabha's activities around welfare issues, such as the struggle against malnutrition and hunger-related deaths. Alongside, the Kisan Sabha demanded provision of basic facilities, industrialisation, and employment generation in Thane district. The 1990s also saw the demand raised for overall development of the region and not just Adivasi-populated areas. Conferences accompanied by mass rallies and gatherings, *sabhas* and *jahir sabhas* were important means of mobilisation of the Adivasis; and passive resistance, demonstrations, roadblocks, *gherao* and *melava* were popular methods of struggle.

### *Struggles for Forest Plots and Against the Damaging of Crops, 1971–4*

It has been argued that the state's failure to address the land question forced the Adivasis to invade government land and forest land, and these invaded plots of land were treated as "encroachments" by the Government (Ambasta 1998, p. 289). Economic necessity and the basic struggle for survival drove the Adivasis to encroach on government-owned forest and grazing lands, as well as on the lands of individual landowners and public trusts controlled by individual families (D. Saldanha 1984, p. 381). According to Lobo (2011), this was also the phase when land held by Adivasis was being transferred to the hands of non-Adivasis. From the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Kisan Sabha began a mass mobilisation of Adivasis as part of its struggle for forest plots; the struggle was at its peak in 1971–4.

In August 1971, passive resistance was conducted for a month by batches of Kisan Sabha activists on encroached forest plots, and more than 5,000 Adivasis were arrested all over Thane district.<sup>21</sup> The struggle for forest plots invited different kinds of repressive measures. There were attempts by government officials to damage and destroy the forest plots of the Adivasis, and to prevent agricultural cultivation in the forest areas. Activists and workers of the Kisan Sabha and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)] tried to stop the officials of the Forest Department and warned them against such actions. Finally, the destruction of forest plots was stopped and 43,000 acres of forest land in Thane district were redistributed among cultivators (Khopkar 1995, p. 18).

In late 1972, demonstrations were taken out by the Kisan Sabha to offices in different talukas of Thane district to further press the Adivasi demand concerning forest plots (D. Saldanha 1984, p. 384). Continuous agitations by the Adivasis forced the government to regularise land acquired through "encroachment" up to August 15, 1972 through a Resolution dated August 14, 1972 (*ibid.*, p. 385).<sup>22</sup> In 1974, applications for ownership of forest plots from Adivasis were submitted to the government by

<sup>21</sup> Interview with L. B. Dhangar, Dahanu, May 2, 2012.

<sup>22</sup> However, it was limited only to those "encroachments" that were on revenue land and left out the plot-holders cultivating forest lands who constituted a large majority of such cultivators (D. Saldanha 1984, Ambasta 1998).

demonstrations taken out in Dahanu, Palghar, Jawhar, Talasari, Wada, and Shahapur talukas. According to Dhangar, in 1974–5, the government distributed around 17,000 acres of forest land to the Adivasis, spread over four to five locations.<sup>23</sup>

### *Struggles During and After the Emergency, 1975–79*

The Emergency years saw systematic and brutal oppression against the holders of forest plots (Ambasta 1998). Forest Department officials, backed by Emergency regulations and the police, engaged in large-scale and forcible eviction of Adivasis who had “encroached” upon government lands (D. Saldanha 1984). This period was also marked by repression of the Kisan Sabha in Thane district, with many of its activists either being arrested or going underground. Despite this, the Kisan Sabha continued the struggle. The prevalence of indebtedness as well as bonded labour in Thane district was highlighted by a number of peasant organisations, including the Kisan Sabha, and this led to a series of laws being passed by the State Government. Growing indebtedness among the urban and rural poor led the government to pass the Maharashtra Debt Relief Act (3 of 1976) which tried to relieve “the poor peasants and agricultural labourers, especially the Adivasis among them, of indebtedness” (D. Saldanha 1984, p. 396). The prevalence of bonded labour led the government to pass the Bonded Labour Abolition Act No. 19 of 1976 (D. Saldanha 1984, Ambasta 1998).

The Kisan Sabha worked hard to try and ensure proper implementation of the above legislations. In 1975, it launched an agitation demanding implementation of the State Government’s Minimum Wage Act of 1974. The prevalent daily wages were Rs 2 in the season and Re 1 off-season, while the Act prescribed Rs 3. The Kisan Sabha was able to secure this increased wage in Talasari, Dahanu and Wada talukas of Thane district (D. Saldanha 1984, p. 398). It also took up the demand for implementation of the Bonded Labour Abolition Act. One of the important actions launched by the Kisan Sabha in this regard was the freeing of about 1500 bonded labourers in Wada taluka (D. Saldanha 1984, Khopkar 1995).

After the Emergency was lifted, the movement for forest plots revived and the demand for regularisation of encroached land gathered momentum. In 1978, the government passed a Resolution ordering the regularisation of all encroached plots as on March 31, 1978. However, this Resolution left out many encroachers who had been evicted either before or during the Emergency years (Kulkarni 1979, D. Saldanha 1984). It also contained a provision that encroachments found ineligible for regularisation had to be vacated immediately (Kulkarni 1979). A joint front of peasant organisations, including the Kisan Sabha, protested against this Resolution. They demanded that “all the encroachments up to 31 March 1978 be regularised and that credit facilities be given to cultivate barren forest lands,” and threatened to go on indefinite passive resistance (D. Saldanha 1984, p. 400). In 1979, in the face of massive

<sup>23</sup> Interview with L. B. Dhangar, Dahanu, May 2, 2012.

mobilisation of Adivasis, the specified date of March 31, 1978 was pushed back to April 1, 1972. This change, however, was also limited, as it did not take into account those who had cultivated plots between 1966 and 1968. The peasant organisations, Kisan Sabha included, demanded that the period for regularisation be from 1960 to 1978, and that the evidence for encroachment be any one year. They also called for a stay on all evictions till a just settlement was reached (D. Saldanha 1984, p. 402). Encroachments, meanwhile, continued into the 1980s.

### *Land Struggles, 1980s and 1990s*

While the struggle for forest plots of the 1970s was in progress, the process by which the lands of Adivasis passed into the hands of landowners continued. This led the Kisan Sabha to demand that land be given back to the real owners (that is, the Adivasis), and it launched struggles on the demand for the same in the 1980s. It forced the landowners to do so and also led its members physically to take over such lands.

One of the ways in which the land of Adivasis passed into the hands of non-Adivasis was through improper measurement of land. The Kisan Sabha demanded re-evaluation of the documents and that land be returned to the real owners.<sup>24</sup> A second means by which land earlier owned by Adivasis was occupied by other landowners was indebtedness, and forged signatures on court paper. A struggle was launched by the Kisan Sabha to free such lands. According to Edward Vartha, who joined the Kisan Sabha in January 1980, some landowners voluntarily freed lands as a result of this struggle, whereas in some places the Kisan Sabha had forcibly to take back land from them.<sup>25</sup>

In the 1980s, the Kisan Sabha launched a number of struggles to occupy fallow government land, forest land, and private land. In the mid-1980s, it gave a call to Adivasis in parts of Thane district to occupy fallow land. In 1987–8, it started the land-grab movement, and Adivasis from Wada and other talukas occupied fallow forest land.<sup>26</sup>

In the late 1980s and 1990s, there were continuing struggles led by the Kisan Sabha on the issue of land, especially relating to the capture and redistribution of land. These included the land-grab programme of 1987 and 1988, under which more than 3,000 acres around the Tansa Lake area in Thane district were acquired and redistributed among landless peasants.<sup>27</sup> In 1991–2, the Kisan Sabha undertook a programme to rehabilitate Adivasis evicted in the Tansa area. From the late 1980s and 1990s, there were attempts by the Kisan Sabha to capture and redistribute various other types

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Gangaram Sutar, Dahanu, August 6, 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Edward Vartha, Dahanu, July 26 and 27, 2012.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Jagan Mhase, Wada taluka, August 13, 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Report of Maharashtra State Kisan Sabha (1995).

of land, namely trust or revenue-free (*inami*), in Thane district. Overall, during this period, the Kisan Sabha led struggles to establish control of the Adivasis over roughly 1,000 acres of private land, 4,000 acres of fallow government land, and 3,500 acres of trust or revenue-free land (*inami*) in Thane district.<sup>28</sup>

### STRUGGLES FOR WAGES

#### *Struggle for Minimum Wage in Paddy Cultivation, 1977*

Together with the struggles for land, the Kisan Sabha was also involved in struggles for wages in the 1970s and 1980s. One of these was the struggle in 1977 for an increase in the wages of Adivasi labourers employed in rice transplantation (from June to August). The wage paid by bigger landowners was to be at least Rs 4.50 and Rs 4 by smaller landowners, and the wage was to be the same for both male and female workers (D. Saldanha 1984, p. 410). On June 26, 1977, transplanting workers struck work in support of this wage demand. The failure of landowners to agree to the increased wage led to a general strike in the fields from July 6 to 12, in Dahanu, Talasari, and Manor regions of Palghar taluka. About 3,000 agricultural labourers from 41 villages were involved in this strike (D. Saldanha 1984). The month-long strike and urgent need for transplantation in the fields finally led to contradictions among the landowners, with the smaller landowners turning in favour of the increased wage. In a joint meeting of workers and Kisan Sabha activists held at Talasari and Ganjad, Dahanu taluka, Rs 4 was agreed upon as the wage for transplantation.<sup>29</sup> The new wage was Re 1 more than the existing wage of Rs 3. This wage increase in Thane district was regularised by the State Government. It has been stated that 5.4 million agricultural labourers in Maharashtra gained from the wage increase (D. Saldanha 1984, p. 416).

#### *Struggle of Chikuwadi Workers in Dahanu, 1978–82*

By the late 1970s, the Kisan Sabha began organising workers in the chiku farms of Dahanu taluka. It revived the labour union of these workers by forming the *Chikuwadi Sanghatana* in 1978.<sup>30</sup> A struggle of chiku farm labourers began in January 1982 in the Saravli area of Dahanu. The Kisan Sabha organised a strike of 3,000 to 4,000 chiku farm labourers; their demand was a minimum wage of Rs 8 per day. The strike lasted 55 days. The movement finally caused division among the chiku farm owners and some of them agreed to pay the minimum wage.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Report of All India Kisan Sabha Thane District (1995).

<sup>29</sup> Interview with L. B. Dhangar, Dahanu, September 25, 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Chaitya Bhikar Mere, Dahanu taluka, July 28, 2012.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with L. B. Dhangar, Dahanu, September 25, 2012.

### *Development Questions*

The Kisan Sabha's efforts on the question of development of Adivasis in Thane continued through the 1970s and 1980s as well, with newer demands and forms of mobilisation. A series of conferences was organised in and outside Thane district. These included the Adivasi Conference (Talasari, February 1–3, 1974), the Maharashtra Rajya Adivasi Parishad (Charoti, Dahanu taluka, January 8–9, 1978) and the Adivasi conference (Nashik district, December 24–25, 1981). These conferences raised a number of relevant issues. First, they attempted to bring together different Adivasi groups. Secondly, they discussed and passed resolutions on issues of importance to Adivasis, such as the restoration of land that had been taken over by big landowners; grants of cultivable wasteland in the forests to landless Adivasis; changes in the forest policy of the government to safeguard the interests of Adivasis; increases in minimum wages; implementation of irrigation projects; regularisation of forest plots; implementation of the Tribal Sub-Plan; and provision of employment, health, and educational facilities in Adivasi areas.<sup>32</sup>

### *WELFARE ISSUES*

#### *Malnutrition*

Malnutrition has been a major problem of the Adivasis in Thane district, especially in Jawhar, Mokhada, Vikramgad, Murbad, and Wada talukas (M. Dhawale 2006, Ghorude and Shelar 2011). Malnutrition-related deaths have been reported from Thane district since the early 1990s. In 1992, deaths of Adivasi children because of malnourishment were reported from the Wavar-Vangani area of Jawhar taluka. The Kisan Sabha ensured that these deaths were reported in the newspapers and that they received attention across the State. The Kisan Sabha campaigned to highlight the lack of basic facilities like wells, roads, and electricity in the areas concerned. It demanded the provision of food and the establishment of more child-care centres and schools in the villages.<sup>33</sup>

#### *Basic Amenities*

An emphasis on the overall development of the tribal region, especially by means of provision of basic facilities, can be seen in the Kisan Sabha's mobilisation and activities in Thane district in the 1990s. The Kisan Sabha demanded the establishment of a Dahanu–Jawhar–Nashik railway; the provision of electricity, drinking water, roads, pre-schools, primary schools, and primary health centres in all Adivasi hamlets; a public distribution system (PDS) shop for each village; buses for transportation; and the creation of new employment opportunities in the rural areas of the district.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> See *Economic and Political Weekly* (1974), Maharashtra Rajya Adivasi Parishad (in Marathi), January 8–9, 1978, Charoti Naka, Dahanu, Thane district, and Maharashtra Rajya Kisan Sabha, Akhil Maharashtra Rajya Adivasi Parishad (in Marathi), December 24–25, 1981, Nashik.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Ratan Budhar, Jawahar taluka, August 8, 2012.

<sup>34</sup> Report of Maharashtra State Kisan Sabha (1999), pp. 74–5.

## *RECENT STRUGGLES, WELFARE WORK AND THE ROLE OF ELECTIONS*

The period from 2000 saw continued struggles for land and forest plots led by the Kisan Sabha in Thane district. Its mobilisation played an important role in the enactment and implementation of the Forest Rights Act of 2006. This section of the article analyses the struggles conducted after 2000. Secondly, it looks at other welfare issues taken up for struggle by the Kisan Sabha, some of the prominent among these being water and the Public Distribution System (PDS). Thirdly, it discusses the participation of Kisan Sabha leaders in panchayat and other local-level elections, and the welfare work undertaken by them at the local level. In light of criticism that has pronounced a decline of the Kisan Sabha after the Warli revolt, this section looks at the electoral performance of leaders of the Kisan Sabha and the Left at various levels and its importance. It also discusses the Kisan Sabha's attempt to self-critically examine some of the challenges facing the organisation.

### *Land, Water and Other Issues*

#### *Land and Water*

From 2000 onwards, the Kisan Sabha has been involved in campaigns on the issues of land and water. These include campaigns for filling forms for ownership rights over encroached forest plots and public meetings to regularise forest plots.<sup>35</sup> Interviews with Kisan Sabha activists and two case studies of Adivasis from Thane district suggest that there were two processes by which Adivasis were alienated from their land. The first was where Adivasis had documentary proof of the land but the land was actually occupied by other landowners. The second was where Adivasis actually cultivated the land but did not have documentary proof of ownership. In recent years, the Kisan Sabha has been vigorously engaged in freeing land of Adivasis that had fraudulently been occupied by other landowners, and in getting the names of Adivasis registered in the official land records.

The Kisan Sabha has repeatedly pointed that although some of the largest reservoirs in the State are located in Thane, the rural Adivasi population of the district hardly obtains any benefits from them, since most of the water from these reservoirs is supplied to Mumbai.<sup>36</sup>

#### *Forest Rights Act*

The period 2000–14 witnessed large-scale mobilisation on the issue of the Forest Rights Act; indeed the campaign was an important factor in the enactment and implementation of the legislation. On November 18, 2005, demonstrations in which more than 20,000 peasants and agricultural labourers participated were organised

<sup>35</sup> Report of All India Kisan Sabha (2004).

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Rajaram Ozare, Dahanu, June 30, 2012. See also Deshpande 2012.



in all talukas of Thane district.<sup>37</sup> Again, on July 18, 2006, thousands of people participated in demonstrations across the district for enactment of the Forest Rights Act.<sup>38</sup> On December 20, 2006, after the Forest Rights Act was passed by Parliament, a huge, district-wide victory rally of over 25,000 Adivasis was organised at Vikramgad. On January 12, 2007, a 10,000-strong victory rally of Adivasi women was organised by the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) at Talasari. On August 25, 2010, a demonstration of about 20,000 people from ten talukas of the district was taken to the Deputy Collector's office in Jawhar, demanding implementation of the Forest Rights Act.

As part of a State-wide campaign organised by the Maharashtra Rajya Kisan Sabha from January 26–31, 2011, about 25,000 people from ten talukas of Thane district were involved in road-block and fill-the-jails demonstrations to press for the implementation of the Forest Rights Act.<sup>39</sup> The State Government called the Kisan Sabha for talks and conceded some of its demands. However, when even these assurances failed to be implemented, another State-wide road-block campaign was called. It was to begin on April 11, 2013 onwards. April 11 is the birth anniversary of one of the great pioneers of the social reform movement in Maharashtra, Jyotirao Phule, and it is also the foundation day of the All India Kisan Sabha. For two days, over 50,000 Adivasi peasants from Thane, Nashik and other districts blocked State highways and other roads. Eventually the State government had to again call the Kisan Sabha for talks, and certain other demands related to implementation of the Forest Rights Act were conceded.

### *Public Distribution System and Other Issues*

Questions related to the Public Distribution System (PDS), the exclusion of names in Below Poverty Line (BPL) lists, and the supply of electricity began to surface as important campaign issues for the Kisan Sabha. On April 4, 2006, about 8,000 people from Thane district participated in a State-level demonstration held in Mumbai on the issue of farmers' suicides, the hike in electricity bills, corruption in the public distribution system, and unemployment.<sup>40</sup> From May 9 to 31, 2011, about 33,000 people from seven talukas were involved in demonstrations on the question of the exclusion of names from the below-poverty-line list.<sup>41</sup>

In the recent past, there have been campaigns on the issue of the Right to Food Bill. The demands include universalisation of the public food-distribution system and the provision of 35 kg of foodgrain at not more than Rs 2 per kg to every family every

<sup>37</sup> Report of CPI (M) (2008), Talasari taluka, p. 9.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Report of CPI (M) (2012), Talasari taluka.

<sup>40</sup> Report of CPI (M) (2008), Talasari taluka, p. 9.

<sup>41</sup> Report of CPI (M) (2012), Talasari taluka.

month. Campaigns on the issue of food distribution have also involved exposing corruption in the system, especially in talukas like Dahanu.<sup>42</sup>

### *The Role of Panchayat and Other Local Elections in Welfare Work*

D. Saldanha (1984) and Ambasta (1998) have argued that the Kisan Sabha in Thane district was unable to carry forward struggles after the Warli revolt. The participation of Kisan Sabha and CPI(M) activists in electoral politics was seen as the reason for this “decline” (D. Saldanha 1984, Ambasta 1998, Heredia and Dandekar 2000). Such criticism raises the question of the role played by panchayat and other local elections in welfare work undertaken by the Kisan Sabha in Thane district.

### *Participation in Elections*

The accounts of Kisan Sabha leaders show that since the 1970s, elections became important occasions for the Kisan Sabha and the Left in Thane district to raise demands and begin welfare activities at the local level. Arjun Dumada, a resident of Talasari taluka who joined the Kisan Sabha in 1972, contested and won the district council (zilla parishad) election in 1979. According to him, land and forest plots were the two main demands raised by Kisan Sabha leaders at the local level. Dumada felt that it was for these reasons that the CPI(M) had been winning seats in the Talasari panchayat samiti for fifty years.<sup>43</sup> The reasons for the Left’s electoral victories in Talasari were corroborated by Vasant Dodiya, a resident of Kochai village in Talasari taluka who joined the Kisan Sabha in 1972. He pointed out that a number of issues – education, health, electricity, ration cards, irrigation, providing tractors and sinking bore-wells – were taken up by elected representatives at the local level in Talasari taluka. Dodiya also said that though the issues raised by elected representatives had successful outcomes in talukas like Talasari, they were not very effective in other talukas. Nevertheless, he did not believe that the influence of the Kisan Sabha and the Left, was on the wane in Thane district.<sup>44</sup>

### *Elected Representatives and Welfare Interventions*

Laxman Bhuyal, a resident of Aundhane village in Palghar taluka, who joined the Kisan Sabha in 1957, was elected as a block council (panchayat samiti) member in the taluka in 1981. According to him, the supply of electricity, construction of pre-schools and schools, sinking and repairing wells, and distributing land to Adivasis, were some of the tasks he undertook when he was in the block council (panchayat samiti).<sup>45</sup> Rajaram Gehla of Vikramgad taluka, who joined the Kisan Sabha in 1971,

<sup>42</sup> See Pudhari (2012a and b) and Lokmat (2012).

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Arjun Dumada, Talasari, June 18, 2012.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Vasant Dodiya, Talasari, June 18, 2012.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Laxman Bhuyal, Palghar, August 9, 2012.

was the head of a village panchayat (*sarpanch*) for ten years and member of the village panchayat for 35 years. Gehla raised a number of issues when he was elected to the district council (zilla parishad). He helped people get bank loans, water for domestic use, and electricity in their homes. When he was in the Agriculture Department, he asked the government to distribute goats, cows, buffaloes, and pigs to the poor people to enhance their incomes. There were no roads and wells in his village, so he made requests for these of the government, and had roads constructed and wells sunk in his village. He also tried to raise his voice against the harassment of Adivasis by the Forest Department. According to him, it was the Kisan Sabha that gave him a platform to raise and address the above issues.<sup>46</sup>

Activists and leaders of the Kisan Sabha participated not only in local elections, but also elections to the Legislative Assembly of Maharashtra State and to Parliament. Lahanu Kom, who won the Dahanu (Scheduled Tribe) Parliamentary seat in 1977 and the Jawhar (Scheduled Tribe) Assembly seat three times from 1980 to 1990, recounted his electoral experiences. As a Member of Parliament (MP) in 1977–80, Kom was appointed to the Committee of Tribal Affairs. As a part of this committee, he visited Adivasi-inhabited areas all over the country, and tried to understand their problems. As a Member of the Legislative Assembly, Kom tried to ensure that funds were used for building roads and for education, especially for constructing school buildings, in a number of villages in Jawhar. He also constructed buildings for child-care centre workers using his legislator's funds for the purpose.<sup>47</sup> Kom's contribution to the education of Adivasis of the region has been particularly significant. He is currently the president of the Adivasi Pragati Mandal (Tribal Progress Council),<sup>48</sup> an educational institution founded by Shamrao and Godavari Parulekar in 1961 for the educational development of Adivasis. The organisation runs a college, schools, and hostels in the region (Rajput 2013).

### *Electoral Performance*

A look at the results of local body elections in Thane district from 2002 to 2012 shows that communist candidates have consistently been winning elections in some areas, and taking charge as representatives in district councils and block-level councils. Their victory has been largely in the *tehsils* of Talasari, Dahanu, Jawhar, and Vikramgad. One illustration of the continued mass support enjoyed by the Party in Thane district is the fact that a CPI(M) MLA was elected from the Jawhar (ST) Assembly

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Rajaram Gehla, Talasari, June 18, 2012.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Lahanu Kom, Talasari, July 31 and August 16, 2012.

<sup>48</sup> Apart from the senior and junior colleges at Talasari, the Adivasi Pragati Mandal (APM) runs schools and hostels for Adivasi students in villages like Udhva, Vasa, Kochai, and Vevji in Talasari tehsil, and Ashagad in Dahanu tehsil. It also runs two junior colleges, one each in Udhva and Ashagad. The total student strength of all the APM-run institutions is 8,000, and the total staff strength is 150. Over 90 per cent of the students in these schools, hostels, and colleges are Adivasis, and many of them are first-generation learners (Rajput 2013).

constituency for seven consecutive terms from 1978 to 2004 (A. Dhawale 2007).<sup>49</sup> In the Legislative Assembly elections of 2009, the Party won the newly delimited Dahanu constituency in Thane district, polling over 62,000 votes.<sup>50</sup> In the Lok Sabha elections of 2009, it polled nearly one lakh votes in the Palghar constituency in Thane district (A. Dhawale 2012).

### CHALLENGES

The Kisan Sabha has identified its inability to attract the non-Adivasi peasantry to its ranks as one of its biggest challenges in the district.<sup>51</sup> It has also emphasised the need to increase the participation of women peasants in its campaigns and leadership.<sup>52</sup> The distribution of membership has been another concern for the organisation. In 2000 and 2004, about 70 per cent of members of the Kisan Sabha in Thane district were from only two talukas, Talasari and Dahanu.<sup>53 54</sup>

An important organisational change in Thane district in the last two decades is that, along with the All India Kisan Sabha, which was and continues to be the premier Left mass organisation in the district, other mass organisations of students, youth, women, agricultural workers and industrial workers have also begun regular work in the district. They have been taking up issues of the sections they represent through political campaigns, and several joint campaigns of the Kisan Sabha and these other mass organisations on common issues have taken place in recent times.

A further organisational change is that the work of the Kisan Sabha in the Adivasi areas of Maharashtra, which began in Thane district in the 1940s, has spread to other districts in subsequent decades. In the 1970s it spread to Nashik district, and from the 1990s it has gradually expanded to other Adivasi districts such as Nandurbar, Ahmednagar, Pune, Yavatmal, Amravati, and Nanded.

### CONCLUSION

Adivasi struggles led by the Kisan Sabha in Thane district since the 1940s stand out for a number of reasons. They attempted to address the historical exploitation of Adivasis by challenging the British colonial rulers as well as the local exploiters. A unique feature of struggles like the Warli revolt was that these were largely peaceful,

<sup>49</sup> See Information on Zila Parishad and Panchayat Samiti Elections 2002, Thane District Collectorate; Dhawale 2007; Information on Zila Parishad and Panchayat Samiti Elections 2007, BTR Library, Belapur, Thane district; Information on Zila Parishad and Panchayat Samiti Elections held on February 7, 2012, Thane District Collectorate. See also Deshpande (2012).

<sup>50</sup> Statistical Reports of Assembly Elections, Election Commission of India, available at [http://eci.gov.in/eci\\_main1/ElectionStatistics.aspx](http://eci.gov.in/eci_main1/ElectionStatistics.aspx), viewed on January 28, 2013.

<sup>51</sup> Report of Maharashtra State Kisan Sabha (2001), Beed district, p. 82.

<sup>52</sup> Report of Maharashtra State Kisan Sabha (2009), Parbhani district, pp. 62–63.

<sup>53</sup> Report of All India Kisan Sabha (2000), Dahanu taluka.

<sup>54</sup> Report of All India Kisan Sabha 19th Thane District Session (2004), Shahapur taluka.

despite the repression unleashed by landlords and the police. The Kisan Sabha also led mass political campaigns on the issues of land, forests, wages, and other welfare issues. In addition, participation in electoral politics played an important role in the articulation of the demands of the Adivasis, especially at the local level. The organisation's mass support in Thane district, especially in the Adivasi talukas, is the result of six decades of successful struggles and bringing about a change in the lives of the Adivasis.

Six decades of Kisan Sabha-led Adivasi struggles in Thane district can be said to be a continuation of the intervention since the 1940s by the Left in Adivasi areas. These struggles were not viewed by the Left only as a means to meet the needs of Adivasis, but also as struggles against an entire system and for a better future for all oppressed people. In this sense, the struggles for Adivasi rights were an integral part of a larger movement to democratise the entire economy, society and polity.

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### LIST OF INTERVIEWS

S. No.	Name of the respondent	Date of Interview	Notes
1	L. B. Dhangar	May 2, May 4, and September 25, 2012	Joined Kisan Sabha in 1949, Vice-President of Maharashtra State Kisan Sabha
2	Laxman Bhuyal	August 9, 2012	Resident of Aundhane village in Palghar taluka, joined Kisan Sabha in 1957, elected Panchayat Samiti member in 1981.
3	Lahanu Kom	July 31 and August 16, 2012	Joined Kisan Sabha in 1959, later CPI(M) Member of Parliament and Member of the Legislative Assembly
4	Chaitya Bikhari Mere	July 28, 2012	Joined Kisan Sabha in 1970
5	Gangaram Sutar	August 6, 2012	Joined Kisan Sabha in 1981
6	Edward Vartha	July 26–27, 2012	Joined Kisan Sabha in 1980
7	Jagan Mhase	August 13, 2012	Resident of Wada taluka, joined Kisan Sabha in 1982
8	Ratan Budhar	August 8, 2012	Joined Kisan Sabha in the early 1980s
9	Rajaram Ozare	June 30, 2012	Joined Kisan Sabha in 1979, CPI (M) Member of the Legislative Assembly for Dahanu, 2009–14
10	Arjun Dumada	June 18, 2012	Resident of Talasari taluka, joined Kisan Sabha in 1972, won district council (zila parishad) election in 1979
11	Vasant Dodiya	June 18, 2012	Resident of Kochai village, Talasari taluka, joined Kisan Sabha in 1972
12	Rajaram Gehla	June 18, 2012	Resident of Vikramgad taluka, joined Kisan Sabha in 1971, head of village panchayat ( <i>sarpanch</i> ) for 10 years and elected member of village panchayat for 35 years

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## GLOSSARY

<i>adivasi</i>	lit. original inhabitants or indigenous people; refers to tribes and tribal communities; Scheduled Tribes.
<i>anganwadi</i>	lit. "courtyard"; refers to a government-sponsored child-care and mother-care centre, part of the Integrated Child Development Services programme, which began in 1975 in India.
<i>balwadi</i>	pre-school for income-poor and other children in the age group 3-5 years.
<i>chiku</i>	<i>Manilkara zapota</i> ; fruit also called sapodilla or sapota
<i>chiku-wadi</i>	chiku farm
<i>gherao</i>	to encircle/besiege/surround someone or something until a demand is met
<i>gram panchayat</i>	elected village council
<i>inami land</i>	land granted by the state or order, often revenue-free or trust land
<i>jahir sabha</i>	public meeting
<i>jail bharo</i>	lit. "fill the jails"; to court arrest
<i>khavti</i>	advance of grain made to tenants by landlords
<i>kul kayeda</i>	tenancy legislation/law
<i>lagna gadi</i>	bonded servants
<i>mamlatdar</i>	revenue officer in executive charge of a taluka
<i>melava</i>	gathering
<i>morcha</i>	protest rally
<i>pale mode</i>	loan given to small landholders to meet food requirements for two to three months
<i>panchayat samiti</i>	elected block council
<i>rasta roko</i>	road blockade
<i>saat bara (7/12)</i>	government revenue document (land deed) showing ownership of particular area of land
<i>sabha</i>	meeting or forum
<i>sarpanch</i>	elected head of the gram panchayat
<i>satyagraha</i>	non-violent civil resistance
<i>taluka/tehsil</i>	administrative subdivision of a district; also spelt taluk
<i>veth/veth begar</i>	forced labour
<i>zilla parishad</i>	elected district council

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