PEASANT MOVEMENT IN MAHARASHTRA: A CASE-STUDY OF THE SHETKARI SANGHATANA

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CERTIFIED that the work incorporated in the thesis Peasant Movement in Maharashtra: A Case Study of the Shetkari Sanghatan submitted by Smt. Aruna Pendse (Mudholkar) was carried out by the candidate under my supervision guidance. Such material as has been obtained from other sources has been duly acknowledged in the thesis.

( Y. D. Phadke )

Supervisor/ Research Guide.
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ABSTRACT

This is a study of the Shetkari Sanghatana, a contemporary peasant movement in Maharashtra. The movement started in 1978 and soon spread in many parts of the state. This peasant unrest, which was witnessed also in other states in India at that time was due to the crisis the agriculture was then facing. The stagnation experienced after the initial phase of the Green Revolution was aggravated by a slump in the prices of farm products from mid 1970s, giving rise to a spate of peasant movements in different parts of the country.

The Shetkari Sanghatana in Maharashtra organized farmers to demand 'remunerative prices' for agricultural products. It launched agitations demanding fair prices for cash-crops like onions, sugar-cane, tobacco, cotton etc. in succession, mobilising the peasantry of Maharashtra in large numbers. The use of techniques such as rail-roko, raasta-roko and withholding of the agricultural produce from the markets was new in the peasant agitations, and their success widened the Sanghatana's support-base.

The Sanghatana has evolved its own ideology which emphasises the role of the remunerative prices to farm produce as the key to the rural development. The main attack of the movement is on the "uneven terms of trade" between industry and agriculture which leads to the exploitation of agriculture. The Sanghatana believes that the remunerative prices to agricultural produce will correct this imbalance and result in a genuine development in the countryside and ultimately in the entire nation.

This demand, however, is basically the demand of the rich and the middle farmers. The rich farmers used
this movement to further their political interests, viz. challenging the hegemony of the industrial bourgeoisie and asserting their own political strength. As the rich peasantry is a part of the ruling bloc, it does not directly oppose the hegemonic industrial bourgeoisie and uses the mass movement to serve this purpose. This movement, therefore, is not radical or revolutionary. It is a non-radical populist movement which advocates agrarian class unity to serve the ends of one fraction of the ruling bloc.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Peasantry is an important section of any developing nation and the study of peasant movements, therefore, becomes very vital in the study of the development process of these nations. In the wake of peasant revolutions or rebellions in countries like China, Mexico, Peru, Vietnam etc., attention was drawn to the peasant movements. They were studied to examine their role as agents or catalysts of change and/or revolution and development.

The revolutionary character of the peasantry, which was once a debatable point, has now been accepted. (Mitrany: 1951: pp.19-22.) Even the Indian peasantry, whose record was "unimpressive" compared to the other revolutionary movements; (Moore, Jr.: 1966: pp.379,453,459), is now seen to possess revolutionary potential which was demonstrated amply in history. The studies of peasant movements by A.R. Desai, Dhanagare and Sunil Sen as also the Subaltern Studies edited by Ranajit Guha, have clearly indicated the sensitivity of the Indian peasants to exploitation as well as subsequent resistance to it through various forms of protest.

Historically, the peasant movements in India can be divided into pre-independence and post-independence periods. They are also classified according to their nature as revivalist, reformist, religious messianic, social banditry and mass insurrectionist.(Gough: 1979: pp.85-126) The peasant movements have acquired labels also according to the ideology they embrace or the nature of the goals they strive for. The agitational methods also distinguish peasant movements.
The peasant movements have generally been region specific and issue specific. Some of them were systematically planned struggles; while others were spontaneous uprisings. The peasant movements in the pre-independence period in the 19th century were mostly in the form of armed protests. Anti-British in nature, some of them aimed at driving the British out of this country. Other agitations during that period were anti-landlord and anti-moneylender. By the end of the 19th century, with the emergence of the Congress and Kisan Sabha leaderships the peasant movements acquired a clearer nationalist character. They at the same time made demands to abolish the Zamindari system and implement agricultural reforms including land reforms. The peasant movement in India under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi played an important role in the mainstream politics of the country. It was through these movements that millions of peasants and rural folk participated in the freedom-struggle.

After independence the peasant movements were initially at a low key as the issues seemed to have changed. The movements led by the left parties and the Congress earlier on the questions of land distribution or rent increase, lost their momentum in the light of the promise of the new Government to bring about land reforms legally. The anti-Zamindari and land ceiling legislations were in the offing.

The 1950s saw the introduction and implementation of the land reforms legislation. The laws, however, with loopholes favourable to the land owning rich peasantry, were implemented halfheartedly. This frustrated the rural poor who expected radical changes. The various developmental schemes and programmes of the Government for the rural areas also did not bring any relief to them. The result was
The beginning of agitations in the rural areas from late 1960s. On the one hand there was a violent and strong reaction in the form of the Naxalite movement and on the other, non-violent Gandhian type land-grab agitations. The left parties organised poor peasants, landless labourers and tribal poor against exploitation and repression by landlords and moneylenders.

In the mid-sixties the Government adopted the strategy of Green-Revolution for agricultural development. Its main objective was to increase productivity and reach self-sufficiency in food-grains to combat the persistent droughts haunting the country that resulted in politico-economic crises. The Green Revolution, with its thrust on technological development, mechanisation, High Yielding Varieties (HYVs) of seeds as well as chemical fertilizers etc. accelerated the process of capitalist development of agriculture. This development remained restricted only to areas with good irrigation facilities and to farmers capable of making high capital investments. It created pockets of prosperity and adversely affected poor peasants and landless labourers. Rural disparities widened further, giving rise to increasing discontent.

The Green Revolution created widespread heavy indebtedness among the peasantry. The increasing prices of agricultural inputs and the comparative stagnation of the prices of agricultural commodities added to the frustration of even the middle and the rich peasants. The overall unemployment in the agrarian sector increased. The number of agricultural labourers in 1964-65 was 27.29 millions. This number increased to 47.49 million in 1974-75. (Surjeet: 1981: pp.12-17.) This deepening crisis led to countrywide peasant movements which encompassed every section of the peasantry.
The movements which started in 1980-81 in the states of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat etc. had certain common demands. Their most important demand was of remunerative prices for agricultural produce. This demand was followed by other demands of reduction in prices of agricultural inputs; an end to exorbitant increase in taxes and levies; relief from indebtedness, and for employment. A demand for higher wages for agricultural labourers was also included in some of these agitations.

This peasant upsurge was unparalleled in the history of free India. Peasants in vast numbers came into action erecting roadblocks, organising marches, gheraos of assemblies, courting mass-arrests, defying the bullets and lathis of police to defend their own interests. These spontaneous peasant movements later acquired such momentum and force that the governments in the respective states, mostly the Congress (I) governments, were forced to concede the demands of the farmers. The movements challenged the entire gamut of the agrarian policies of the government and the ruling classes. The most interesting feature of these movements was the unity of all the strata within the agrarian sector against the urban industrial sector represented by the ‘State’.

These movements have revived the interest of the academic world in peasant studies. However, not many studies have so far been published on the contemporary movements. Most of the works deal with movements in the pre-independence period. Some studies on the Telangana movement, the Naxalite movement and the agitations of the Kisan Sabhas do exist. A.R. Desai has edited a major volume on the Agrarian Struggles in India After Independence which encompasses some of these movements. This work also covers the agitations waged by the independent left organisations.
among tribal peasants. However, barring a few works like M.V. Nadkarni's *Farmers' Movement in India*, which is mainly a case study of the Karnataka movement, but also includes brief accounts of peasant movements in Punjab and Maharashtra, one does not come across studies on these movements. Good historical studies have been made of the peasant movements in UP, Bihar, Bengal, Gujarat, Punjab etc. In their comparison, scholarly work on Maharashtra's peasant movements is negligible with the exception of a very detailed and thorough 3 volume report on *Peasant Resistance in Maharashtra* prepared by Sulabha Brahme and Ashok Upadhyaya. The authors trace in their work the peasant movements in Maharashtra from the pre-independence period up to 1977-78. Their work includes an in-depth study of the peasant movements in four regions of Maharashtra. These include the movements by the Warli and Bhil tribal peasants and labourers in Thane and Dhule districts as also the development of agriculture and agrarian movements in the Marathwada and Southern Maharashtra regions.

A few studies also occur in the form of articles. Maria Mies discusses the *Shahada Movement* in the *Journal of Peasant Studies* (Mies: 1976). Ashok Upadhyaya wrote on the *Bhoomi Sena movement* in the same journal. (Upadhyaya: 1980). The two volumes by Y.D. Phadke on the political history of Maharashtra (Phadke: 1989) also provide us with the necessary information on the peasant revolts and movements which took place in the pre-independence period (19th century onwards) in Maharashtra.

Among the works which provide information and data about agriculture and related topics are the works by Sulabha Brahme and R.P. Nene on the farm labourers in Maharashtra (Brahme and Nene: 1983), A.R. Kamat's *Essays on Social Change in India* (Kamat: 1983), Datta Desai's work on *Droughts in Maharashtra* (Desai: 1987), as also B.S. Baviskar's

Two books in Marathi deal with the movement of the Shetkari Sanghatana. One of them, by Vijay Parulkar, Yoddha Shetkari (meaning warrior peasant) which appeared in 1981 is a dramatic description of the sugar-cane agitation of 1980. The other one Shetkari Andolan (Peasant Movement) in two parts by Ramesh Padhye, published in December 1985 and December 1987 is a critical appraisal of the Shetkari Sanghatana’s economic demands. It also criticises the political undertones of the movement. There is no other book on the Shetkari Sanghatana in Marathi or English.

Many articles have, however, appeared in different periodicals, journals and newspapers etc. Only the serious ones from amongst them are mentioned here V.M. Dandekar wrote a critical article on Joshi’s argument about remunerative prices in Artha Samvad, April/June 1983 (Marathi). D.N. Dhanagare’s appraisal of the Shetkari Sanghatana’s movement appeared in an interview format in Manoos (Marathi), 10-17 August 1985. An interesting and informative article regarding the inner working of the Sanghatana and profiles of some of its workers appeared in Manoos, August 1986, written by Sanjay Sangwai. A critical article about the leadership and working of the Shetkari Sanghatana by B.L. Bhole was published in Paryaya (Marathi) Nov.-Dec. 1987. A very exhaustive and comprehensive appraisal of Sharad Joshi’s ideology and politics by Shrinivas Khandewale was published in Samaj Prabodhan Patrika (Marathi), Oct.- Dec. 1990.

The Economic and Political Weekly has published a
number of important articles on the Shetkari Sanghatana, its ideology and movements. Gail Omvedt has consistently written on the Shetkari Sanghatana and her changing positions on the issue are clearly reflected in her writings. The earliest writing by Omvedt was in EPW, 6 Dec. 1980, Cane Farmers’ Movement, which was very critical and sceptical about the professed goals of the Shetkari Sanghatana. Till 1986, Gail was critical of the movement in her writings in the EPW. In the EPW issue of Nov.29, 1986, she wrote on Peasants and Women: Challenge of Chandwad. This article was a critical review of Sharad Joshi’s formulation of the women’s question. However in the 21st Nov. 1987 issue of the EPW, she reversed her position and justified the Sanghatana’s stand on women’s question in her article Women and Maharashtra Zilla Parishad Elections. Gail Omvedt with Chetana Gala (EPW: 2nd July 1988) joined issues with K. Balagopal regarding the class character of the Shetkari Sanghatana. In this article she fully justified the ideological position of the Shetkari Sanghatana. She also wrote an article, titled New Movements in Seminar, Dec. 1988, which supported the Sanghatana ideology and criticized the left parties and their position on the ‘farm-prices’ and the peasant movement. From among the leftists, there is a seriously critical article by Vishnugupt Sharma in Liberation (June 1987), an organ of the CPI (ML), On Sharad Joshi’s Model, which criticizes Joshi’s ideology.

D.N. Dhanagare in his article An Apolitician Populism, in Seminar, (Dec. 1988), has compared the Shetkari Sanghatana’s agitation with that of the Bhartiya Kisan Union treating both as populist movements. The study, however, centres not on the Shetkari Sanghatana but on the BKU.

These articles notwithstanding, a comprehensive work on the movement of the Shetkari Sanghatana is not available. The available material mentioned above deals with but an
aspect or two of the movement and the approach (barring a few exceptions) is incidental. There is a need, therefore, of a more detailed and comprehensive study of the subject.

The present study is a study of the continuing contemporary peasant movement in Maharashtra, that is, the movement of the Shetkari Sanghatana. The movement started in 1978 and has completed a decade of its operations. This long-spanning movement, with its own distinctive ideology has brought the peasantry into political focus. By organising the peasantry, the Sanghatana has emerged as an enviable political force. Initially adopting a non-party organizational form and a non-political stance the Sanghatana roused curiosity of many who rushed to term it a non-party political formation (Sethi and Kothari: 1983). The Sanghatana, however, has changed its stand in the course of time. This stand needs to be carefully analysed. The present study intends to trace the development of the Shetkari Sanghatana's movement; study its organization and methods of mobilization and analyse the nature of its ideology and leadership. It also intends to examine the nature of this movement and its role in the national and the State politics.

The nature of a peasant movement is generally determined on the basis of its class character. Which section of the peasantry is involved in the agitation is said to give a clue to the revolutionary (or otherwise) nature of the movement. This is based on the assumption that the different classes of peasantry have different and generally antagonistic interests. For example, an agitation of landless labourers demanding redistribution of land or higher wages is obviously contrary to the interests of rich peasants who will not be interested in giving up their land or willing to give higher wages cutting into their own profits. The agitation of the rich or middle peasants in a
similar manner will be opposed to the interests of poor peasants and landless labourers.

The terms 'peasant' and 'peasant stratification' which are used frequently, need to be clarified here. Sometimes the term 'peasant' is distinguished from the term 'farmer'. Similarly distinction is made between 'peasant' and 'tribal'. Whereas some scholars define 'peasant' in a very narrow sense which includes only the poor peasants and landless labourers excluding the rich peasants; some others include rich peasants as well. A.R. Desai in his volume on Agrarian Struggles in India After Independence has deliberately chosen the term 'agrarian', as it "represents a larger category of humanity than the term 'peasant'"(Desai: 1986: pp.XXI). Dhanagare, while pointing out the various strata of peasantry, includes them all, except the strata of landlords, in the concept of 'peasants' as they all have played a role in the agrarian struggles in India (Dhanagare: 1983: pp.19). In this context Eric Wolf's definition of 'peasants' seems to be quite comprehensive. He defines 'peasants' as "populations that are existentially involved in cultivation and make autonomous decisions regarding the process of cultivation. The category is thus made to cover tenants and share croppers as well as owner-operators, as long as they are in a position to make relevant decisions on how their crops are grown. It does not, however, include fishermen or landless labourers." (Wolf: 1971: pp.XVIII) Wolf has further distinguished 'peasants' from 'farmers'. 'Peasant' is the one having an aim of subsistence, while 'farmer' is the one who enters and participates fully in the market.

The exercise to define the term 'peasant', itself indicates the stratification of peasantry. The stratifications are based on various criteria. They include, variously, the amount of the land owned, the nature of the ownership rights of the land, the nature of the income
derived from the land and the extent of the field work actually performed. (Thorner: 1956: pp.4) Daniel Thorner has used these criteria to give a comprehensive picture of the peasant strata in India. Utsa Patnaik has used another criterion in her study of the peasantry in Haryana; that is the extent of the use of family labour and hired labour. In this stratification, the upper strata of landlords and rich peasants primarily exploit labour of others, the middle and small peasant strata primarily use self and family labour, while the poor peasants (including poor tenant and labourer with land) and landless labourers are primarily exploited by others. (Patnaik: 1986: pp.98-123)

The term 'peasant' is used here more loosely, though the researcher is aware of the finer distinctions of the term. By 'peasantry' the researcher means different strata of 'peasantry' and not just those cultivators who do not participate in the market. This is because among the 'peasants' under consideration, even the subsistence peasant occasionally participates in market. Landless labourer will, however, be referred to separately.

The peasant movement in Maharashtra under the banner of the Shetkari Sanghatana involves different strata of the agrarian society except the landless labourers. Landless labourers have participated in these movements very rarely. The middle and the small peasants of Maratha-Kunbi and Mali-Dhangar castes have provided the bulk of this movement, whereas the rich Maratha-Mali peasants have led the movement. This agrarian/peasant unity has been the strong-point of the Shetkari Sanghatana. In fact the Sanghatana rejects the concept of 'class' in agriculture.

Hence, determining the nature of the movement of the Shetkari Sanghatana merely on the basis of its class character poses a problem. It will not be easy to stamp the
movement as a "rich peasants' movement" or a "middle peasants' movement". The reasons behind this class unity will have to be located to provide a better idea about the nature and the role of the movement. The 'ideology' of the movement will also have to be analysed. It would reveal the role of the different classes involved in the movement.

The ideology of the Shetkari Sanghatana will be discussed later in a separate chapter. Here, a brief introduction to the ideology of the Sanghatana will be helpful. The main tenets of the Shetkari Sanghatana's ideology include a firm assumption that the inter-sectoral terms of trade in India are unequal with a bias in favour of industry and urban areas; and against agriculture and rural areas. Another tenet is that there is a basic unity of interests of all the strata of peasantry. Rural poverty is the result of the deliberate policies which are anti-agrarian. The solution to rural poverty as well as the problems of the overall development of the country lies in the State granting remunerative prices to the agricultural produce. Thus, the movement has a one-point programme, that of getting remunerative prices for agricultural commodities. The Sanghatana has effectively put this demand before the government through various agitations and by agitational pressures it has made the government concede some of its demands.

The successful mobilization generated by this movement has to be traced to the success of its leaders' effective use of a 'populist' ideology. 'Populist' ideology denies the existence of class and appeals to the 'people', here, the 'peasantry' as a whole. It invokes "peasant consciousness" against urban/industrial culture, and in the process side-tracks "class." The State, or the ruling bloc, is projected as antagonistic to the "genuine" interests of the agrarian community as a whole and basically a representative of the
urban/industrial interests. Thus the State is the main target of attack. The basic political framework of the system, however, is tacitly accepted. The movement, while opposing the State is careful not to turn revolutionary and aim at overthrow of the State. The antagonism between the State/ruling bloc and the peasantry is first projected sharply and then transformed into simple differences. Thus, the sharpness of the antagonism does not become radical. The antagonism is used merely to challenge the ruling bloc. The increased power of the movement is used only to improve the bargaining power of the organisation vis-a-vis the power bloc. A belief is cultivated in the minds of the participants that the strength of the movement will make the State change its policies towards agriculture. When such a change comes, and the State policies are favourable to the agricultural sector, true developmental process will be ensured. This development will remove rural poverty, provide employment to the rural folk and usher in general prosperity.

All these factors point to the 'populist' nature of the ideology which can be further described as "non-radical populism". Here, the term populism is used in the sense in which Ernesto Laclau uses it in his analysis of "populism" (Laclau: 1977: pp.143-198) Laclau's thesis is that, "populism consists in the presentation of popular democratic interpellations as a synthetic antagonistic complex with respect to the dominant ideology. Populism starts at the point where popular democratic elements are presented as an antagonistic option against the ideology of the dominant bloc." (Op. Cit. pp.143-198) According to Laclau 'populism' is the expression of the articulating power of the dominated class when it challenges the hegemony of the dominant class and tries to impose itself hegemonically on the rest of the society. (Op. Cit. pp.188) In his argument Laclau terms that form of populism as the highest developed and most radical
wherein the class interests it represents lead it to the suppression of the State as an antagonistic force, meaning thereby a revolutionary overthrow of the State.

It is in this context that the populism of the Shetkari Sanghatana can be described as a “non-radical populism”.

The ideology of the Shetkari Sanghatana projects the grievances and hardships of the poor peasants as if they are grievances and hardships of the entire peasantry (including the rich and the middle peasants). In doing so, it obscures and neutralises the real antagonisms within the peasantry. Casting these grievances in the peasant idiom the Sanghatana actually presents the demands of the rich and middle peasants. It locates the villain, which happens to be the ‘State’ conveniently outside the agrarian society. The State is also projected as an autonomous entity representing the urban/industrial interests. However, the State is considered to be amenable to pressure and reason. So, the peaceful democratic methods of agitation are used to exert pressure. This is the non-radical populist ideology of the Shetkari Sanghatana.

This ideology is propagated by the class of rich peasants and supported by the newly emerging class of traders/politicians of the Marwari-Gujar communities from the semi urban townships. (Vora: 1990) The class of rich peasants does not have sharp differences with the dominant/ruling class. The nature of its conflict with the ruling bloc is more competitive than antagonistic. It already is a subordinate partner in the heterogeneous ruling bloc. (Lele: 1985/6: pp.35-36) Its aspirations, therefore, are to play a dominant and hegemonic role.

The share of agriculture in the economy is going down in comparison to the increasing share of the industrial
sector. (Directorate Of Economics And Statistics: 1982 and 1985) In the light of this fact, this class, senses a threat to its political power and resorts to this populist ideology and movement in order to strengthen its power-base and bargaining power vis-a-vis the industrial class.

The middle peasants, whose number is significant in the movement, hope to secure direct material gains from it. The "higher prices" demand serves the interests of many from this class who market their surplus produce. Some of them also aspire to climb higher in the class hierarchy and obtain a share in power. They too find this 'populist' ideology equally convenient.

The question is, why do the poor peasants who are not directly benefited by the demands, still lend their numerical support to the movement. The answer to this question is to be found in the emotional charge of the populist ideology. The populist ideology does not appeal merely to the objective material reality, but also to the subjective consciousness of the peasantry. It is this appeal which makes the unity of the antagonistic agrarian classes possible and makes the poor peasants participate in the agitations.

The theme of using 'peasant consciousness' as a factor in the organisation of peasantry has been discussed by David Arnold in the context of 'peasant subalternity'. (Arnold: 1984: pp.155-177) Upadhyaya and Brahme also discuss it as a principal factor in peasant organisation. (Brahme and Upadhyaya: 1979: vol 1 and 3) Consciousness denotes the perception and knowledge of existing reality. "Peasant consciousness" means that peasants as an independent entity have a perception different from the others. It refers to a set of values, beliefs and ideas specific to the peasantry that are not shared by others. Hobsbawm has
noted that despite economic divisions the peasantry as a whole has an existence which is shared by them all vis-a-vis the outside world, be it the State, town, industry, etc. This creates a typical peasant idiom shared and understood by them all. (Hobsbawn: 1973: pp.6)

The concept of "peasant consciousness" which obscures the reality of class, caste differences within the peasantry has been used by the Shetkari Sanghatana for its populist ends. That is, to transcend the agrarian classes and bring about a working unity of the peasantry as a whole. The slogan Shetkari Tituka Ek Ek (All the peasants are one) of the Shetkari Sanghatana symbolises this strategy.

This invocation of "peasant consciousness" by using peasant idiom to bring the more populous agrarian strata into a movement is not an innovation of the Shetkari Sanghatana. Similar instances are found in history. Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Patel, for example, used a similar strategy in the Bardoli 'no-tax' movement. Dhanagare gives an account of Sardar Patel's attempts to unite various castes and agrarian classes in Bardoli 'by calling all peasants Khedut - a term symbolising the identity of anyone connected with the cultivation of land, whether absentee owner, sharecropper, or even landless and bonded labourers. For Patel, "the money-lender was merged in tenant like water in milk," and their relations were non-antagonistic. The notion of a vertical solidarity of the peasant community suited his purpose best." (Dhanagare: 1983: pp.87) Dhanagare observes that class collaboration, attempted through reassertion of traditional values and caste organisations showed up at its best in the Bardoli agitation. (Ibid.)

The Shetkari Sanghatana has achieved similar success at present by using populist tactics. The use of the populist ideology in organizations and agitations by the Shetkari
Methodology

The present study is a study of the Shetkari Sanghatana and its movement during the period 1978-1987. As it is a case-study of a contemporary movement, it poses certain methodological problems.

One of the methods used for this study is that of participant observation. The researcher has personally attended various rallies, agitations, camps and meetings of the Shetkari Sanghatana which were part of the movement. Various persons involved in the movement were personally interviewed at various times. This enabled the researcher to acquire first-hand information and primary data. The primary data also includes handouts, pamphlets and leaflets circulated at different times and the various official publications of the organization.

The primary data is very important as it offers clear insights into the various aspects of the movement and organization. Participant observation method scores over the historical method, which primarily depends on secondary material, on this count.

However, in the historical method, because of distancing from the subject matter, there is a possibility of achieving a more objective perspective. In the study of contemporary movements, the participant observation method can often be a handicap. As total distancing from the subject matter is not possible, the sheer closeness can distort the perspective of the researcher. The researcher has to strive hard to avoid this distortion. This can be
achieved with the study of theoretical works. Hence, participant observation is here supplemented by library research. Existing literature dealing with similar movements and relevant theoretical debates are traced through this method. Other secondary data in the form of journalistic writings, newspaper reports, books, pamphlets and such other publications by other organizations have also been considered.

Plan of Work

This study is a case-study of the Shetkari Sanghatana from 1978 to 1987. The ideology and the movement of the Shetkari Sanghatana is studied along with its organization and mobilisation strategies. In doing so, references to the developments in state politics and other parties and organizations are inevitable. However, this is not a comparative study. No comparison of the Shetkari Sanghatana with similar contemporary peasant movements in Karnataka, Punjab or Gujarat etc. is attempted here. Though such comparisons can be useful, they do not come in the ambit of the present study.

The introductory chapter will be followed by a chapter on the historical background of the movement. In this, the peasant movements in the pre- and post-independence period in Maharashtra will be traced indicating their relevance as precursors to the present movement, if any. Besides the review of the earlier peasant movements, a brief account of the economic and sociopolitical developments in Maharashtra which served as the backdrop for the development of the movement of the Shetkari Sanghatana will be given. The historical background will help to view the present movement in a perspective. The next chapter will be on the ideology
of the movement which will give, first, a summary of the Shetkari Sanghatana's/Sharad Joshi's ideology in its different aspects as propounded by Joshi himself, followed by a critique of the same. This critique is of central importance as it develops a framework within which the entire logic and politics of the movement can be analysed. An attempt will be made to prove that the ideology of the Shetkari Sanghatana is a 'populist' ideology which rejects 'class' and projects 'sectoral unity' of the peasantry vis-a-vis the industrial/urban sector, in order to build a mass movement to challenge the hegemony of the existing power bloc and promote the interests of the competing fraction of the ruling bloc itself. Its ideology is not radical or revolutionary but a non-radical populism.

The chapter on 'Organization' which comes next examines the organization of the Shetkari Sanghatana as it evolved over a period. In this chapter, the organizational structure, its composition, and leadership will be explained and analysed. The mobilisational tactics which the Sanghatana employed in its agitations will also be examined. The next chapter will review the movement and will trace the important agitations launched by the Shetkari Sanghatana. It will give a detailed account of the happenings during various agitations and simultaneously review their political implications. In the last chapter conclusions reached through the analysis of the different aspects of the movement of the Shetkari Sanghatana will be briefly discussed.
CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In 1818 Peshwa Bajirao II was defeated and the British established their rule in Western India. Though the British consolidated their power in due course of time, they had to face resistance from a section of local chieftains and tribals for a few decades. Due to the new forest regulations of the British, the tribals lost their autonomy as well as control over the forest and other means of livelihood. They resisted the British and these protests continued for a long time. The disbandment of the armies of the native kings and local chieftains rendered thousands of people jobless. Some of these demobilized soldiers turned into bandits or outlaws; while many returned to the land. Many artisans dependent on the patronage of the local chiefs or kings were also compelled to abandon their trades and turn to farming. Thus pressure on land increased. The British, also introduced a new system of land tenure and land revenue, altering property rights.

The new system of land revenue made the individual land owner responsible for the payment of the land tax. The payment was to be made in cash, in full, every year and the earlier concession of paying the tax in kind was withdrawn. This system was called the Ryotwari system. In this system the farmer was forced to take loans from the money-lender for the payment of land-revenue. The recurring famines and extortions by money-lenders worsened the condition of the farmer. With the improvement in transport facilities and penetration of market forces cash transactions assumed increasing importance resulting in increased dependence of farmers on money-lenders.
The money-lenders, mostly immigrant Marwaris and Gujaratis dealt with individual peasants. The increased importance of money-lenders also degraded the status of the traditional head of the village community, the Patil. The new judicial system facilitated the transfer of mortgaged lands from the peasants to the money-lenders. This process of alienation of land gave rise to an antagonism between the peasants and money-lenders. (Vora: 1986, p.4)

The protests and revolts which occurred in Maharashtra during the early phase of British rule were of four kinds. (1) Social banditry which is a protest against oppression, a cry for vengeance on the oppressor and a vague dream of righting of individual wrongs. (Hobsbawm: 1958: pp.23-27) It does not have a socially purposeful ideology or organization. In the absence of better means of self-defence, these protests are sporadic in nature. The revolts of the tribals like Ramoshis, Kolis and Bhils against British rule were of this kind. (2) Armed rebellions to overthrow the British and reestablish the sovereignty of the former rulers. Either the former rulers themselves, for example, those of Nagpur, Satara, Kolhapur etc., or their loyal subjects resorted to such rebellions. (3) The protests and uprisings of the peasants against oppression by money-lenders. (4) Mobilization attempted by individuals to involve people in a revolt against foreign rule. The attempts by Wasudeo Balwant Phadke and Baba Saheb are the examples of this category. (Brahme, Upadhyaya: 1979, Vol. 1: pp.132)

The present study concerns itself with peasant movement, hence, protests of the third category among the four mentioned above, are relevant and will be discussed more extensively. The other three categories will be narrated in brief as they were not, strictly speaking, peasant revolts or protests.
The revolts were mostly confined to a small section of the population. They were in the form of recurring sporadic uprisings. They were basically geographically and organizationally isolated, and the British with their superior arms and organization crushed them mercilessly. In the case of Ramoshis of Pune district the British had initially adopted a conciliatory policy. But the Ramoshis did not compromise. (Phadke: 1989: pp.22) These revolts did not mature into a movement which could mobilize the people on a basic issue in a sustained manner. (Brahme, Upadhyaya: 1979, Vol 1: pp.133).

Ramushi and Koli Revellions:

The Ramoshis in the southern part of Poona district revolted in 1928 under the leadership of Umaji Naik who became a legendary figure. He was captured in 1927 and the revolt came to an end. The British tried to pacify the Ramoshis by their recruitment into the police force.

The revolt of the Ramoshis was followed by the uprising of the Kolis. Though the revolt subsided in 1830, it occurred again between 1839 and 1846 in Poona district. This revolt had a distinctly political intent. There were a few Brahmins among its leaders along with Kolis. The British forces defeated them in encounters. Fifty four rebels were tried, two leaders were hanged, and twenty eight were given life imprisonment.

There was a Koli rebellion in Peth, a small Jahagir of 24 villages in Nasik district in December 1857. The rebel Kolis plundered the Harsool Bazar and detained the Haslatdar. Nearly 2000 Kolis participated in the rebellion which was ultimately crushed. Sixteen rebels were hanged and
a large number of them were sentenced to transportation for life.

**Bhil Uprisings:**

From 1822 to 1857 the Bhils of Satpuda hills in northern Maharashtra revolted repeatedly against the British. The British had to employ their troops stationed at Aurangabad to deal with the Bhil uprisings. Serious revolts occurred in the years 1822, 1823, 1827, 1834, 1838, 1841, 1843, 1860. The Government used its armed force to finally put down the Bhil uprisings.

**Restorative Rebellions:**

In 1817-18 the former ruler of Nagpur, Appasaheb Bhosale, with the help of Gond tribals, rebelled against the British. The British captured him but he managed to escape and hid in the Satpuda hills. He defeated the British troops at Betul and captured Melghat and Bhaisandehi towns. But ultimately he was defeated. He died in Jodhpur in 1840. (Phadke: 1989: pp.21)

There were recurring rebellions in the princely state of Kolhapur. In 1829, the rebellion of Dadaji Daulatrao Ghorpade was crushed by the British. In 1844 there was an insurrection by the Killedars or the garrison of forts. By the treaty of 1827, the British had appointed a new Executive, a Brahmin, to look after the affairs of Kolhapur. Some actions and policies of the new appointee were resented and led to the insurrection. The insurrection was supported by the Kolhapur state forces and the insurgents.
captured Kolhapur town in 1844. Outside communications were disrupted and the treasury of Chikodi was looted. The rebellion was supported by the local people. It took about nine months for the 10,000 strong British army to crush this rebellion. (Phadke: op. cit.: pp. 21-2)

There were similar uprisings and rebellions in Satara region due to the discontent caused by the deposition and dispossession of Chhatrapati Pratapsingh in 1839. There was a series of futile, short skirmishes. Rango Bapuji, a loyal servant of Pratapsingh, engaged in a long-drawn constitutional fight for his master. He carried a ceaseless campaign against the East India Company’s deeds in India, living in London between 1840-1853. After he lost the constitutional battle he returned to India and raised a revolt in December 1856. The rebellion however could not succeed and Rango Bapuji escaped never to be traced again. (Phadke: op. cit.: pp. 24)

No-Revenue Campaign: 1973

The political activity among the peasants of colonial Maharashtra started in the form of a protest against the enhanced rates of land revenue. In 1822, the peasants of Khandesh region protested against the revenue settlement of John Briggs. Similarly, when the rates of land revenue were increased in Indapur taluka of Poona district in 1828 by Robert Pringle, the peasants expressed their resentment. The changes brought about by the Ryotwari system gave rise to political activity among peasants.

The peasants already harassed by the high rate of tax and the extortions by the money-lenders were burdened further by the increase in the rate of land-tax in 1870.
This new burden was coupled with the unsympathetic attitude of the tax-collecting officials. Insufficient rains in 1871-72 worsened the conditions and deepened the discontent.

The peasants of Indapur taluka (sub-district) in Pune district decided to communicate their resentment to the Government. A petition to that effect was drafted in the meeting of peasants held in Indapur town. Gopal Deshmukh, a traditional watan holder, a leader of the peasant community, took the lead in the signature campaign. The petition was signed by 2,684 peasants and was sent to the government.

The issue was taken up by the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha (Public Association) formed in 1870 by the middle class Brahmins and supported by the landed aristocracy. The Sabha had assumed the role of a leading political organization in Maharashtra. It had close ties with the rural society having its branches in a number of district and taluka towns. The revised rates of land tax and the resultant discontent among the peasantry gave an opportunity to the Sabha to broaden its base. It immediately appealed to the Government and sent its representatives to the villages to educate the peasants about the issue. They succeeded in arousing the peasants against the enhancement in the land tax. In several districts of Maharashtra no-tax campaigns were organized. The British officers held the Sarvajanik Sabha responsible for these peasant protests. But along with the Sarvajanik Sabha, the traditional leaders of the peasants had also played a significant role in organizing the no-tax campaign. (Vora: op.cit.: pp.5) As a consequence of the agitation, the government of Bombay declared some concessions to peasants, to make the new rates acceptable. (Ravinder Kumar: 1968: pp.182-3).

However, these concessions did not solve the basic problem of indebtedness of farmers. The antagonism between
the peasants and money-lenders continued and the peasant discontent increased to such an extent that within two years after the no-tax campaign peasants resorted to rioting. These riots are known as the Deccan Riots of 1875.

The Deccan Riots: 1875

The heavy indebtedness of farmers ultimately leading to the transfer of land to the money-lenders and the decline of the traditional authority in the village were the main reasons behind the peasant unrest in the villages of Poona and Ahmednagar districts.

In December 1974 in a village in Shirur taluka (Poona district), a Marwari moneylender brought a decree of auction against a watandar Deshmukh of the village. The harassment of the Deshmukh by the moneylender drove the people in the village to take a collective action of a social boycott against the moneylender. The barbers, water-carriers, house-servants, all joined the boycott. (Fukuzawa: 1982: pp.194-195) The villagers opened their own grocery shop and the moneylenders had to flee to the taluka place under police protection. This was the first expression of the agitated peasants. But the peasants in many Deccan villages were similarly agitated and soon took action in consultation with each other. (Brahme, Upadhyaya: op.cit. pp.138) Similar social sanctions were applied by the peasants of Kalas village of Indapur taluka (Poona district) against the moneylenders. A notice to that effect warned the populace that anyone who worked for the money-lenders in their farms, would be excommunicated.

The riots started in village Supa, about twenty five miles from Pune, and spread to surrounding villages.
Hundreds of peasants, assembled on market day at Supa, attacked the houses of Marwari and Gujarati money-lenders. Bonds, decrees and other records were destroyed. However, no personal violence was committed. This pattern was followed elsewhere. The riots spread to Indapur and Purandar talukas of Poona district and Parner, Shrigonda, Nagar and Karjat talukas of Ahmednagar district. The Enquiry Commission reported that the rioting occurred in 33 villages and almost a thousand peasants were arrested by the police.

Compared to the no-tax campaign of 1873, the Deccan riots were spontaneous and unorganized. The Sarvajanik Sabha which had taken the lead earlier was not involved in these riots. Rioters were more or less without leaders at many places. In the villages where traditional leaders like Patils were taking lead, the riots were less violent. The victims of the riots were mostly the alien Marwari or Gujarati money-lenders who had settled in the villages. The local money-lenders were not harassed.

The riots succeeded in attracting attention of the Government. The Government of Bombay appointed a Commission to enquire into the problem of indebtedness of peasants. On the basis of this Commission's report, the Deccan Agriculturists' Relief Act was enacted in 1879. The Act sought to protect peasants from the usurious practices of the money-lenders. The Government, however, paid no attention to the real problem of peasants, namely the unbearable burden of taxes. The peasants too were unaware of the working of the oppressive system and rose basically against their immediate, visible oppressor, the money-lender. The Act of 1879 did not provide much relief since the loopholes in the Act were used by the money-lenders to continue their hold over the rural economy. The process of dispossession of peasants from their land continued for several more decades. (Brahme, Upadhyaya: op. cit. pp.140)
Before the promulgation of the Agriculturists’ Relief Act, the peasants faced a severe famine between 1876-1878. The Government of Bombay started relief works but the grains and wages paid at these relief works were too meager for the sustenance of a peasant family. As a protest about one lakh peasants engaged at famine relief works abandoned the work. They offered a passive resistance to the Government orders by striking work and rendering themselves jobless. Sarvajanik Sabha played an important role in instigating these strikes. (Mehrotra: September 1969: pp.229-322.) These strikes, however, did not result in any favourable response from the government. The resistance subsided slowly as the severity of the famine declined by 1878.

No Revenue Campaign: 1896-97

In spite of the severity of famine of 1896-97, the Government did not give any remission in land-revenue. It did not even postpone the recovery of dues. This point of contention was central to the no-revenue agitation organized by the Sarvajanik Sabha. Between October 1896 to April 1897, the agents of the Sabha visited almost all the districts of Maharashtra to explain the Famine Code to the peasants and to collect data on the severity of the famine. The public meetings by the Sabha were attended by peasants in large numbers. The petitions asking for remission in tax were circulated by the representatives of Sabha among the peasants. These petitions were sent to the Mamlatdar, or the revenue officer at the taluka level or to the District Collector. The Sabha translated the Famine Code (which stipulated that remission be granted in land-revenue in case of famine) into Marathi and distributed thousand of its copies among peasants.
As a result of the mobilization, no-tax combinations were held in Thana, Kolaba, Ratnagiri, Poona, and Khandesh districts. Both rich and poor peasants participated in this agitation. At some places in Kolaba district, the petitioners mobbed the camp of the Collector. The agitation also evoked some response in the districts of Nasik, Ahmednagar, Solapur and Satara, which were hit by famine the worst. The Government used coercive measures to deal with the movement. The defaulters were arrested. As a result, the agitation came to an end by January 1897. This campaign failed in the sense that the government did not take any immediate remedial steps to redress the grievances of the peasants.

Grain riots and Bhil Revolts:

The famine years made the living condition of tribals like Bhils and of poor peasants miserable. Hoarding and withholding of grain by the Banias and their refusal to advance grains to the poor left them with no means of survival. The tribals were also not allowed to sell firewood from the forests. This led them to revolt. The Bhil revolts occurred in Panch Mahal district of Bombay Presidency in 1899.

The famine conditions similarly led the poor peasants to resort to grain riots in Amravati district of Berar. In 1896-98, grain robberies in central Provinces were often organized by the whole village. No property except grain was looted. These riots were tackled by the use of force by the police. (Brahme, Upadhyaya: op.cit.: pp.141)
Revolts against the British:

The plight of the people led some youth to revolt against the British. An eminent example is that of Wasudeo Balwant Phadke. Disturbed by the situation of 1876-77, Wasudeo Balwant, a Brahmin from Shirdhon village in Kolaba district, formed a band of Ramoshis, Kolis, Mangs and Mahars. They robbed money-lenders and other wealthy men to raise funds to acquire arms for the struggle against the British. In May 1879 Wasudeo Balwant published a manifesto in which he severely criticized the exploitation by the British government, the increasing burden of taxes and the fat salaries of the white officers. He asserted that his struggle was against the British government. (Phadke: op.cit. pp.25) The British government tried every way to capture Wasudeo Balvant.

Wasudeo Balwant became suspicious of his Ramoshi colleagues as they showed more interest in appropriating the loot. He went to the state of Nizam at Shrishail temple for penance. He returned from there and once escaped from getting arrested by the police. However in July 1879, he was captured. He was tried in the court and Sarvajanik Kaka, a founder of Sarvajanik Sabha fought his case. Wasudeo Balwant was convicted and sent to Eden where he died in prison in February 1883. (ibid. pp.26-27)

Insurrection in Beed: 1899

An insurrection took place in Beed district in 1899, which was led by Sadashiv Neelkantha Joshi. He was reportedly moving around under various names such as Bhausbe b Limaye, Ganesh Keshav Limaye, Bhausbe b Khasgiwale etc. He was in contact with the major leaders
like Lokmanya Tilak, Dadasaheb Khaparde, Sir Moropant Joshi etc. He had tried to contact British army personnel to incite them to revolt. He had also resorted to dacoity to raise money to purchase arms. In 1898 Joshi went to Hyderabad State; here he was helped by the employees of the Hyderabad Government. From Hyderabad he went to Beed accompanied by two Sikhs, Sukhsing and Khansing. In April 1899 Sadashiv Joshi, alias Raosaheb, alias Bhausaheb, clashed with the troops of the Hyderabad state. A large number of his band were arrested, while many were killed. Though the insurrection was suppressed Sadashiv Joshi managed to escape. (Phadke : 1985 : pp.18-26).

Constitutional Protests:

Just as the peasant protests and revolts were taking place against money-lenders and the alien government in the latter part of the 19th century, a cultural revolt was also emerging in Maharashtra which was against both money-lenders and Brahmins. It was a social movement of aspiring middle and low castes to challenge upper caste dominance. Its basis was the bahujan samaj, the non-Brahmin peasant masses. Early leadership to this movement was provided by some non-Brahmin intellectuals, who in class terms were more likely to be lower-level members of the commercial bourgeoisie (such as contractors) or richer peasants rather than professionals and lawyers. They aspired to speak for the masses, especially for the toiling peasantry, and their most influential figure, Jotirao Phule formulated an ideology of cultural revolt. (Gail Omvedt : 1976, p.279)

Jotirao Phule emphasised the need of social and cultural reforms, attacked the economic exploitation perpetrated by “Shetji and Bhatji”, that is the money-lender
and Brahmin landlord, priest and village accountant on the ignorant peasants. He appealed the peasants to resist back this caste domination. This ideology, however, overlooked the exploitation and domination by the Deshmukhs, Patils etc. from among the cultivating castes. The khots or landlords in Konkan were predominantly Brahmins or Prabhus, though in some villages could be found Muslim, Maratha or Mahar Khots also. (Phadke : February 1990 : pp. 167) In Khandesh, Satara, Poona, Nasik etc. the moneylenders, the lawyers and the merchants were mainly Brahmins, Gujars and Marwaris.

Jotirao Phule founded in 1873, the Satya Shodhak Samaj. Its objective was the liberation of Shudras and Atishudras and an end to their exploitation by Brahmins and Banias. The Deen bandhu, a weekly publication of the Satya Shodhak Samaj articulated the grievances of peasants and workers. The movement of the Satya Shodhak Samaj, though initially concentrating on the cultural aspects of dominance, by the 20th century got associated more and more with economic protest. (Omvedt, op.cit. pp. 280) The message of the Satya Shodhak Samaj was spread through popular folk theatre 'jalasas', tours of leaders newspapers and books. It tried to organize the 'bahujan samaj' on the pattern of the nationalist organization.

The Satara Revolt : 1919 - 1921

This was an agitation by tenants against the landlords to demand a reduction in rent from 2/3 or 3/4 to 1/2 of the produce.

The movement of the Satya Shodhak Samaj had spread in the Satara district to a considerable extent. The anger of the tenants against landlords found an expression in a
revolt that erupted in the period 1919-21. Tenants in some 30 villages from Tasgao, Karad, Valva, and Kopargao talukas of the Satara district rebelled against the Brahmin and Marwari landlords and boycotted cultivation leaving the lands follow.

The tenants, however, were not able to organize a unified rent strike. Subsequently, in some villages the tenants resorted to forceful harvesting and in some cases they chased away the Brahmins from the villages.( Omvedt: op.cit. pp. 218-220). The caste factor was dominant in the Satara revolt. It was found that tenants had boycotted only the Brahmin landlords and not the Maratha landlords. Many cases of social boycott and harassment of Brahmin families were reported. Many activists of the Satya Shodhak movement participated in this harassment. The Kesari of Poona defended the Brahmins (Phadke: May 1926: pp. 289-291), while the English press in Bombay supported the non-Brahmins. (Times of India: editorial: 11/6/1921) Both, the nationalist leadership which was predominantly Brahmin and the rich peasant non-Brahmin leadership chose to ignore the Satara rebellion, which had inconvenient class implications. The aim of the Satya Shodhak movement, namely, emancipation of the peasantry from social tyranny was not widened to include economic exploitation.

The non-Brahmin Party:

The leaders of the Satya Shodhak movement established the Non-Brahmin Party in 1920, still claiming the legacy of the Satya Shodhak Samaj. The anti-Brahmin movement became a tool in the hands of the richer Maratha landed sections to challenge the leadership of the Brahmins. After the Montague Chelmsford Reforms of 1919, the non-Brahmin
party could acquire positions of power in the *taluka* and district Local Boards and District school Boards because of the peasant support they could muster. The party established a network of educational institutions which provided the foundation for the growth of educated *Maratha* leadership. The Non-Brahmin Party opposed the Congress because of the dominance of *Brahmins* in it. But in the wake of the increasing strength of the nationalist movement, the Non-Brahmin Party lost its significance. Its prominent leaders like Jedhe and Jawalkar joined the nationalist movement. The Non-Brahmin Party broke up around 1930. (Brahme, Upadhyaya, op. cit. p. 146)

The Indian National Congress:

The Indian National Congress came into existence in 1885 to channelise the simmering discontent among the Indian masses into safe, constitutional ways of protest. In the early period of its existence it was mainly urban based and was dominated by the *Brahmins* and *Parsees* in Maharashtra.

Though the peasantry had participated in some agitations launched by it, the Congress had rarely mobilized the peasants exclusively for their own cause. The peasants, therefore were distanced from it. Though the Home Rule League, under the leadership of Lokmanya Tilak, had tried to go to villages and enroll the peasants in the league, the Congress leaders had generally been disinterested in the peasantry.

It was only after Gandhi took over the leadership, that the Congress waged struggles for peasants, the first being the Champaran indigo farmers' agitation. Later Gandhi and his colleagues drew the peasantry into the Civil
Disobedience movement through the agitations at Kheda and Bardoli. Prior to that too, there was an important agitation in which peasants had participated in large numbers.

**Mulshi Satyagraha: 1920s**

The Tata Company, controlled by the Parsee businessman was to construct a dam and hydroelectric project at Mulshi village, 25 miles south-west of Poona. The power was to be supplied to the industries of Bombay and to the railways. About 51 villages were to be submerged displacing about 10,000 peasants. These villages were inhabited by the Mavlas - Maratha peasants, whose ancestors had fought in the army of Shivaji the legendary Maratha king of 17th Century. Besides Mavlas, there were Brahmin watandars having hereditary rights in land, and Gujarati money lenders.

Some Brahmin residents from Awalas, a major village in the valley decided to resist the move of the Company. They toured the Mulshi valley and acquainted the peasants of the imminent calamity. Some leaders from Poona also decided to help the peasants. Meetings were held at different places. Peasants expressed their resistance to surrender their lands. A decision to protest against the scheme of the Tata Company was taken. Thirteen hundred peasants pledged to join the planned satyagraha. (Bhuskute: 1968: PP. 5-10).

The leaders of the campaign consulted Mahatma Gandhi on the means of protest. He advised them to resort to satyagraha. In a joint meeting of peasants and money lenders, despite the opposition of the money lenders, peasants decided to launch the satyagraha on 16th April 1921. Public opinion in Maharashtra was mobilized. The support of
the Congress, however, was only tacit.

Nearly 400 peasants and some volunteers from Poona used to march to the site of the dam and compel the workers to stop the work. This satyagraha continued for fifteen days. (Vora: op.cit.: pp.12) As a result, the Company promised the peasants that it would suspend the work for 6 months.

The company entered into an agreement with the Government and the land was acquired under the Land Acquisition Act. The money lenders in the area and the Company were pressurised the Mavlas to accept the compensation whereas the Mavlas were not ready to part with their ancestral lands. The struggle went on for two and a half years. The second campaign started in December 1821. Arrests, convictions, intimidation and oppression were resorted to by the government to suppress the agitation. The leaders of the movement, Senapati Bapat, Phatak and Deo, along with 125 Mavlas and 500 volunteers were arrested.

When all the leaders were arrested the money lenders pressurised the peasants who were indebted to them, to accept the compensation. As a result of the long struggle put up by the peasants, a fair compensation was paid to them. The money, however, went into the coffers of the money lenders who promptly recovered their loans. The struggle thus came to an end leaving the peasants landless, homeless and poor.
Peasant Discontent over the Land Revenue Amendment Bill and the Small Holdings Bill: 1927-1929.

The Government of Bombay decided in 1927 to raise the rate of land tax by 22 per cent. In Bardoli the peasants decided to organize a no-tax campaign. On 12th June 1928, Bardoli day was observed, holding public meetings in different parts of the country and Government of Bombay was obliged to reconsider the matter.

The Bombay Government, in order to arrest the process of fragmentation of land resulting in an increase in the number of small and uneconomic holdings framed The Small Holdings Bill. It proposed to limit the division of land among heirs and force the sale of 'uneconomic' fragments. It also proposed a programme of consolidation of holdings, fragmented in strips, owned by the same person in selected villages.

This Bill it was feared would render 80 percent of the peasant families landless. Meetings were held at taluka places in Satara, Poona and Ahmednagar districts to oppose the Bill. At a district conference held at Islampur (Satara district) further thought to organization of the agitation was given. A conference was organized at Poona on 25th July 1928, to form the Bombay Provincial Shetkari Sangh. (Phadke: November 1982: pp.111) The meeting vigorously protested against the Small Holdings Bill, the Land Revenue Amendment Bill and the Bardoli policy of the Bombay Government. V.R.Shinde, Gangadharrao Deshpande, N.C. Kelkar, Keshavrao Jedhe etc. addressed the conference. (ibid).

A movement against the revision of land revenue was organized in certain districts. In 1929, in Baglan taluka (Nasik district), Jedhe and Jawalkar worked as members of
the Enquiry Committee appointed by the Non-Brahmin Party to inspect the condition of farmers. (Phadke: 1982: pp. 112) A movement of non-payment of enhanced revenue was launched in Kolaba district and Palghar taluka of Thane district. (Brahme, Upadhyaya: op.cit.: pp. 152)

**Forest Satyagraha: 1930**

Grievances relating to restrictions regarding the use of forests formed an important issue which involved all sections of the peasantry in the different parts of Western Maharashtra. The new forest laws of the British Government were very troublesome. There were no restrictions or fees earlier on firewood or grazing grass. However, the British imposed restrictions on rounds of protecting and expanding the jungles. The Government restricted the grazing lands. It included the free grazing lands in the taxable category and charged exorbitant fees from the poor farmers. Cattle of defaulters was illegally captured. Peasants in the Central provinces and Berar, especially from Yavatmal district, had registered their protest many times by passing resolutions in their conferences. (Hardas: March 1982: pp. 286)

The Government did not accept the recommendations of the Forest Grievances Committee appointed in 1925. The major demands of the peasants were, 1) Reduction in the fees for cattle grazing. 2) Permission to use arms for the protection of crops from wild animals; 3) Concessions to the farmers in the auctions of reserved forest; 4) Free dry leaves and wood etc. for peasants; 5) Recognition of the right to regrown teak trees on 'malki' land. (Brahme, Upadhyaya: op. cit.: pp.153) Though the last demand mainly concerned the richer land owning sections, the rest of the demands concerned all peasant sections.
Government officers harassed the villagers citing some breach of some forest law or the other and enhanced the grazing charges. This had resulted in a discontent among the villagers.

The forest satyagraha, or the agitation of breaking forest laws was launched in Akola and Sangamner talukas of Ahmednagar districts in 1930. Congress volunteers toured some 200 villages to mobilize the villagers. The agitation received a wide support and on 22nd July 1930, about 58,000 villagers - men, women and children - in defiance of forest laws entered the forests with their cattle. The volunteers were arrested. The satyagrahis demanded their release. The villagers boycotted police officers. Through a Jungle Bulletin, the satyagrahis evolved a communication system. It became difficult for the police to control the zealous villagers participating in the satyagraha. It became even more difficult with the agitation spreading over a wider area.

There were mass satyagrahas in Thane and Kolaba districts with largescale participation of the tribals, particularly in Dang taluka. Violent incidents occurred in some places. At Chirner (Kolaba district.), 3 policemen and one forester were killed by a large mob of excited villagers. The Mamlatdar of the taluka got accidentally killed in the police firing. The satyagrahis were later charged with various offences like rioting, number, dacoity, conspiracy etc. (The Times of India: 30/1/1931) Representations were made by N.C. Kelkar of Poona Sarvajanik Sabha and R.N. Mandlik for the release of Chirner prisoners. Even Mahatma Gandhi inquired about the case with the Governor of Bombay in August 1931. But he did not try to justify the violence committed by the satyagrahis. The court convicted 29 persons in this case. (The Bombay Chronicle, 25/11/1931)
Satyagraha also took place at many places in Nasik district. Many satyagrahis were arrested. Many of them either under physical strain in jail or due to ignorance gave apologies. The village money lenders also pressurised the farmers to give in to the pressure. The indebted villagers had no other choice but to give up their agitation. In Ahmednagar district however, the satyagrahis did not succumb to the pressures. In some villages police damaged the standing crops. The number of arrests increased. But despite the heavy fines and police excesses the satyagraha was valiantly carried on for a few months. As the harvest season approached peasants could not afford to be in jals and the satyagraha gradually petered out. (Brahme, Upadhyaya: op. cit.: pp. 154)

The forest satyagraha in Berar, led by Loknayak Aney, was in support to the salt satyagraha of Mahatma Gandhi. It was an action to join the civil disobedience movement going on in the country. (Hardas: op. cit.: pp. 264-265) The main centre of satyagraha in Berar was Yavatmal district. Satyagraha took place on the 10th July 1930 and continued for a few days. The leaders including Loknayak Aney and Dr. Munje were arrested. (op. cit. PP. 267-269)

The movement spread to 106 centers, and 460 volunteers and 225 workers were involved in it. The main forms of the movement included grass cutting arson, and picketing of fuel and timber auctions. The tribal peasants had given a good response to the movement which spread deep in the countryside. There were clashes between the police and the tribal peasants. By October 1930, the movement was suppressed. (Sunil Sen: 1982: pp. 67)
Peasant Enquiry Committee:

After the Civil Disobedience movement of 1930s was withdrawn, the Congress workers in a consensus expressed the urgency to widen the organization and link it up with the problems of the peasant masses. The Maharashtra Provincial Congress Committee appointed the Peasant Enquiry Committee on 14th July 1935. The committee had as its members Keshavrao Jedhe, N.V. Gadgil, R.K.Khadilkar, Dantwala, Patwardhan and Limaye.

The committee recommended reform of land revenue, credit and marketing systems. It also stressed the need for peasant organization and suggested the organization of a Shetkari Sangh. This organization was to be created through peasant conferences and training camps. Petitions and deputations to the landlords, revenue and forest officers were to be followed by active resistance if need be. The necessity of producers' cooperative organizations, cooperative farming etc. was to be explained to the farmers by the Sangha.

Independent Labour Party of Dr. Ambedkar

The Independent Labour Party established by B.R. Ambedkar on 15th August 1936 voiced the concerns of untouchable and other landless labourers, and debt-ridden tenants. Ambedkar aimed at bringing about changes or reforms through legislation. The marginal strength of his party in the Bombay Legislature, however, did not enable him to push any bills through. The party then concentrated on building up public opinion in favour of these laws. In his campaign he highlighted the problems of agricultural labourers, bonded labourers and debt-ridden tenants. He
exposed the pro-landlord policies of the Congress Government. (Phadke: February 1990: pp. 129) Ambedkar persistently demanded the dissolution of the Mahar Watan, the traditional land right of the Mahars, because he believed that the watan, not only binds but also subjugates them to the landlords and the village in general. The undefined character of the functions which Mahars were expected to perform were related to the watan. Ambedkar, hence, believed that the dissolution of such watan tenure would free the Mahars from such a slavery. (Phadke: op.cit.: pp. 132-134)

Ambedkar, in the same way, also tried for the abolition of the Khoti system. He introduced a bill to that effect in the legislature on 17th September 1937. In this bill, Ambedkar had provided for compensation to the Khots. (Phadke: op. cit.: pp. 140) Ambedkar and his colleagues were mobilizing the tenants and labourers against the Khoti system. They were reportedly inciting the peasants to violent actions. (ibid.: pp. 142)

On 10th January 1938, the Independent Labour Party organized a march of 20,000 farmers in Bombay, which was joined by the communist leaders like Shantaram Mirajkar and Lalji Pendse. Ambedkar, as the leader, presented the demands of the peasants to the Congress Ministry. Four basic and thirteen immediate demands were listed in the memorandum. The basic demands were:

1) The tiller of the land should get the returns of his toil;
2) There should not be intermediaries like Khots or Inamars;
3) Farmers should be provided with sufficient means of living before being taxed;
4) The agricultural labourers should be assured minimum wages by law.
The immediate demands related to the reduction or waiving of the tax or rent for the poor peasants; abolition of the Khoti and Inamdari systems, protection of tenants, reduction of water-cess, free grazing lands in all villages, debt-suspension till the debt-eradication; control on money lending, distribution of fallow land among the landless labourers etc. The peasant march also demanded a universal adult franchise. The Congress ministry led by Balasaheb Kher did not accept the demand of the abolition of Khoti. Some other demands, however, were incorporated by the Congress in the official bill to protect the tenants. (Phadke: op.cit. pp. 144) In July 1942, Ambedkar dissolved the Independent Labour Party and established a new party named All India, Scheduled Castes Federation. (op.cit.: pp. 84) In 1955 Ambedkar gave a call for forceful occupation of Government lands. This was attempted in Marathwada. In this agitation about 2000 satyagrahis were arrested. (Kharat: 1966: pp.215)

All India Kisan Sabha:

While the Maharashtra Provincial Congress Committee was thinking about organizing the peasantry, the Congress Socialist party, at its meeting in Meerut on 15th January 1936, decided to form an All-India Kisan Sabha. This first all-India peasant organization was set up by diverse political forces like the Congress Socialist party, the Communist Party of India (CPI), some left-wing or 'Kisan-minded' Congressmen and some peasant organizations already working at the provincial or regional level. They had all converged on the issue of mobilization of the peasants. (Dhanagare: 1983: pp. 140) In April 1936 representatives of Kisan organisations met at Lucknow. The AIKS was launched in this meeting. Though Maharashtrian delegates had attended the Lucknow meeting, there was no prominent member amongst
them.

In the very first meeting, the Kisan Sabha made its objective of "securing complete freedom from economic exploitation of the peasants" clear, and solicited active participation of the producing masses in the national struggle for independence. It demanded the abolition of all the intermediary systems like Zamindari, Malguzari and Khoti which were unjust and oppressive to the peasants, and abolition of unjust and oppressive systems of land revenue. (Rasul: 1974: PP. 5-76).

The next session of the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS hereafter) was held in Faizpur in Maharashtra. 500 Kisans marched from Manmad to Faizpur a distance of some 200 miles to attend the session on 25th and 26th December 1936. This session demanded reduction in rent and revenue; abolition of feudal dues and levies and forced labour; fixation of tenure, liquidation of debts beyond the capacity of peasants; and statutory provision for living wages for agricultural labourers. It also resolved to encourage peasant unions (Rasul: op. cit.: pp.12-18) These demands were more radical than the recommendations of the (Congress) Peasant Enquiry Committee.

The Kisan Sabha, as an organization, however, did not take roots and little organizational work was done. (Brahme, Upadhyaya: op. cit.: pp. 164) During the second world war, after the split between the Congress and the CPI, the Kisan Sabha became the peasant organization of the CPI. It organized impressive struggles in Andhra and Bengal. Compared to these, the struggles in Maharashtra were moderate.
The Varli Uprising: 1945-46.

The major movement undertaken by the CPI dominated Kisan Sabha in Maharashtra was among the Varlis (tribal peasants) in Thane district during 1945-46. This struggle aimed at abolition of forced labour; living wages and an opposition to the general repression against the Varlis. The Kisan Sabha activists moved around in Thane district organizing the Varlis to stand up against the money lenders and landlords. Efforts were made to stop Veth (forced labour). The Kisan Sabha was successful in organizing the Varlis for a struggle against oppression which started in October 1945. In spite of efforts by the money lenders and landlords to foil the agitation with the help of the government, the Varlis resolutely carried on their struggle under the leadership of Godavari Parulekar. They struck work on the farms to demand higher /subsistence wages. The struggle came to an end on 10th November 1946 when the demands of the Varlis were granted. (Parulekar, in Desai (Ed): 1982: pp.592) The Kisan Sabha work among the Varlis continued after independence.

The Post Independence Period:

After India became independent in 1947, the Congress party formed the Government. The new government's promise to bring about land reforms and make efforts for the development of agriculture either reduced the intensity of or ended the peasant movements which were going on. The new government had to take steps to abolish landlordism and give protection to tenants. The 1950s saw the introduction and implementation of the land reforms legislations. Introduction of planning and tenancy reforms brought about significant changes in the agrarian scene in Maharashtra.
Land reform measures abolished systems of Jagir, Inam and watan rights. The tenancy legislation tried to protect the tenants and eliminate absentee landlordism. With this change, rent was no longer a significant form of surplus extraction and profit became dominant. The loopholes in the tenancy legislation were used by the land owners to evict tenants in large numbers. Tenancies were terminated and large number of small tenants were thrown into the ranks of landless agricultural labourers.

Along with the tenancy reforms the Government of Maharashtra also imposed ceiling on land holdings in 1961. The objective was to remove disparities in holdings and bring about more equitable distribution of land. This Land Ceiling Act was revised again in 1975, lowering the ceiling. It has, however, not been implemented effectively due to the loopholes in it. The land continues to be distributed unevenly.

Many development schemes for agriculture and rural areas were introduced and implemented by the government. Infra-structural developments were effected under the plan investments, which included irrigation works, electrification, development of roads, markets and extension of credit. These plan investments helped the large land owners or the medium-sized land owners in the canal irrigation area. (Brahme, Upadhyaya: op.cit.: pp.26) The cooperative sugar factories and credit societies flourished with the government support to the cooperative movement. The cooperatives provided a basis for the rich farmers' section to increase its economic and political power. The cooperatives in the rural areas serve as the political base of the ruling party.

The Green Revolution strategy of agricultural development introduced in the 1960s helped the process of
capitalisation of agriculture which strengthened the power of the rich peasantry. The introduction of the new high yielding varieties of jowar, cotton and wheat, the increasing use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and farm machinery and water obliged the farmer to have or raise working funds or capital. Only the farmers who could have it could enjoy benefits of the Green Revolution. It created islands of prosperity among the poverty-ridden rural areas. It also led to regional disparities which were inevitable given the regional variations in irrigation facilities. Green Revolution accelerated the process of differentiation among the peasantry with the number of agricultural labourers increasing.

The peasant movements in Maharashtra in the post-independence period have to be seen in the light of these developments. As the Congress became the ruling party, the protests were organized by the other, opposition parties, mainly the left parties. The Congress with its various development and reform policies and programmes managed to keep the momentum of these movements very low. The left parties like the CPI, the CPM, the Peasants and Workers Party (PWP) and the Lai Nishan (Red Flag) Party were the ones who continued to organize the peasantry around certain issues like land-reforms, land-redistribution and agricultural wages. These movements remained at a low key till late 1960s when once again the discontent in the rural areas erupted in agitations. Some non-party organizations also organized the tribal peasants and launched agitations against the land-lord-money-lender combine. However, these struggles remained restricted to certain pockets and did not develop into mass-movements.
After independence the main demands of the Kisan Sabha have been

1) abolition of landlordism;
2) distribution of cultivable fallow and other waste land among the poor and landless peasants;
3) organizing and increasing production with a view to national self-sufficiency in food and raw material;
4) struggle against colonialism and neo-colonialism.

(Brahme, Upadhyaya: op. cit. pp. 165)

Between 1950 and 1960, Kisan Sabha gave attention to the demand of tenancy reforms with a slogan “land to the tiller.” In 1956, the Kisan Sabha joined in the agitation launched by the Republican Party of India on the demand of distribution Government waste lands to the landless. The struggle was led by Nana Patil of the CPI and Dadasaheb Gaikwad of the RPI. Scheduled caste as well as caste Hindu landless labourers joined the agitation which spread to Nasik, Ahmednagar and districts of Marathwada. About 50,000 landless labourers reportedly participated in the agitation. Land was occupied and ploughed in some cases, though occupation could not be maintained for long. This was the last mass mobilization of the Kisan Sabha on the land question during the 1950s. After that for a decade the peasant front of the CPI was quiet as the CPI had joined the Samyukta Maharashtra movement.

In 1970s the Kisan Sabha and the Shet Mazdoor Sangh of the CPI joined the land-grab or the land-liberation agitation which was launched jointly by the left parties on an all-India level. In August 1970, the agitation carried out the programmes of occupation of forest land, government lands and surplus lands for a week. In Maharashtra, about
50,000 poor peasants and landless labourers joined the agitation. The struggle took place in almost all the districts of Maharashtra but especially in Ahmednagar, Jalgaon, Dhule, and Amravati districts. In August 1972, an agitation demanding a lowering of the land ceiling and distribution of surplus land was launched.

In early '70s during the severe drought conditions, the CPI (M), Lal Nishan Party, the PWP and the Socialist party, jointly organized a number of struggles all over Maharashtra. The struggles demanded the declaration of drought conditions in specific areas; relief works and provision of wage work on a sustained basis. They organized landless agricultural workers and the landed peasants from different castes and communities to fight for their right to work and right to subsistence wages.

**CPI (Marxist) led Kisan Sabha**

After the split in the Communist Party of India, the Kisan Sabha also split on the political lines. The major part in Maharashtra came into the hands of the CPI (M) dominated Kisan Sabha.

The Kisan Sabha of the CPI (M) has its activities mainly in the tribal areas of Thane district, and the adjoining tribal talukas of Nasik district. It has launched struggles for regaining Adivasi lands and for the regularisation of the cultivation of open forest lands. The Kisan Sabha also handled the issue of minimum wages for agricultural work, grass-cutting work and forest work successfully through a united action in Thane district. It has raised demands regarding debt-re redemption, provision of credit and extension of infrastructural facilities to the
tribal areas. Fair prices for crops has been an important demand of the Kisan Sabha. (Brahme, Upadhyaya: op. cit.: pp. 175) The Kisan Sabha has its influence in Thane district and in Parbhani district (Marathwada). Its base in Parbhani however has been eroded lately.

Shetkari Kamgar Paksh (Peasants and Workers' Party) -

The year 1947 marked the formation of the Peasants' and Workers' Group in the Maharashtra Congress. It was later transformed into the PWP, standing outside and in opposition to the Congress. This split was manifestation of the sociopolitical conflict in the Congress. The PWP was headed by non-Brahmin stalwarts like Jedhe, More, Raut who had entered the Congress after 1930 and other left oriented Congressmen like Khadilkar. It tried to build a radical image in 1950 by adopting the Dabhadi thesis with Marxism as its ideological creed. The 15 point programme spelt out in the Dabhadi thesis included right to work, regulation of private profit, remunerative prices to the agricultural produce etc. (Phadnis: 1978: pp. 42-48) The party did not do well in the elections of 1952. After that, important leaders like Jedhe etc. left the PWP and joined the Congress once again in 1954.

Though the party lost its vigour and did not do well in elections, it continued to attract some following from the Bahujan Samaj (non-Brahmin masses). The party had its hold in Marathwada, Kolaba district as well as some districts in Western Maharashtra. The Shetkari Sangh of the Party is active in these districts.

The PWP's main demand has been fair prices to agricultural produce to be determined on the basis of the
cost of production. Remunerative prices, according to the PWP, alone will make for expansion of the home market and improvement in the standard of living of peasants. The PWP also demands the removal of intermediaries like traders. The PWP's major struggles have centred round the issue of prices.

The PWP does not consider organization of agricultural labourers on wage demands feasible. The vertical division among the peasant classes on the basis of caste, which prevents any organization of the landless labourers on economic issues is cited as the main reason for this by the leaders. The PWP, instead, demands the EGS work where the agricultural labour can work unitedly. It believes that the EGS works set agricultural wage level and neutralise social pressure of the landowners. It also thinks that given the assurance of livelihood, cooperative farming becomes feasible and the agricultural labourers too can be incorporated in the cooperative farms. (Manoos: 4/2/1978: pp. 11-12)

The Lal Nishan Party: (LNP)

A group of cadre in the CPI, led by S.K. Limaye was expelled from the party in 1942 for its criticism of the party policy of supporting the war effort. This group in 1943 formed an organization, the Navjeevan Sanghatana, which joined the PWP in 1948. This group was later ousted from the PWP and founded the Kangar- Kisan Paksh in 1951 under the leadership of Datta Deshmukh. The group later came to be known as Lal Nishan because of a fortnightly of that name run by the party.
The LNP decided to concentrate on the trade union movement in the industries of Bombay and Poona and other major cities of Western Maharashtra. It considered the approach of all-peasant unity as irrelevant in the post-independence period and emphasised the need to organize the agricultural labourers on their own demands. The LNP organized the unions of village level service personnel, like Kotwals (village watchmen), Zilla Parishad employees, workers in sugar factories, labourers working for the State Farming Corporation etc.

In 1970 the LNP organised the first conference of landless labourers and poor peasants at Shrirampur (Ahmednagar district) which was supported by the Socialist Party, the CPI, and CPI (M). Since 1973, the LNP has organized the workers employed by the sugar factories and the labourers working on the sugar-cane farms into Sakhar Kamgar Mahamandal. The LNP has since then consistently organized agricultural labourers' conferences in Maharashtra. The major demands of the LNP have been the implementation of minimum wages; EGS work all round the year; rehabilitation of the persons displaced due to irrigation projects; land redistribution; and support for the input and credit demands of the small peasants.

The activity of the LNP has remained within trade union bounds and a wider political perspective has not emerged. (Brahme, Upadhyaya: op.cit.: pp.183)

The Socialist Party's Shetkari-Shetmajoor Panchayat

This organisation was set up in 1969. Its aims were similar to those of the Kisan Sabha, namely distribution of waste and forest land among the landless; enforcement of
land ceiling; living wages to agricultural labourers etc. The Shetkari-Shetmajoor Panchayat’s main activity is to help the peasants in land transfer cases and other legal or official matters. During the 1972-73 drought period, the Panchayat took up the issue of proper wage payment, corruption at work sites, opening of new work etc. It has also been helping the workers at the EGS works. Its work is basically centred in Poona, Sangli and Kolaba districts.

**Shramik Sanghatana : Shahada Movement**

A Bhil tribal peasants’ movement started in Shahada (taluka place in Dhule district) in January 1972. This was basically a struggle against the exploitation of the tribal peasants and landless labourers by the landlords and money-lenders.

The Gujarats who had migrated in this area from Gujarat in the 19th century became village patils and revenue collectors. With money-lending and usurious practices they soon deprived the Bhils of their lands and turned them into either tenants /share croppers or landless labourers. Some of them were employed on a yearly contract basis, as Saidars. With the coming of railways and development of trade, Gujarats took to commercial agriculture, raising crops like cotton, sugar-cane etc. on a large scale using the Adivasis as labourers. Capitalist farming (in a backward social setting) increased the exploitation of the Adivasis turning them into virtual serfs. After independence the Gujarats also monopolized positions of political power in the area.

The exploitation was resisted by the Adivasis first under the leadership of Ambarsingh Suratvanti, a tribal
himself. But this resistance was rendered futile by the repressive measures of the landlords-money lenders combine. In January 1972 a land-liberation conference was held at Shahada organized by a united front of the *sarvodaya* workers, the *Bhil Adivasi Seva Mandal*, the LNP’s Agricultural Labourer’s Union, some young Marxists from Bombay and the editor of the Marathi weekly *Manoos*. The United Front, under the leadership of Ambarsingh Suratvanti founded the *Shramik Sanghatana*. (Mies: in A.R.Desai (Ed): 1986: pp. 403-422)

The main points of the programme of action of *Shramik Sanghatana* were:

1) Occupation of lands which right fully belonged to the *Adivasis*.
2) Building up organised pressure on the government to implement its Employment Guarantee Scheme.
3) Cancellation of all *Adivi* land transfers after 1947.
4) Cancellation of all *Adivi* debts to government institutions.
5) Fixation of minimum wages for agricultural workers.

The joint programme of action, the organised strength of the peasants and the support of the press in Bombay and Poona, succeeded in putting some pressure on the landlords. Full-time activists from Bombay and Poona joined the *Shramik Sanghatana* to work among the *Adivasis* and help them get back their alienated lands. They mobilised the Adivasis to fight for their rights. About 4000 acres of land was recovered. In March 1972, the *Shramik Sanghatana* held a peasants’ rally at Shahade which demanded increase in the wages of *saldars*. To press this demand, *saldars*, day labourers and sharecroppers went on strike. The *Gujars* had to give in to this organised pressure and accept the
During the 1973 famine year, the Shramik Sanghatana organised mass rallies, demonstrations and seminars on the famine legislations, as well as action programmes like gheraos of government officials etc. The militant participation of women in all these actions was quite significant. In 1974, the Shramik Sanghatana organised a conference of peasants which was followed by a wave of strikes. But the landlords were in no mood to concede the demands. The Association of Rich Peasants declared that it would not negotiate with the Shramik Sanghatana. With the use of brute force the landlords tried to crush the Shramik Sanghatana. They attacked the activists and the Adivasis. A delegation of Gujar Patils went to meet the Chief Minster and demanded a ban on the Shramik Sanghatana. They asked for police reinforcement in the area to help them. With the demands granted the repression against the Shramik Sanghatana and the Adivasis increased. The Shramik Sanghatana despite these odds continued its work. Though it has not launched any major agitation after 1980, the movement of organising the tribal peasants and their struggle continues. In 1983, some activists of the Shramik Sanghatana were in the CPI (M), while some others were in a political organization called the Shramik Hukti Dal. (Annual Report (1982), Shramik Sanghatana, district Dhule March 1983)

**Bhoomi Sena:**

After the land-grab agitation organised by the Praja Socialist Party in Palghar taluka of Thane district, some Varli Adivasi satyagrahis decided to continue a struggle against exploitation. An Adivasi leader Adil organised the Varlis of Palghar taluka and formed an organisation named
The Bhoomi Sena first started its struggle of crop seizures against the landlords. Its intention was to bring to the notice of the authorities, cases of fraudulent land usurpation. The grain acquired from the crop seizure was thrashed and stored into a collective grain bank. The Bhoomi Sena waged a struggle for minimum wages to the tribal agricultural labourers in the mid-'70s. On the one hand it sent petitions to the relevant local officials to look into the matter and implement the minimum wages act, and on the other it mobilised the tribals to go on a strike. When the landlords refused to comply with the demands, the Adivasis refused to work in the fields and sought alternative means of income by felling jungle trees. The landlords once accepted the demand but then went back on their words. The Bhoomi Sena called for a strike once again, till the demands were met. The Bhoomi Sena also made persistent efforts to stop the practice of bonded labour and with the help of the local Tarun Mandalas (Youth groups) and Tehsildars, freed bonded labourers in some villages and rehabilitated them. The Bhoomi Sena also demanded the implementation of the EGS to provide work to the Adivasis. The activists had to face repression by the landlords and the police. However, with collective might and organization the Bhoomi Sena proved to the Adivasis that repression can be countered. It has continued its non-violent and constitutional struggle. The area of activity, however has remained restricted to Palghar taluka, and the Bhoomi Sena has not turned into a mass-movement as such.

As this review shows, the nature of peasant movement in India has changed over a period of time. The struggles during the early British period were basically of two types. One, there were anti-British, restorative movements which pulled either peasants or tribals into them. Such revolts or
rebellions were ruthlessly crushed by the British. Then there were peasant uprisings protesting against the unbearable burden of taxes or low wages at famine relief works. These again were anti-government in character. At times peasant discontent was directed against the immediate oppressors like money-lenders. Some of these issues continued to concern the peasant struggles even later, but in the early 20th century, more causes fuelled the discontent. They were, dispossession due to the acquisition of land by the Government; increased amount of rent; insecurity of tenure and the unjust forest rules and regulations. The introduction of the Gandhian means of agitation, namely, the satyagraha, also changed the nature of the peasant movements in this period. The issues changed even more after independence. The struggles were now centred on the implementation of the new land-reform acts, redistribution of land, wages of the agricultural labourers and demand of work under the schemes like famine relief or the Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS).

The movements by the left parties after independence tried to mobilize the poor or landless peasants and the tribals and tribal peasants. Barring the PWP, none of them took up the issues of the middle peasants or the peasantry as a whole. Even the PWP confined itself to merely voicing a demand like remunerative prices without mobilizing the peasants for it. The CPI (M) discussed the strategy of united front of the peasantry ("The Issue of Remunerative Prices", Central Committee Document, CPI< (M), 1983) and started including the demand of 'prices' in its all-India level meetings. The CPI (M)'s work in Maharashtra, however, remained restricted to the tribal belt and could not extend to the peasantry in general. The LNP concentrated on organizing the rural labourers on the model of the trade unions. It does not work among the middle or poor peasants, the numerically strong sections of the peasantry in
Maharashtra. In a way it was an open field for the _Shetkari Sanghatana_, therefore, to organize the peasantry and voice their demands.

The Congress has been the party traditionally representing or claiming to represent, interests of the peasantry in Maharashtra. As the ruling party dominated by the rich _Maratha_ peasants, the politics in Maharashtra is also under the domination of the same section. (Vora: 1988: P. 21). However, the Congress is not monolithic or homogeneous party. It has many factions, each led by a leader. Some of these factions manage to get power while the others wait for that opportunity. Most of these leaders are the rich _Maratha_ peasants. The major opposition party leaders also happen to be _Marathas_. The PWP, for example, with the exception of Raigad district unit, is mainly the party of rich _Maratha_ peasants. The Janata Party's rural leadership also comes from the same class and caste. They are basically dissatisfied ex-Congressmen who have gone to the Janta Party. (Vora: op. cit.: pp.21) The _Bharatiya Janta Party_ (BJP) has attempted to raise some peasant issues also because of the presence of some _Maratha_ leaders in it.

In 1978, the first non-Congress ministry came to power in Maharashtra, but it too was controlled by the rich _Maratha_ peasant leaders. However, as will be discussed later, it is not the rich peasants alone, but the rich peasants in alliance with the industrial bourgeoisie of Bombay and Poona who dominate the politics in Maharashtra. In this alliance the rich peasantry plays a subordinate role, and therefore, the policies of Congress though they seem to be determined by the rich _Maratha_ peasant leaders, are actually determined by the industrial bourgeoisie. The tacit understanding of this alliance is that the rich _Maratha_ peasant leaders of Congress, with their political base among the middle and poor peasants should assure political support.
in terms of votes in elections, for this alliance. The rich peasantry has extended this support in return for the various concessions and subsidies it has received. The tax-concessions and input-subsidies have helped the rich peasants to strengthen their economic and political power. The policies resulting in capitalist development of agriculture, thus, though beneficial to the rich peasantry, have left the middle and the poor peasants high and dry. The fruits of agricultural development were not distributed evenly, leading to a discontent among a large section of peasantry. These farmers, hit further by the declining agricultural prices in the mid-'70s looked for an articulation of their grievances and problems. This was not done by either the Congress or the opposition parties, even the left parties. The situation was thus ripe for the emergence of a non-party organization like the Shetkari Sanghatana and its movement which tried to organize the entire peasantry.
In 1818 Peshwa Bajirao II was defeated and the British established their rule in Western India. Though the British consolidated their power in due course of time, they had to face resistance from a section of local chieftains and tribals for a few decades. Due to the new forest regulations of the British, the tribals lost their autonomy as well as control over the forest and other means of livelihood. They resisted the British and these protests continued for a long time. The disbandment of the armies of the native kings and local chieftains rendered thousands of people jobless. Some of these demobilized soldiers turned into bandits or outlaws; while many returned to the land. Many artisans dependent on the patronage of the local chiefs or kings were also compelled to abandon their trades and turn to farming. Thus pressure on land increased. The British, also introduced a new system of land tenure and land revenue, altering property rights.

The new system of land revenue made the individual land owner responsible for the payment of the land tax. The payment was to be made in cash, in full, every year and the earlier concession of paying the tax in kind was withdrawn. This system was called the Ryotwari system. In this system the farmer was forced to take loans from the money-lender for the payment of land-revenue. The recurring famines and extortions by money-lenders worsened the condition of the farmer. With the improvement in transport facilities and penetration of market forces cash transactions assumed increasing importance resulting in increased dependence of farmers on money-lenders.
The money-lenders, mostly immigrant Marwaris and Gujaratis dealt with individual peasants. The increased importance of money-lenders also degraded the status of the traditional head of the village community, the Patil. The new judicial system facilitated the transfer of mortgaged lands from the peasants to the money-lenders. This process of alienation of land gave rise to an antagonism between the peasants and money-lenders. (Vora:1986, p.4)

The protests and revolts which occurred in Maharashtra during the early phase of British rule were of four kinds. (1) Social banditry which is a protest against oppression, a cry for vengeance on the oppressor and a vague dream of righting of individual wrongs. (Hobsbawm: 1959: pp.23-27) It does not have a socially purposeful ideology or organization. In the absence of better means of self-defence, these protests are sporadic in nature. The revolts of the tribals like Ranoshis, Kolis and Bhils against British rule were of this kind. (2) Armed rebellions to overthrow the British and reestablish the sovereignty of the former rulers. Either the former rulers themselves, for example, those of Nagpur, Satara, Kolhapur etc., or their loyal subjects resorted to such rebellions. (3) The protests and uprisings of the peasants against oppression by money-lenders. (4) Mobilization attempted by individuals to involve people in a revolt against foreign rule. The attempts by Wasudeo Balwant Phadke and Baba Saheb are the examples of this category. (Brahme, Upadhyaya: 1979, Vol. 1: pp.132)

The present study concerns itself with peasant movement, hence, protests of the third category among the four mentioned above, are relevant and will be discussed more extensively. The other three categories will be narrated in brief as they were not, strictly speaking, peasant revolts or protests.
The revolts were mostly confined to a small section of the population. They were in the form of recurring sporadic uprisings. They were basically geographically and organizationally isolated, and the British with their superior arms and organization crushed them mercilessly. In the case of Ramoshis of Pune district the British had initially adopted a conciliatory policy. But the Ramoshis did not compromise. (Phadke: 1989: pp.22) These revolts did not mature into a movement which could mobilize the people on a basic issue in a sustained manner. (Brahme, Upadhyaya: 1979, Vol 1: pp.133).

**Ramoshi and Koli Revellions:**

The Ramoshis in the southern part of Poona district revolted in 1928 under the leadership of Umaji Naik who became a legendary figure. He was captured in 1927 and the revolt came to an end. The British tried to pacify the Ramoshis by their recruitment into the police force.

The revolt of the Ramoshis was followed by the uprising of the Kolis. Though the revolt subsided in 1830, it occurred again between 1839 and 1846 in Poona district. This revolt had a distinctly political intent. There were a few Brahmins among its leaders along with Kolis. The British forces defeated them in encounters. Fifty four rebels were tried, two leaders were hanged, and twenty eight were given life imprisonment.

There was a Koli rebellion in Peth, a small Jahagir of 24 villages in Nasik district in December 1857. The rebel Kolis plundered the Harsool Bazar and detained the Manlatdar. Nearly 2000 Kolis participated in the rebellion which was ultimately crushed. Sixteen rebels were hanged and
a large number of them were sentenced to transportation for life.

_Bhil Uprisings:_

From 1822 to 1857 the Bhils of Satpuda hills in northern Maharashtra revolted repeatedly against the British. The British had to employ their troops stationed at Aurangabad to deal with the Bhil uprisings. Serious revolts occurred in the years 1822, 1823, 1827, 1834, 1838, 1841, 1843, 1860. The Government used its armed force to finally put down the Bhil uprisings.

_Restorative Rebellions:_

In 1817-18 the former ruler of Nagpur, Appasaheb Bhosale, with the help of Gond tribals, rebelled against the British. The British captured him but he managed to escape and hid in the Satpuda hills. He defeated the British troops at Betul and captured Melghat and Bhaisandehi towns. But ultimately he was defeated. He died in Jodhpur in 1840. (Phadke: 1989: pp.21)

There were recurring rebellions in the princely state of Kolhapur. In 1829, the rebellion of Dadaji Daulatrao Ghorpade was crushed by the British. In 1844 there was an insurrection by the Killedars or the garrison of forts. By the treaty of 1827, the British had appointed a new Executive, a Brahmin, to look after the affairs of Kolhapur. Some actions and policies of the new appointee were resented and led to the insurrection. The insurrection was supported by the Kolhapur state forces and the insurgents.
captured Kolhapur town in 1844. Outside communications were disrupted and the treasury of Chikodi was looted. The rebellion was supported by the local people. It took about nine months for the 10,000 strong British army to crush this rebellion. (Phadke: *op. cit.*: pp.21-2)

There were similar uprisings and rebellions in Satara region due to the discontent caused by the deposition and dispossession of Chhatrapati Pratapsingh in 1839. There was a series of futile, short skirmishes. Rango Bapuji, a loyal servant of Pratapsingh, engaged in a long-drawn constitutional fight for his master. He carried a ceaseless campaign against the East India Company’s deeds in India, living in London between 1840-1853. After he lost the constitutional battle he returned to India and raised a revolt in December 1856. The rebellion however could not succeed and Rango Bapuji escaped never to be traced again. (Phadke: *op. cit.*: pp24)

**No-Revenue Campaign: 1973**

The political activity among the peasants of colonial Maharashtra started in the form of a protest against the enhanced rates of land revenue. In 1822, the peasants of Khandesh region protested against the revenue settlement of John Briggs. Similarly, when the rates of land revenue were increased in Indapur taluka of Poona district in 1828 by Robert Pringle, the peasants expressed their resentment. The changes brought about by the Ryotwari system gave rise to political activity among peasants.

The peasants already harassed by the high rate of tax and the extortions by the money-lenders were burdened further by the increase in the rate of land-tax in 1870.
This new burden was coupled with the unsympathetic attitude of the tax-collecting officials. Insufficient rains in 1871-72 worsened the conditions and deepened the discontent.

The peasants of Indapur taluka (sub-district) in Pune district decided to communicate their resentment to the Government. A petition to that effect was drafted in the meeting of peasants held in Indapur town. Gopal Deshmukh, a traditional watan holder, a leader of the peasant community, took the lead in the signature campaign. The petition was signed by 2,684 peasants and was sent to the government.

The issue was taken up by the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha (Public Association) formed in 1870 by the middle class Brahmins and supported by the landed aristocracy. The Sabha had assumed the role of a leading political organization in Maharashtra. It had close ties with the rural society having its branches in a number of district and taluka towns. The revised rates of land tax and the resultant discontent among the peasantry gave an opportunity to the Sabha to broaden its base. It immediately appealed to the Government and sent its representatives to the villages to educate the peasants about the issue. They succeeded in arousing the peasants against the enhancement in the land tax. In several districts of Maharashtra no-tax campaigns were organized. The British officers held the Sarvajanik Sabha responsible for these peasant protests. But along with the Sarvajanik Sabha, the traditional leaders of the peasants had also played a significant role in organizing the no-tax campaign. (Vora: op.cit.: pp.5) As a consequence of the agitation, the government of Bombay declared some concessions to peasants, to make the new rates acceptable. (Ravinder Kumar: 1968: pp.182-3).

However, these concessions did not solve the basic problem of indebtedness of farmers. The antagonism between
the peasants and money-lenders continued and the peasant discontent increased to such an extent that within two years after the no-tax campaign peasants resorted to rioting. These riots are known as the Deccan Riots of 1875.

The Deccan Riots: 1875

The heavy indebtedness of farmers ultimately leading to the transfer of land to the money-lenders and the decline of the traditional authority in the village were the main reasons behind the peasant unrest in the villages of Poona and Ahmednagar districts.

In December 1974 in a village in Shirur taluka (Poona district), a Marwari moneylender brought a decree of auction against a watandar Deshmukh of the village. The harassment of the Deshmukh by the moneylender drove the people in the village to take a collective action of a social boycott against the moneylender. The barbers, water-carriers, house-servants, all joined the boycott. (Fukuzawa: 1982: pp.194-195) The villagers opened their own grocery shop and the moneylenders had to flee to the taluka place under police protection. This was the first expression of the agitated peasants. But the peasants in many Deccan villages were similarly agitated and soon took action in consultation with each other. (Brahme, Upadhyaya: op.cit. pp.138) Similar social sanctions were applied by the peasants of Kalas village of Indapur taluka (Poona district) against the moneylenders. A notice to that effect warned the populace that anyone who worked for the money-lenders in their farms, would be excommunicated.

The riots started in village Supa, about twenty five miles from Pune, and spread to surrounding villages.
Hundreds of peasants, assembled on market day at Supa, attacked the houses of Marwari and Gujarati money-lenders. Bonds, decrees and other records were destroyed. However, no personal violence was committed. This pattern was followed elsewhere. The riots spread to Indapur and Purandar talukas of Poona district and Parner, Shrigonda, Nagar and Karjat talukas of Ahmednagar district. The Enquiry Commission reported that the rioting occurred in 33 villages and almost a thousand peasants were arrested by the police.

Compared to the no-tax campaign of 1873, the Deccan riots were spontaneous and unorganized. The Sarvajanik Sabha which had taken the lead earlier was not involved in these riots. Rioters were more or less without leaders at many places. In the villages where traditional leaders like Patils were taking lead, the riots were less violent. The victims of the riots were mostly the alien Marwari or Gujarati money-lenders who had settled in the villages. The local money-lenders were not harassed.

The riots succeeded in attracting attention of the Government. The Government of Bombay appointed a Commission to enquire into the problem of indebtedness of peasants. On the basis of this Commission's report, the Deccan Agriculturists' Relief Act was enacted in 1879. The Act sought to protect peasants from the usurious practices of the money-lenders. The Government, however, paid no attention to the real problem of peasants, namely the unbearable burden of taxes. The peasants too were unaware of the working of the oppressive system and rose basically against their immediate, visible oppressor, the money-lender. The Act of 1879 did not provide much relief since the loopholes in the Act were used by the money-lenders to continue their hold over the rural economy. The process of dispossession of peasants from their land continued for several more decades. (Brahme, Upadhyaya: op.cit. pp.140)
Before the promulgation of the Agriculturists' Relief Act, the peasants faced a severe famine between 1876-1878. The Government of Bombay started relief works but the grains and wages paid at these relief works were too meager for the sustenance of a peasant family. As a protest about one lakh peasants engaged at famine relief works abandoned the work. They offered a passive resistance to the Government orders by striking work and rendering themselves jobless. Sarvajanik Sabha played an important role in instigating these strikes. (Mehrotra: September 1969: pp.229-322.) These strikes, however, did not result in any favourable response from the government. The resistance subsided slowly as the severity of the famine declined by 1878.

No Revenue Campaign : 1896-97

In spite of the severity of famine of 1896-97, the Government did not give any remission in land-revenue. It did not even postpone the recovery of dues. This point of contention was central to the no-revenue agitation organized by the Sarvajanik Sabha. Between October 1896 to April 1897, the agents of the Sabha visited almost all the districts of Maharashtra to explain the Famine Code to the peasants and to collect data on the severity of the famine. The public meetings by the Sabha were attended by peasants in large numbers. The petitions asking for remission in tax were circulated by the representatives of Sabha among the peasants. These petitions were sent to the Mamlatdar, or the revenue officer at the taluka level or to the District Collector. The Sabha translated the Famine Code (which stipulated that remission be granted in land-revenue in case of famine) into Marathi and distributed thousand of its copies among peasants.
As a result of the mobilization, no-tax combinations were held in Thana, Kolaba, Ratnagiri, Poona, and Khandesh districts. Both rich and poor peasants participated in this agitation. At some places in Kolaba district, the petitioners mobbed the camp of the Collector. The agitation also evoked some response in the districts of Nasik, Ahmednagar, Solapur and Satara, which were hit by famine the worst. The Government used coercive measures to deal with the movement. The defaulters were arrested. As a result, the agitation came to an end by January 1897. This campaign failed in the sense that the government did not take any immediate remedial steps to redress the grievances of the peasants.

Grain riots and Bhil Revolts:

The famine years made the living condition of tribals like Bhils and of poor peasants miserable. Hoarding and withholding of grain by the Banias and their refusal to advance grains to the poor left them with no means of survival. The tribals were also not allowed to sell firewood from the forests. This led them to revolt. The Bhil revolts occurred in Panch Mahal district of Bombay Presidency in 1899.

The famine conditions similarly led the poor peasants to resort to grain riots in Amravati district of Berar. In 1898-98, grain robberies in central Provinces were often organized by the whole village. No property except grain was looted. These riots were tackled by the use of force by the police. (Brahme, Upadhyaya: op.cit.: pp.141)
Revolts against the British:

The plight of the people led some youth to revolt against the British. An eminent example is that of Wasudeo Balwant Phadke. Disturbed by the situation of 1878-77, Wasudeo Balwant, a Brahmin from Shirdhon village in Kolaba district, formed a band of Ramoshis, Kolis, Mangs and Mahars. They robbed money-lenders and other wealthy men to raise funds to acquire arms for the struggle against the British. In May 1879 Wasudeo Balwant published a manifesto in which he severely criticized the exploitation by the British government, the increasing burden of taxes and the fat salaries of the white officers. He asserted that his struggle was against the British government. (Phadke: op.cit. pp.25) The British government tried every way to capture Wasudeo Balvant.

Wasudeo Balwant became suspicious of his Ramoshi colleagues as they showed more interest in appropriating the loot. He went to the state of Nizam at Shrishail temple for penance. He returned from there and once escaped from getting arrested by the police. However in July 1879, he was captured. He was tried in the court and Sarvajanik Kaka, a founder of Sarvajanik Sabha fought his case. Wasudeo Balwant was convicted and sent to Eden where he died in prison in February 1883. (ibid. pp.26-27)

Insurrection in Beed: 1899

An insurrection took place in Beed district in 1899, which was led by Sadashiv Neelkantha Joshi. He was reportedly moving around under various names such as Bhausheeb Limaye, Ganesh Keshav Limaye, Bhausheeb Khasgiwale etc. He was in contact with the major leaders
Like Lokmanya Tilak, Dadasaheb Khaparde, Sir Moropant Joshi etc. He had tried to contact British army personnel to incite them to revolt. He had also resorted to dacoity to raise money to purchase arms. In 1898 Joshi went to Hyderabad State; here he was helped by the employees of the Hyderabad Government. From Hyderabad he went to Beed accompanied by two Sikhs, Sukhasing and Khansing. In April 1899 Sadashiv Joshi, alias Raosaheb, alias Bhausaheb, clashed with the troops of the Hyderabad state. A large number of his band were arrested, while many were killed. Though the insurrection was suppressed Sadashiv Joshi managed to escape. (Phadke : 1985 : pp.18-26).

Constitutional Protests:

Just as the peasant protests and revolts were taking place against money-lenders and the alien government in the latter part of the 19th century, a cultural revolt was also emerging in Maharashtra which was against both money-lenders and Brahmins. It was a social movement of aspiring middle and low castes to challenge upper caste dominance. Its basis was the bahujan samaj, the non-Brahmin peasant masses. Early leadership to this movement was provided by some non-Brahmin intellectuals, who in class terms were more likely to be lower-level members of the commercial bourgeoisie (such as contractors) or richer peasants rather than professionals and lawyers. They aspired to speak for the masses, especially for the toiling peasantry, and their most influential figure, Jotirao Phule formulated an ideology of cultural revolt. (Gail Omvedt : 1976, p.279)

Jotirao Phule emphasised the need of social and cultural reforms, attacked the economic exploitation perpetrated by "Shetji and Bhatji", that is the money-lender
and Brahmin landlord, priest and village accountant on the ignorant peasants. He appealed the peasants to resist back this caste domination. This ideology, however, overlooked the exploitation and domination by the Deshmukhs, Patils etc. from among the cultivating castes. The khots or landlords in Konkan were predominantly Brahmins or Prabhus, though in some villages could be found Muslim, Maratha or Mahar Khots also. (Phadke : February 1990 : pp. 167) In Khandesh, Satara, Poona, Nasik etc. the moneylenders, the lawyers and the merchants were mainly Brahmins, Gujars and Marwaris.

Jotirao Phule founded in 1873, the Satya Shodhak Samaj. Its objective was the liberation of Shudras and Atishudras and an end to their exploitation by Brahmins and Banias. The Deen bandhu, a weekly publication of the Satya Shodhak Samaj articulated the grievances of peasants and workers. The movement of the Satya Shodhak Samaj, though initially concentrating on the cultural aspects of dominance, by the 20th century got associated more and more with economic protest. (Omvedt, op.cit. pp. 280) The message of the Satya Shodhak Samaj was spread through popular folk theatre 'jalasas', tours of leaders newspapers and books. It tried to organize the 'bahujan samaj' on the pattern of the nationalist organization.

The Satara Revolt : 1919 - 1921

This was an agitation by tenants against the landlords to demand a reduction in rent from 2/3 or 3/4 to 1/2 of the produce.

The movement of the Satya Shodhak Samaj had spread in the Satara district to a considerable extent. The anger of the tenants against landlords found an expression in a
revolt that erupted in the period 1919-21. Tenants in some 30 villages from Tasgao, Karad, Valva, and Kopargao talukas of the Satara district rebelled against the Brahmin and Marwari landlords and boycotted cultivation leaving the lands follow.

The tenants, however, were not able to organize a unified rent strike. Subsequently, in some villages the tenants resorted to forceful harvesting and in some cases they chased away the Brahmins from the villages. (Omvedt: op.cit. pp. 218-220). The caste factor was dominant in the Satara revolt. It was found that tenants had boycotted only the Brahmin landlords and not the Maratha landlords. Many cases of social boycott and harassment of Brahmin families were reported. Many activists of the Satya Shodhak movement participated in this harassment. The Kesari of Poona defended the Brahmins (Phadke: May 1986: pp. 289-291), while the English press in Bombay supported the non-Brahmins. (Times of India: editorial: 11/6/1921) Both, the nationalist leadership which was predominantly Brahmin and the rich peasant non-Brahmin leadership chose to ignore the Satara rebellion, which had inconvenient class implications. The aim of the Satya Shodhak movement, namely, emancipation of the peasantry from social tyranny was not widened to include economic exploitation.

The non-Brahmin Party:

The leaders of the Satya Shodhak movement established the Non-Brahmin Party in 1920, still claiming the legacy of the Satya Shodhak Samaj. The anti-Brahmin movement became a tool in the hands of the richer Maratha landed sections to challenge the leadership of the Brahmins. After the Montague Chelmsford Reforms of 1918, the non-Brahmin
party could acquire positions of power in the taluka and district Local Boards and District school Boards because of the peasant support they could muster. The party established a network of educational institutions which provided the foundation for the growth of educated Maratha leadership. The Non-Brahmin Party opposed the Congress because of the dominance of Bramhins in it. But in the wake of the increasing strength of the nationalist movement, the Non-Brahmin Party lost its significance. Its prominent leaders like Jedhe and Jawalkar joined the nationalist movement. The Non-Brahmin Party broke up around 1930. (Brahme, Upadhyaya, op. cit. p. 146)

The Indian National Congress:

The Indian National Congress came into existence in 1885 to channelise the simmering discontent among the Indian masses into safe, constitutional ways of protest. In the early period of its existence it was mainly urban based and was dominated by the Brahmins and Parsees in Maharashtra.

Though the peasantry had participated in some agitations launched by it, the Congress had rarely mobilized the peasants exclusively for their own cause. The peasants, therefore were distanced from it. Though the Home Rule League, under the leadership of Lokmanya Tilak, had tried to go to villages and enroll the peasants in the league, the Congress leaders had generally been disinterested in the peasantry.

It was only after Gandhi took over the leadership, that the Congress waged struggles for peasants, the first being the Champaran indigo farmers' agitation. Later Gandhi and his colleagues drew the peasantry into the Civil
Disobedience movement through the agitations at Kheda and Bardoli. Prior to that too, there was an important agitation in which peasants had participated in large numbers.

**Mulshi Satyagraha: 1920s**

The Tata Company, controlled by the Parsee businessman was to construct a dam and hydroelectric project at Mulshi village, 25 miles south-west of Poona. The power was to be supplied to the industries of Bombay and to the railways. About 51 villages were to be submerged displacing about 10,000 peasants. These villages were inhabited by the Mavlas - Maratha peasants, whose ancestors had fought in the army of Shivaji the legendary Maratha king of 17th Century. Besides Mavlas, there were Brahmin watandars having hereditary rights in land, and Gujarati money lenders.

Some Brahmin residents from Awalas, a major village in the valley decided to resist the move of the Company. They toured the Mulshi valley and acquainted the peasants of the imminent calamity. Some leaders from Poona also decided to help the peasants. Meetings were held at different places. Peasants expressed their resistance to surrender their lands. A decision to protest against the scheme of the Tata Company was taken. Thirteen hundred peasants pledged to join the planned *satyagraha*. (Bhuskute: 1968: PP. 5-10).

The leaders of the campaign consulted Mahatma Gandhi on the means of protest. He advised them to resort to *satyagraha*. In a joint meeting of peasants and money lenders, despite the opposition of the money lenders, peasants decided to launch the *satyagraha* on 16th April 1921. Public opinion in Maharashtra was mobilized. The support of
the Congress, however, was only tacit.

Nearly 400 peasants and some volunteers from Poona used to march to the site of the dam and compel the workers to stop the work. This satyagraha continued for fifteen days. (Vora: op.cit.: pp.12) As a result, the Company promised the peasants that it would suspend the work for 6 months.

The company entered into an agreement with the Government and the land was acquired under the Land Acquisition Act. The money lenders in the area and the Company were pressurised the Mavlas to accept the compensation whereas the Mavlas were not ready to part with their ancestral lands. The struggle went on for two and a half years. The second campaign started in December 1821. Arrests, convictions, intimidation and oppression were resorted to by the government to suppress the agitation. The leaders of the movement, Senapati Bapat, Phatak and Deo, along with 125 Mavlas and 500 volunteers were arrested.

When all the leaders were arrested the money lenders pressurised the peasants who were indebted to them, to accept the compensation. As a result of the long struggle put up by the peasants, a fair compensation was paid to them. The money, however, went into the coffers of the money lenders who promptly recovered their loans. The struggle thus came to an end leaving the peasants landless, homeless and poor.
Peasant Discontent over the Land Revenue Amendment Bill and the Small Holdings Bill: 1927-1929.

The Government of Bombay decided in 1927 to raise the rate of land tax by 22 per cent. In Bardoli the peasants decided to organize a no-tax campaign. On 12th June 1928, Bardoli day was observed, holding public meetings in different parts of the country and Government of Bombay was obliged to reconsider the matter.

The Bombay Government, in order to arrest the process of fragmentation of land resulting in an increase in the number of small and uneconomic holdings framed the Small Holdings Bill. It proposed to limit the division of land among heirs and force the sale of 'uneconomic' fragments. It also proposed a programme of consolidation of holdings, fragmented in strips, owned by the same person in selected villages.

This Bill it was feared would render 80 percent of the peasant families landless. Meetings were held at taluka places in Satara, Poona and Ahmednagar districts to oppose the Bill. At a district conference held at Islampur (Satara district) further thought to organization of the agitation was given. A conference was organized at Poona on 25th July 1928, to form the Bombay Provincial Shetkari Sangh. (Phadke: November 1982: pp.111) The meeting vigorously protested against the Small Holdings Bill, the Land Revenue Amendment Bill and the Bardoli policy of the Bombay Government. V.R.Shinde, Gangadharrao Deshpande, N.C. Kelkar, Keshavrao Jedhe etc. addressed the conference. (ibid).

A movement against the revision of land revenue was organized in certain districts. In 1929, in Baglan taluka (Nasik district), Jedhe and Jawalkar worked as members of
the Enquiry Committee appointed by the Non-Brahmin Party to inspect the condition of farmers. (Phadke: 1982: pp. 112) A movement of non-payment of enhanced revenue was launched in Kolaba district and Palghar taluka of Thane district. (Brahme, Upadhyaya: op. cit.: pp. 152)

Forest Satyagraha: 1930

Grievances relating to restrictions regarding the use of forests formed an important issue which involved all sections of the peasantry in the different parts of Western Maharashtra. The new forest laws of the British Government were very troublesome. There were no restrictions or fees earlier on firewood or grazing grass. However, the British imposed restrictions on rounds of protecting and expanding the jungles. The Government restricted the grazing lands. It included the free grazing lands in the taxable category and charged exorbitant fees to the poor farmers. Cattle of defaulters was illegally captured. Peasants in the Central provinces and Berar, especially from Yavatmal district, had registered their protest many times by passing resolutions in their conferences. (Hardas: March 1982: pp. 286)

The Government did not accept the recommendations of the Forest Grievances Committee appointed in 1925. The major demands of the peasants were, 1) Reduction in the fees for cattle grazing. 2) Permission to use arms for the protection of crops from wild animals; 3) Concessions to the farmers in the auctions of reserved forest; 4) Free dry leaves and wood etc. for peasants; 5) Recognition of the right to regrown teak trees on 'nalki' land. (Brahme, Upadhyaya: op. cit.: pp. 153) Though the last demand mainly concerned the richer land owning sections, the rest of the demands concerned all peasant sections.
Government officers harassed the villagers citing some breach of some forest law or the other and enhanced the grazing charges. This had resulted in a discontent among the villagers.

The forest satyagraha, or the agitation of breaking forest laws was launched in Akola and Sangamner talukas of Ahmednagar districts in 1930. Congress volunteers toured some 200 villages to mobilize the villagers. The agitation received a wide support and on 22nd July 1930, about 58,000 villagers - men, women and children - in defiance of forest laws entered the forests with their cattle. The volunteers were arrested. The satyagrahis demanded their release. The villagers boycotted police officers. Through a Jungle Bulletin, the satyagrahis evolved a communication system. It became difficult for the police to control the zealous villagers participating in the satyagraha. It became even more difficult with the agitation spreading over a wider area.

There were mass satyagrahas in Thane and Kolaba districts with large-scale participation of the tribals, particularly in Dang taluka. Violent incidents occurred in some places. At Chirner (Kolaba district.), 3 policemen and one forester were killed by a large mob of excited villagers. The Mamlatdar of the taluka got accidentally killed in the police firing. The satyagrahis were later charged with various offences like rioting, number, dacoity, conspiracy etc. (The Times of India: 30/1/1931) Representations were made by N.C. Kelkar of Poona Sarvajanik Sabha and R.N. Mandlik for the release of Chirner prisoners. Even Mahatma Gandhi inquired about the case with the Governor of Bombay in August 1931. But he did not try to justify the violence committed by the satyagrahis. The court convicted 29 persons in this case. (The Bombay Chronicle, 25/11/1931)
Satyagraha also took place at many places in Nasik district. Many satyagrahis were arrested. Many of them either under physical strain in jail or due to ignorance gave apologies. The village money lenders also pressurised the farmers to give in to the pressure. The indebted villagers had no other choice but to give up their agitation. In Ahmednagar district however, the satyagrahis did not succumb to the pressures. In some villages police damaged the standing crops. The number of arrests increased. But despite the heavy fines and police excesses the satyagraha was valiantly carried on for a few months. As the harvest season approached peasants could not afford to be in jails and the satyagraha gradually petered out. (Brahme, Upadhyaya: op. cit.: pp. 154)

The forest satyagraha in Berar, led by Loknayak Aney, was in support to the salt satyagraha of Mahatma Gandhi. It was an action to join the civil disobedience movement going on in the country. (Hardas: op. cit.: pp. 264-265) The main centre of satyagraha in Berar was Yavatmal district. Satyagraha took place on the 10th July 1930 and continued for a few days. The leaders including Loknayak Aney and Dr. Munje were arrested. (op. cit. PP. 267-269)

The movement spread to 106 centers, and 460 volunteers and 225 workers were involved in it. The main forms of the movement included grass cutting arson, and picketing of fuel and timber auctions. The tribal peasants had given a good response to the movement which spread deep in the countryside. There were clashes between the police and the tribal peasants. By October 1930, the movement was suppressed. (Sunil Sen: 1982: pp. 67)
Peasant Enquiry Committee:

After the Civil Disobedience movement of 1930s was withdrawn, the Congress workers in a consensus expressed the urgency to widen the organization and link it up with the problems of the peasant masses. The Maharashtra Provincial Congress Committee appointed the Peasant Enquiry Committee on 14th July 1935. The committee had as its members Keshavrao Jedhe, N.V. Gadgil, R.K.Khadilkar, Dantwala, Patwardhan and Limaye.

The committee recommended reform of land revenue, credit and marketing systems. It also stressed the need for peasant organization and suggested the organization of a Shetkari Sangh. This organization was to be created through peasant conferences and training camps. Petitions and deputations to the landlords, revenue and forest officers were to be followed by active resistance if need be. The necessity of producers' cooperative organizations, cooperative farming etc. was to be explained to the farmers by the Sangha.

Independent Labour Party of Dr. Ambedkar

The Independent Labour Party established by B.R. Ambedkar on 15th August 1936 voiced the concerns of untouchable and other landless labourers, and debt-ridden tenants. Ambedkar aimed at bringing about changes or reforms through legislation. The marginal strength of his party in the Bombay Legislature, however, did not enable him to push any bills through. The party then concentrated on building up public opinion in favour of these laws. In his campaign he highlighted the problems of agricultural labourers, bonded labourers and debt-ridden tenants. He
exposed the pro-landlord policies of the Congress Government. (Phadke: February 1990: pp. 129) Ambedkar persistently demanded the dissolution of the Mahar Watan, the traditional land right of the Mahars, because he believed that the watan, not only binds but also subjugates them to the landlords and the village in general. The undefined character of the functions which Mahars were expected to perform were related to the watan. Ambedkar, hence, believed that the dissolution of such watan tenure would free the Mahars from such a slavery. (Phadke: op.cit.: pp. 132-134)

Ambedkar, in the same way, also tried for the abolition of the Khoti system. He introduced a bill to that effect in the legislature on 17th September 1937. In this bill, Ambedkar had, provided for compensation to the Khots. (Phadke: op. cit.: pp. 140) Ambedkar and his colleagues were mobilizing the tenants and labourers against the Khoti system. They were reportedly inciting the peasants to violent actions. (ibid.: pp. 142)

On 10th January 1938, the Independent Labour Party organized a march of 20,000 farmers in Bombay, which was joined by the communist leaders like Shantaram Mirajkar and Lalji Pendse. Ambedkar, as the leader, presented the demands of the peasants to the Congress Ministry. Four basic and thirteen immediate demands were listed in the memorandum. The basic demands were:

1) The tiller of the land should get the returns of his toil;
2) There should not be intermediaries like Khots or Inamars;
3) Farmers should be provided with sufficient means of living before being taxed;
4) The agricultural labourers should be assured minimum wages by law.
The immediate demands related to the reduction or waiving of the tax or rent for the poor peasants; abolition of the Khoti and Inamdari systems, protection of tenants, reduction of water-cess, free grazing lands in all villages, debt-suspension till the debt-eradication; control on money lending, distribution of fallow land among the landless labourers etc. The peasant march also demanded a universal adult franchise. The Congress ministry led by Balasaheb Kher did not accept the demand of the abolition of Khoti. Some other demands, however, were incorporated by the Congress in the official bill to protect the tenants. (Phadke: op.cit. pp. 144) In July 1942, Ambedkar dissolved the Independent Labour Party and established a new party named All India, Scheduled Castes Federation. (op.cit.: pp. 84) In 1955 Ambedkar gave a call for forceful occupation of Government lands. This was attempted in Marathwada. In this agitation about 2000 satyagrahis were arrested. (Kharat: 1966: pp.215)

All India Kisan Sabha:

While the Maharashtra Provincial Congress Committee was thinking about organizing the peasantry, the Congress Socialist party, at its meeting in Meerut on 15th January 1936, decided to form an All-India Kisan Sabha. This first all-India peasant organization was set up by diverse political forces like the Congress Socialist party, the Communist Party of India (CPI), some left-wing or 'Kisan-minded' Congressmen and some peasant organizations already working at the provincial or regional level. They had all converged on the issue of mobilization of the peasants. (Dhanagare: 1983: pp. 140) In April 1936 representatives of Kisan organisations met at Lucknow. The AIKS was launched in this meeting. Though Maharashtrian delegates had attended the Lucknow meeting, there was no prominent member amongst
them.

In the very first meeting, the Kisan Sabha made its objective of "securing complete freedom from economic exploitation of the peasants" clear, and solicited active participation of the producing masses in the national struggle for independence. It demanded the abolition of all the intermediary systems like Zamindari, Malguzari and Khoti which were unjust and oppressive to the peasants, and abolition of unjust and oppressive systems of land revenue. (Rasul: 1974: PP. 5-76).

The next session of the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS hereafter) was held in Faizpur in Maharashtra. 500 Kisans marched from Manmad to Faizpur a distance of some 200 miles to attend the session on 25th and 26th December 1936. This session demanded reduction in rent and revenue; abolition of feudal dues and levies and forced labour; fixation of tenure, liquidation of debts beyond the capacity of peasants; and statutory provision for living wages for agricultural labourers. It also resolved to encourage peasant unions (Rasul: op. cit.: pp.12-18) These demands were more radical than the recommendations of the (Congress) Peasant Enquiry Committee.

The Kisan Sabha, as an organization, however, did not take roots and little organizational work was done. (Brahme, Upadhyaya: op.cit.: pp. 164) During the second world war, after the split between the Congress and the CPI, the Kisan Sabha became the peasant organization of the CPI. It organized impressive struggles in Andhra and Bengal. Compared to these, the struggles in Maharashtra were moderate.
The Varli Uprising: 1945-46.

The major movement undertaken by the CPI dominated Kisan Sabha in Maharashtra was among the Varlis (tribal peasants) in Thane district during 1945-46. This struggle aimed at abolition of forced labour; living wages and an opposition to the general repression against the Varlis. The Kisan Sabha activists moved around in Thane district organizing the Varlis to stand up against the money lenders and landlords. Efforts were made to stop Veth (forced labour). The Kisan Sabha was successful in organizing the Varlis for a struggle against oppression which started in October 1945. In spite of efforts by the money lenders and landlords to foil the agitation with the help of the government, the Varlis resolutely carried on their struggle under the leadership of Godavari Parulekar. They struck work on the farms to demand higher/subsistence wages. The struggle came to an end on 10th November 1946 when the demands of the Varlis were granted. (Parulekar, in Desai (Ed): 1982: pp.592) The Kisan Sabha work among the Varlis continued after independence.

The Post Independence Period:

After India became independent in 1947, the Congress party formed the Government. The new government's promise to bring about land reforms and make efforts for the development of agriculture either reduced the intensity of or ended the peasant movements which were going on. The new government had to take steps to abolish landlordism and give protection to tenants. The 1950s saw the introduction and implementation of the land reforms legislations. Introduction of planning and tenancy reforms brought about significant changes in the agrarian scene in Maharashtra.
Land reform measures abolished systems of Jagir, Inam and watan rights. The tenancy legislation tried to protect the tenants and eliminate absentee landlordism. With this change, rent was no longer a significant form of surplus extraction and profit became dominant. The loopholes in the tenancy legislation were used by the land owners to evict tenants in a large numbers. Tenancies were terminated and large number of small tenants were thrown into the ranks of landless agricultural labourers.

Along with the tenancy reforms the Government of Maharashtra also imposed ceiling on land holdings in 1961. The objective was to remove disparities in holdings and bring about more equitable distribution of land. This Land Ceiling Act was revised again in 1975, lowering the ceiling. It has, however, not been implemented effectively due to the loopholes in it. The land continues to be distributed unevenly.

Many development schemes for agriculture and rural areas were introduced and implemented by the government. Infra-structural developments were effected under the plan investments, which included irrigation works, electrification, development of roads, markets and extension of credit. "These plan investments helped the large land owners or the medium-sized land owners in the canal irrigation area. (Brahme, Upadhyaya: op.cit.: pp.26) The cooperative sugar factories and credit societies flourished with the government support to the cooperative movement. The cooperatives provided a basis for the rich farmers' section to increase its economic and political power. The cooperatives in the rural areas serve as the political base of the ruling party.

The Green Revolution strategy of agricultural development introduced in the 1960s helped the process of
capitalisation of agriculture which strengthened the power of the rich peasantry. The introduction of the new high yielding varieties of jowar, cotton and wheat, the increasing use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and farm machinery and water obliged the farmer to have or raise working funds or capital. Only the farmers who could have it could enjoy benefits of the Green Revolution. It created islands of prosperity among the poverty-ridden rural areas. It also led to regional disparities which were inevitable given the regional variations in irrigation facilities. Green Revolution accelerated the process of differentiation among the peasantry with the number of agricultural labourers increasing.

The peasant movements in Maharashtra in the post-independence period have to be seen in the light of these developments. As the Congress became the ruling party, the protests were organized by the other, opposition parties, mainly the left parties. The Congress with its various development and reform policies and programmes managed to keep the momentum of these movements very low. The left parties like the CPI, the CPM, the Peasants and Workers' Party (PWP) and the Lai Nishan (Red Flag) Party were the ones who continued to organize the peasantry around certain issues like land-reforms, land-redistribution and agricultural wages. These movements remained at a low key till late 1960s when once again the discontent in the rural areas erupted in agitations. Some non-party organizations also organized the tribal peasants and launched agitations against the land-lord-money-lender combine. However, these struggles remained restricted to certain pockets and did not develop into mass-movements.
After independence the main demands of the *Kisan Sabha* have been

1) abolition of landlordism;
2) distribution of cultivable fallow and other waste land among the poor and landless peasants;
3) organizing and increasing production with a view to national self-sufficiency in food and raw material;
4) struggle against colonialism and neo-colonialism.

(Brahme, Upadhyaya: *op. cit.* pp. 165)

Between 1950 and 1960, *Kisan Sabha* gave attention to the demand of tenancy reforms with a slogan “land to the tiller.” In 1956, the *Kisan Sabha* joined in the agitation launched by the Republican Party of India on the demand of distribution Government waste lands to the landless. The struggle was led by Nana Patil of the CPI and Dadasaheb Gaikwad of the RPI. Scheduled caste as well as caste Hindu landless labourers joined the agitation which spread to Nasik, Ahmednagar and districts of Marathwada. About 50,000 landless labourers reportedly participated in the agitation. Land was occupied and ploughed in some cases, though occupation could not be maintained for long. This was the last mass mobilization of the *Kisan Sabha* on the land question during the 1950s. After that for a decade the peasant front of the CPI was quiet as the CPI had joined the *Samyukta Maharashtra* movement.

In 1970s the *Kisan Sabha* and the *Shet Mazdoor Sangh* of the CPI joined the land-grab or the land-liberation agitation which was launched jointly by the left parties on an all-India level. In August 1970, the agitation carried out the programmes of occupation of forest land, government lands and surplus lands for a week. In Maharashtra, about
50,000 poor peasants and landless labourers joined the agitation. The struggle took place in almost all the districts of Maharashtra but especially in Ahmednagar, Jalgao, Dhule, and Amravati districts. In August 1972, an agitation demanding a lowering of the land ceiling and distribution of surplus land was launched.

In early '70s during the severe drought conditions, the CPI (M), Lal Nishan Party, the PWP and the Socialist party, jointly organized a number of struggles all over Maharashtra. The struggles demanded the declaration of drought conditions in specific areas; relief works and provision of wage work on a sustained basis. They organized landless agricultural workers and the landed peasants form different castes and communities to fight for their right to work and right to subsistence wages.

CPI (Marxist) led Kisan Sabha

After the split in the Communist Party of India, the Kisan Sabha also split on the political lines. The major part in Maharashtra came into the hands of the CPI (M) dominated Kisan Sabha.

The Kisan Sabha of the CPI (M) has its activities mainly in the tribal areas of Thane district, and the adjoining tribal talukas of Nasik district. It has launched struggles for regaining Adivasi lands and for the regularisation of the cultivation of open forest lands. The Kisan Sabha also handled the issue of minimum wages for agricultural work, grass-cutting work and forest work successfully through a united action in Thane district. It has raised demands regarding debt-redemption, provision of credit and extension of infrastructural facilities to the
tribal areas. Fair prices for crops has been an important demand of the Kisan Sabha. (Brahme, Upadhyaya: op. cit.: pp. 175) The Kisan Sabha has its influence in Thane district and in Parbhani district (Marathwada). Its base in Parbhani however has been eroded lately.

**Shetkari Kamgar Paksh (Peasants and Workers' Party)**

✓ The year 1947 marked the formation of the Peasants' and Workers' Group in the Maharashtra Congress. It was later transformed into the PWP, standing outside and in opposition to the Congress. This split was manifestation of the sociopolitical conflict in the Congress. The PWP was headed by non-Brahmin stalwarts like Jedhe, More, Raut who had entered the Congress after 1930 and other left oriented Congressmen like Khadilkar. It tried to build a radical image in 1950 by adopting the Dabhadi thesis with Marxism as its ideological creed. The 15 point programme spelt out in the Dabhadi thesis included right to work, regulation of private profit, remunerative prices to the agricultural produce etc. (Phadnis: 1978: pp. 42-48) The party did not do well in the elections of 1952. After that, important leaders like Jedhe etc. left the PWP and joined the Congress once again in 1954.

Though the party lost its vigour and did not do well in elections, it continued to attract some following from the Bahujan Samaj (non-Brahmin masses). The party had its hold in Marathwada, Kolaba district as well as some districts in Western Maharashtra. The Shetkari Sangh of the Party is active in these districts.

The PWP's main demand has been fair prices to agricultural produce to be determined on the basis of the
cost of production. Remunerative prices, according to the PWP, alone will make for expansion of the home market and improvement in the standard of living of peasants. The PWP also demands the removal of intermediaries like traders. The PWP’s major struggles have centred round the issue of prices.

The PWP does not consider organization of agricultural labourers on wage demands feasible. The vertical division among the peasant classes on the basis of caste, which prevents any organization of the landless labourers on economic issues is cited as the main reason for this by the leaders. The PWP, instead, demands the EGS work where the agricultural labour can work unitedly. It believes that the EGS works set agricultural wage level and neutralise social pressure of the landowners. It also thinks that given the assurance of livelihood, cooperative farming becomes feasible and the agricultural labourers too can be incorporated in the cooperative farms. (*Manoos*: 4/2/1978: pp. 11-12)

**The Lal Nishan Party** : (LNP)

A group of cadre in the CPI, led by S.K. Limaye was expelled from the party in 1942 for its criticism of the party policy of supporting the war effort. This group in 1943 formed an organization, the *Navjeevan Sanghatana*, which joined the PWP in 1948. This group was later ousted from the PWP and founded the Kamgar- Kisan Paksh in 1951 under the leadership of Datta Deshmukh. The group later came to be known as *Lal Nishan* because of a fortnightly of that name run by the party.
The LNP decided to concentrate on the trade union movement in the industries of Bombay and Poona and other major cities of Western Maharashtra. It considered the approach of all-peasant unity as irrelevant in the post-independence period and emphasised the need to organize the agricultural labourers on their own demands. The LNP organized the unions of village level service personnel, like Kotwals (village watchmen), Zilla Parishad employees, workers in sugar factories, labourers working for the State Farming Corporation etc.

In 1970 the LNP organised the first conference of landless labourers and poor peasants at Shrirampur (Ahmednagar district) which was supported by the Socialist Party, the CPI, and CPI (M). Since 1973, the LNP has organized the workers employed by the sugar factories and the labourers working on the sugar-cane farms into Sakhar Kamgar Mahamandal. The LNP has since then consistently organized agricultural labourers' conferences in Maharashtra. The major demands of the LNP have been the implementation of minimum wages; EGS work all round the year; rehabilitation of the persons displaced due to irrigation projects; land redistribution; and support for the input and credit demands of the small peasants.

The activity of the LNP has remained within trade union bounds and a wider political perspective has not emerged. (Brahme, Upadhyaya: op.cit.; pp.183)

The Socialist Party's Shetkari-Shetmajoor Panchayat

This organization was set up in 1969. Its aims were similar to those of the Kisan Sabha, namely distribution of waste and forest land among the landless; enforcement of
land ceiling; living wages to agricultural labourers etc. The Shetkari-Shetmajoor Panchayat's main activity is to help the peasants in land transfer cases and other legal or official matters. During the 1972-73 drought period, the Panchayat took up the issue of proper wage payment, corruption at work sites, opening of new work etc. It has also been helping the workers at the EGS works. Its work is basically centred in Poona, Sangli and Kolaba districts.

Shramik Sanghatana : Shahada Movement

A Bhil tribal peasants’ movement started in Shahada (taluka place in Dhule district) in January 1972. This was basically a struggle against the exploitation of the tribal peasants and landless labourers by the landlords and money-lenders.

The Gujars who had migrated in this area from Gujarat in the 19th century became village patils and revenue collectors. With money-lending and usurious practices they soon deprived the Bhils of their lands and turned them into either tenants/share croppers or landless labourers. Some of them were employed on a yearly contract basis, as Saidars. With the coming of railways and development of trade, Gujars took to commercial agriculture, raising crops like cotton, sugar-cane etc. on a large scale using the Adivasis as labourers. Capitalist farming (in a backward social setting) increased the exploitation of the Adivasis turning them into virtual serfs. After independence the Gujars also monopolized positions of political power in the area.

The exploitation was resisted by the Adivasis first under the leadership of Ambarsingh Suratvanti, a tribal
himself. But this resistance was rendered futile by the repressive measures of the landlords-money lenders combine. 

In January 1972 a land-liberation conference was held at Shahada organized by a united front of the sarvodaya workers, the Bhil Adivasi Seva Mandal, the LNP’s Agricultural Labourer’s Union, some young Marxists from Bombay and the editor of the Marathi weekly Manaos. The United Front, under the leadership of Ambarsingh Suratvanti founded the Shramik Sanghatana. (Mies: in A.R. Desai (Ed): 1986: pp. 403-422)

The main points of the programme of action of Shramik Sanghatana were:

1) Occupation of lands which right fully belonged to the Adivasis.
2) Building up organised pressure on the government to implement its Employment Guarantee Scheme.
3) Cancellation of all Adivasi land transfers after 1947.
4) Cancellation of all Adivasi debts to government institutions.
5) Fixation of minimum wages for agricultural workers.

The joint programme of action, the organised strength of the peasants and the support of the press in Bombay and Poona, succeeded in putting some pressure on the landlords. Full-time activists from Bombay and Poona joined the Shramik Sanghatana to work among the Adivasis and help them get back their alienated lands. They mobilised the Adivasis to fight for their rights. About 4000 acres of land was recovered. In March 1972, the Shramik Sanghatana held a peasants’ rally at Shahade which demanded increase in the wages of saldars. To press this demand, saldars, day labourers and sharecroppers went on strike. The Gujars had to give in to this organised pressure and accept the
During the 1973 famine year, the Shramik Sanghatana organised mass rallies, demonstrations and seminars on the famine legislations, as well as action programmes like gheraos of government officials etc. The militant participation of women in all these actions was quite significant. In 1974, the Shramik Sanghatana organised a conference of peasants which was followed by a wave of strikes. But the landlords were in no mood to concede the demands. The Association of Rich Peasants declared that it would not negotiate with the Shramik Sanghatana. With the use of brute force the landlords tried to crush the Shramik Sanghatana. They attacked the activists and the Adivasis. A delegation of Gujar Patils went to meet the Chief Minister and demanded a ban on the Shramik Sanghatana. They asked for police reinforcement in the area to help them. With the demands granted the repression against the Shramik Sanghatana and the Adivasis increased. The Shramik Sanghatana despite these odds continued its work. Though it has not launched any major agitation after 1980, the movement of organising the tribal peasants and their struggle continues. In 1983, some activists of the Shramik Sanghatana were in the CPI (M), while some others were in a political organization called the Shramik Hukti Dal. (Annual Report (1982), Shramik Sanghatana, district Dhule March 1983)

Bhoomi Sena:

After the land-grab agitation organised by the Praja Socialist Party in Palghar taluka of Thane district, some Varli Adivasi satyagrahis decided to continue a struggle against exploitation. An Adivasi leader Adil organised the Varlis of Palghar taluka and formed an organisation named
The Bhoomi Sena first started its struggle of crop seizures against the landlords. Its intention was to bring to the notice of the authorities, cases of fraudulent land usurpation. The grain acquired from the crop seizure was thrashed and stored into a collective grain bank. The Bhoomi Sena waged a struggle for minimum wages to the tribal agricultural labourers in the mid-'70s. On one hand, it sent petitions to the relevant local officials to look into the matter and implement the minimum wages act, and on the other, it mobilised the tribals to go on a strike. When the landlords refused to comply with the demands, the Adivasis refused to work in the fields and sought alternative means of income by felling jungle trees. The landlords once accepted the demand but then went back on their words. The Bhoomi Sena called for a strike once again, till the demands were met. The Bhoomi Sena also made persistent efforts to stop the practice of bonded labour and with the help of the local Tarun Mandalas (Youth groups) and Tehsildars, freed bonded labourers in some villages and rehabilitated them. The Bhoomi Sena also demanded the implementation of the EGS to provide work to the Adivasis. The activists had to face repression by the landlords and the police. However, with collective might and organization the Bhoomi Sena proved to the Adivasis that repression can be countered. It has continued its non-violent and constitutional struggle. The area of activity, however, has remained restricted to Palghar taluka, and the Bhoomi Sena has not turned into a mass-movement as such.

As this review shows, the nature of peasant movement in India has changed over a period of time. The struggles during the early British period were basically of two types. One, there were anti-British, restorative movements which pulled either peasants or tribals into them. Such revolts or
rebellions were ruthlessly crushed by the British. Then there were peasant uprisings protesting against the unbearable burden of taxes or low wages at famine relief works. These again were anti-government in character. At times peasant discontent was directed against the immediate oppressors like money-lenders. Some of these issues continued to concern the peasant struggles even later, but in the early 20th century, more causes fuelled the discontent. They were, dispossession due to the acquisition of land by the Government; increased amount of rent; insecurity of tenure and the unjust forest rules and regulations. The introduction of the Gandhian means of agitation, namely, the satyagraha, also changed the nature of the peasant movements in this period. The issues changed even more after independence. The struggles were now centred on the implementation of the new land-reform acts, redistribution of land, wages of the agricultural labourers and demand of work under the schemes like famine relief or the Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS).

The movements by the left parties after independence tried to mobilize the poor or landless peasants and the tribals and tribal peasants. Barring the PWP, none of them took up the issues of the middle peasants or the peasantry as a whole. Even the PWP confined itself to merely voicing a demand like remunerative prices without mobilizing the peasants for it. The CPI (M) discussed the strategy of united front of the peasantry ("The Issue of Remunerative Prices", Central Committee Document, CPI< (M), 1983) and started including the demand of 'prices' in its all-India level meetings. The CPI (M)'s work in Maharashtra, however, remained restricted to the tribal belt and could not extend to the peasantry in general. The LNP concentrated on organizing the rural labourers on the model of the trade unions. It does not work among the middle or poor peasants, the numerically strong sections of the peasantry in
Maharashtra. In a way it was an open field for the Shetkari Sanghatana, therefore, to organize the peasantry and voice their demands.

The Congress has been the party traditionally representing or claiming to represent, interests of the peasantry in Maharashtra. As the ruling party dominated by the rich Maratha peasants, the politics in Maharashtra is also under the domination of the same section. (Vora: 1988: P. 21). However, the Congress is not monolithic or homogeneous party. It has many factions, each led by a leader. Some of these factions manage to get power while the others wait for that opportunity. Most of these leaders are the rich Maratha peasants. The major opposition party leaders also happen to be Marathas. The PWP, for example, with the exception of Raigad district unit, is mainly the party of rich Maratha peasants. The Janata Party's rural leadership also comes from the same class and caste. They are basically dissatisfied ex-Congressmen who have gone to the Janta Party. (Vora: op. cit.: pp.21) The Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) has attempted to raise some peasant issues also because of the presence of some Maratha leaders in it.

In 1978, the first non-Congress ministry came to power in Maharashtra, but it too was controlled by the rich Maratha peasant leaders. However, as will be discussed later, it is not the rich peasants alone, but the rich peasants in alliance with the industrial bourgeoisie of Bombay and Poona who dominate the politics in Maharashtra. In this alliance the rich peasantry plays a subordinate role, and therefore, the policies of Congress though they seem to be determined by the rich Maratha peasant leaders, are actually determined by the industrial bourgeoisie. The tacit understanding of this alliance is that the rich Maratha peasant leaders of Congress, with their political base among the middle and poor peasants should ensure political support
In terms of votes in elections, for this alliance. The rich peasantry has extended this support in return for the various concessions and subsidies it has received. The tax-concessions and input-subsidies have helped the rich peasants to strengthen their economic and political power. The policies resulting in capitalist development of agriculture, thus, though beneficial to the rich peasantry, have left the middle and the poor peasants high and dry. The fruits of agricultural development were not distributed evenly, leading to a discontent among a large section of peasantry. These farmers, hit further by the declining agricultural prices in the mid-'70s looked for an articulation of their grievances and problems. This was not done by either the Congress or the opposition parties, even the left parties. The situation was thus ripe for the emergence of a non-party organization like the Shetkari Sanghatana and its movement which tried to organize the entire peasantry.
CHAPTER III

IDEOLOGY

Ideology is a nebulous concept. It denotes a system of ideas and formulations interwoven to create a pattern. This set or pattern of ideas generally explains the past and present state of a society. Ideology also tries to give a blueprint for the future society. It is action oriented as it gives people a plan of action to realise the blueprint of the future society. Ideology is generally an admixture of myth and reality which creates a peculiar perception of looking at things. An ideology explains various phenomena – social, political and economic – through this perception. Thus ideology becomes a world-view.

Ideology is essentially a class-view. The prevailing ideology in any society is generally the ideology of the ruling class. This is the hegemonic ideology. In order to blunt the edge of conflict between the ruling and the ruled classes, hegemonic ideology tries to give a comprehensive ideological structure. It consists of the themes of the dominant as well as dominated classes. The themes of the dominated classes are, however, transformed subtly to suit the interests of the ruling class. The effort of the hegemonic ideology is to make the subjects believe that it is their duty and it is in their interest to be subservient to the ruling class.

The challenge to hegemonic ideology is articulated only in terms of ideology. This challenging ideology represents the interests and the world-view of a class which may either be a fraction of the ruling class
competing with the other fraction/s, or it may be the representation of the dominated class. A class competing for hegemony may not challenge the entire system which the hegemonic ideology justifies. The ideology representing the dominated class, however, may challenge the entire logic of the system and aim at its overthrow. The radical or reformatory nature of ideology is thus determined by the character of the class which espouses and advances it.

**Ideology and movement**

Ideology is the soul of a movement. It determines the nature as well as the goals of a movement. The mobilization process in a movement is basically dependent on its ideology. The ideological articulation of a movement depends on the objective material and social conditions of the class which articulates it. It may or may not be the expression of interests of the class which is mobilized. The effectiveness of the ideological appeal to the masses which are mobilized determines the success or the failure of a movement. Ideology in that sense is the spearhead of a movement.

Just as ideology shapes a movement, the movement in its turn shapes and at times changes the ideology. The study of an ongoing movement demonstrates this clearly. The thrust of the movement and the requirements of a situation at times make the amendment of earlier formulations necessary. There may even be a compulsion to make new formulations.

Ideology is an important aspect of the Shetkari Sanghatana's movement. It is the most important device of mass-mobilization. It is both an agitational
ideology for the masses and a tool in the hands of the hegemony aspiring class to pressurise the dominant or hegemonic class.

The *Shetkari Sanghatana*’s ideology has been formulated and expounded by its leader Sharad Joshi. His basic economic argument of exploitation of peasantry expressed in the phrase *Bharat Vs India* provided the initial thrust to the movement. Then over a period of time the ideology was developed more consciously to make it a comprehensive world-view. The argument of *Bharat Vs India* remains pivotal to this ideological framework which also encompasses interpretation of history, culture and various other social and political phenomena including the women’s question.

The ideology of the *Shetkari Sanghatana* has been variously described as the ideology of peasantism, economism, millenarianism, populism etc. The researcher considers it a populist ideology. The explanation of this populism as it befits the *Shetkari Sanghatana*’s ideology will follow the summary of Sharad Joshi’s ideas and formulations.

Sharad Joshi argues that the farmers in India have been consistently exploited, earlier by the colonial rulers and then by the native rulers protecting the interests of the urban industrial sector. This exploitation takes place through the uneven terms of trade, by offering unremunerative prices to the farmers. The surplus thus accumulated is transferred outside the rural areas for use in industrial development. This is the main reason for rural poverty and it can be eradicated only by offering remunerative prices to the farmers.
Joshi explains the internal colonial exploitation by first describing the colonial exploitation. "After the industrial revolution in England and other European countries, the need of raw material at cheap prices was felt by them. So they acquired colonies in other countries. The political power enabled them to have a monopoly to procure raw material at the cheapest price possible from the colonies and use it for their factories at home. The colonies also served as markets to sell the goods so produced at high prices. This system could work for almost 200 years. During this period, India and similar other countries were doomed economically. After the second world war the imperial countries like England could no longer manage to control their colonies with the might of the armies or political power. The colonies were, hence, given freedom. But while leaning they made the arrangements to ensure that their profits in trade would continue, since their main aim behind colonization was commercial and not political." (Joshi/Mhatre : 1982 : pp 60-55)

The entrepreneurs in the imperial countries were no longer interested merely in the extraction of primary products from the colonies. They had already turned to heavy industry and thus were ready to even encourage industrialization in the colonies.

"What happened in India? Those who had risen with the help of industry and trade, along with the government that came to power, forged a new system in which the raw material continued to be purchased in the same way it was purchased earlier (during colonial period). Gradually industries came up in this country
which transformed raw material into finished goods and these goods were sold to common people and poor peasants at high prices. So, where was the change? Only the place of industry changed. The men who received profit changed but the system of the exploitation of peasant, his poverty and misfortune remained the same.” (ibid.)

The British were replaced by a new regime which was equally bad. "In order to explain it we say that in 1947, the British rule over Bharat ended and India's rule (over Bharat) started."

"...... What is this concept of India and Bharat? In our constitution our country has two names, India and Bharat, which are synonymous. The original, old name of our country is Bharat, while abroad and in English it is called India.

"...... That part in our country, wherein the people exploit agriculture in the same manner as the British, to run their industries, have the same kind of standard of living, and education, and also think in the similar manner, is India. India and Bharat do not have a geographical boundary. Rural area as Bharat and urban area as India is not the correct concept. It is a different attitude, economic, social, cultural or educational among the cities, which distinguishes them from the rest of the rural country. (op.cit.: pp.63)

At one place Joshi puts this in a nutshell. "In the Indian parlance, the essential conflict is between India and Bharat - the native and traditional nomenclature of the country. India corresponds to that notional entity that has inherited from the British the mantle of economic, social, cultural, educational exploitation; while Bharat is that notional entity which is subject to
exploitation a second time even after the termination of
the external colonial regime". (Joshi : 1985 : pp.75)

Inter-sectoral terms of trade

A major tenet in the ideology of the Shetkari
Sanghatana is the imbalance in the inter-sectoral terms
of trade, which is not accidental but a very conscious
policy by the rulers. The industrialisation in India has
been effected at the cost of exploitation of
agriculture. There is a transfer of surplus from
agriculture to industry which is made through the
mechanism of differential prices for agricultural and
industrial goods.

Joshi says, "Indian economics has been the handmaid
of the dominant classes manipulated shamelessly to their
profit. The sleight of hand of the professional
economists is nowhere as blatant as in the field of
inter sectoral terms of trade." ( op.cit.: pp. 13)

In support of his argument Joshi quotes various
authorities on the subject. He alleges that it is the
deliberate policy of the government to deny remunerative
prices to agricultural produce. According to him the use
of incorrect price data, choice of inappropriate
weightages and base periods, and deployment of faulty
methodology have made work on the subject extremely
unreliable. "All the same even A.S. Kahlon concedes that
"the terms of trade have in fact moved against
agriculture in recent years" ( EPW: December. 27, 1980)"
(ibid.)

Joshi argues that government of independent India
would have tackled the problem of remunerativeness of
agriculture, especially of farm prices, on a top priority basis if it really wished to mark a departure from the colonial policies. It is exactly the reverse that followed after the advent of independence. Planning for economic development of the newly independent country came to be based on low and stable agricultural prices as an essential instrument of mobilisation of resources.

In support of this allegation Joshi quotes from the report of the working group on agricultural prices of the Fourth Plan period: "Implementation of a policy of minimum prices based on the principle of covering the entire cost of production, in our present context, is beset with insuperable practical difficulties, since it would result in increase in the cost of production of manufactured articles." (op.cit.: pp.16: emphasis original)

According to him the mechanism of manipulation of the farm prices and keeping them low was simple and direct. "Levy procurement in times of scarcity and total indifference in times of abundance that is official policy. Heads or tails, the farmer stands to lose." (op.cit.: pp.17: emphasis original)

Joshi says that all through up to 1977, food grains were being compulsorily procured from farmers to meet shortages. The levy prices were as much as 40% to 50% lower than the prevailing open market prices. If a farmer had no grains to deliver, he was required to pay in cash the difference between the levy and the market price. On the other hand, in times of relative abundance when the prices crashed, the government was extremely reluctant to come to the help of the farmers.
Agriculture is subject to a set of rules, patently discriminatory, Joshi asserts. An industrialist who exports his product and earns foreign exchange is considered a hero, doted upon and encouraged by substantial subsidies. Export of farm produce however, is most tardily permitted and halted at the slightest excuse. Export bans are imposed even in cases where internal prices are well below the cost of production. The export policies are so unsteady that the exasperated purchasers abroad, have simply refused to discuss business with Indian exporters.

In 1975 when the open market price of jowar was Rs. 1.50 per kg., it was compulsorily procured at 83 paise per kilo from the farmers of Chakan. If a farmer did not have sufficient jowar to give in levy, he had to pay the difference between the price of open market and levy, which worked out to 67 paise, to the government. (Joshi/Mhatre: 1982: pp.44)

Till 1977, two lakh tons of onion were exported from Maharashtra. In 1978 price of onion in retail market was one rupee and twenty five paise per kilo. Immediately the export of onions was banned. As a result of the ban, the prices of onion fell to Rs. 17 per quintal in Chakan market, while the cost of production of onion was Rs.50/- to Rs.70/- per quintal. (op.cit.: pp.50)

Another example he gives is that of sugar. "Sixty five percent of sugar manufactured was subject to compulsory levy. In Maharashtra, the government paid Rs.2.72 per kilo for levy sugar as against a universally admitted cost of production of Rs.4.30 per kg. (Joshi’s article was written in August 1981) The purpose, it is
claimed, was to make sugar available to the poorer sections at reasonable prices”. (Joshi : 1985 : p.17)

After citing this discriminatory policy towards agriculture, Joshi questions, “Why has no levy been imposed on medicines the prices of which have skyrocketed beyond the reach of the poor since long?”. He says, “thousands die because they cannot afford to purchase medicines.......... Would it be wrong to conclude that medicine production would have been subject to levy if the profits of the industry were to accrue to farmers?....... There is no denying the fact that even after independence, the colonial exploitation of the masses in this country continues. The advantage accrues now to the native elite who have established oases of Westernised opulence and life style in urban centres”. (op.cit.: pp. 18)

Joshi asserts that despite claims to the contrary by Ashok Dar, Sethi, Dantwala, Ashok Mitra, Sidhu and Singh, Thamarajakshi Venkataraman and even Kahlon and Tyagi,” it is the experience of the farmers that everything they need to purchase is becoming more and more expensive by leaps and bounds while everything that he produces hardly appreciates in value at all. The terms of trade have been moving against agriculture not over the last three years or over the last ten years but demonstrably at least since the depression of the 1920’s.......The terms of trade have been continuously deteriorating as far as the farmer is concerned since as long as he or his elders remember.” (op.cit.: pp.25.)

Joshi makes it clear that he is not merely talking of relative adverse movement of prices or inter-sectoral terms of trade. “We are talking about agricultural prices as compared not with non-agricultural prices but
as compared with their own real cost of production. (op.cit.: pp.24)

The issue of Remunerative Prices

The issue of remunerative prices for agricultural produce or prices based on their cost of production is the pivotal issue in the ideology of the Shetkari Sanghatana. Accordingly, the root-cause of Indian poverty, more precisely rural poverty is the poverty of the farmer which is the result of the unremunerative prices that he has been getting over a long period of time. (On this issue the Shetkari Sanghatana has persistently criticised the Agricultural Prices Commission (APC) from 1980s. In 1984 they had strongly demanded the scrapping of the APC and this demand was conceded by Rajiv Gandhi in 1984 during election campaign.)

"In fact, remunerative prices for agricultural produce has been proclaimed as "one-point programme" not only for the betterment of the farmers' lot but for the economic development of the nation as a whole. (op.cit.: pp.78)

Remunerative prices are calculated by the Shetkari Sanghatana on the basis of what it calls the actual cost of production. Since the State has a policy of regulating the prices, the demand for ensuring remunerative prices for agricultural produce is directed towards the State. More specifically, it was the APC (Agricultural Price Commission) which had become the target of the Shetkari Sanghatana's attack. As Joshi says, "The APC set up in January 1965 to provide
scientific basis for price fixation has, during the course of last 18 years, degenerated into a major instrument of exploitation of farmers". (op.cit.: pp.32)

Joshi criticises the APC's working as unscientific. According to him, the prices fixed by it are generally lower than the post-harvest open market prices and whenever this is not the case, the State machinery is not forthcoming to carry out support operations. "The APC prices have thus little operative significance but act as an indicator of the maximum level up to which the prices may be allowed to rise. (op.cit.: pp.32: emphasis original). The APC is thus considered by the Sanghatana as a mere 'smoke-screen' for the anti-farmer policies of the state.

It was alleged that the calculations of the APC suffered from a number of inadequacies. Many major factors of cost were omitted by it. The APC was said to be ignoring the cost of arranging inputs, the expenses incurred for the repairs of equipment, the cost of transport of the produce from the field to the procurement centre, mandi or the processing factory etc. The APC was also reported to be ignoring the risk factor and the management costs.

The APC was criticised for using data relating to land prices based on revenue records. Though this practice was legally defensible it resulted in underestimation of capital costs. The APC was criticised also for not taking into account expenditure for development of water resources, for installations. It also ignored the need to set aside adequate reserve funds for depreciation, obsolescence, price fluctuations and development and research. (op.cit.: pp. 36) The wage rates which served as the basis of the APC's
calculations were found to be much lower than even the minimum rates of daily wages fixed by legislation.

All these lacunas in the cost calculations ultimately hit at farmers as the costs calculated by the APC were lower than the actual costs and could not cover the real cost of production. The farmers therefore demanded the scrapping of the then APC and creation in its place of a more modest but business like ACC (Agricultural Costs Commission). "This by itself will not do away with the anti-farmer policies", Joshi explained, "but would make it more difficult to camouflage them." (op.cit.: pp. 37)

The *Shetkari Sanghatana* has developed its own method of calculating the cost of production of different agricultural commodities like onions, sugar-cane, cotton etc. It will be useful to see some examples of this computation of the cost of production because it is a controversial point in the *Shetkari Sanghatana* ideology.

The cost of production of onion around the area of Chakan Market during 1977-78 season, was calculated as follows:

*(Shetkari Sanghatana : Khed Taluka - handout mimeograph, March 1978)*

I Capital Investment  Per hectare Expenditure.

1. Medium quality agricultural land, irrigated 3 to 4 months after monsoon; average price Rs.20,000/-

2. Diesel Engine/motor, pump-set, pipe (average 100 meters), irrigation channel and distribution system
Rs.5000/-

3. One bullock, tools & implements Rs.2000/-

4. Irrigation source: medium sized built up well - Rs.10,000/-

5. Cow shed, Godown and other sheds etc. Rs.3,000/-

**Total Capital expenditure per hectare Rs.40,000/-**

a) Duration for onion crop (6 months)
10% p.a. interest on 40,000/- 2,000=00

b) Capital investment in items 2 - 5
10% depreciation for 6 months 1,000=00

**Total expenditure on capital investment 3,000=00**

II **Making of Saplings (45 to 60 days)**

a) 3 m. X 1.5 m. sized, 10 c.m. height 150 plots making Rs.052=50

b) Seeds 7 k.g., Rs.50/- per k. Rs.350=00

Fertilizers Rs.55=00

Pesticides Rs.15=00

Rs.420=00

c) Sowing, irrigating, spraying pesticides & other work Rs.152=00

d) Removing the saplings. Rs.45=00
Transport.  Rs.6=00
Rs.51=00

Approximate cost of producing 800 bunches of saplings  Rs.675=00

(If ready made saplings are bought the expenditure goes to Rs.1800=00)

III Planting (120 to 140 days)

a) Making of 4 m. X 2.5 m. size 1000 plots.  Rs.264=00

b) Fertilizers and pesticides  Rs. 2000=00

c) Planting & other work irrigating etc.  Rs.2529=00

   Rs. 4739=00

IV Other Expenditure

a) Seeds, fertilizers, pesticides & ready goods transport  Rs. 340=00

b) Brokerage, porterage  Rs. 200=00

c) Interest on working capital for 6 months at 10% p.a.  Rs. 250=00

d) (Rs.5000/-) managerial expenditure  Rs.300=00
Rs. 50/- Op.month per hectare 1090=00

In short
1) Expenditure on capital investment 3000=00

2) Making of saplings 675=50

3) Planting 4793=00

4) Other expenditure 1090=00

Cost of production per hectare 8559=50

Minimum production 225 Quintal

Maximum production 350 Quintal

Cost of production per Quintal
Rs.50 = 84 (if minimum)
Rs.32 = 28 (if maximum)

In these calculations, in planting work the wages are counted at Rs.4=00 per day, for other work Rs.3=00 per day.

The cost of production of sugar-cane crop of 18 months duration on canal irrigated land in 1983-84 was calculated in the following way.

(Shetkari Sanghatak: 4 October. 1985)

Assumptions ---

1) Family holding 10 acres.

2) Wages for agricultural labourers - men and women at Rs. 10/- per day.
3) Sugar-cane cutting and transport charges borne by sugar factories, so not taken in calculations.

4) Cost of production in 1980 was based on well-irrigated crop. This year’s cost of production of well-irrigated crop will be 18% to 20% higher.

A Capital investment - for 10 acres.

1. Land: medium quality, black, irrigated at per acre 20,000=00

2. 2 bullocks (5000), bullock cart (5000), shed, cow-shed, godown (20,000 per acre 3,000=00

3. Implements (5000) 500=00

Total per acre 23,500=00

B Working expenditure on Capital investment

1. Interest at 12% p.a. for 18 months on Rs.20,000=00 - cost of land 3600=00

2. Interest on capital investment in items (A 2, 3) at 12% p.a. on Rs. 3500/- per acre for 18 months 630=00

3. Depreciation at 10% on capital investment items (2&3) Rs. 3500/- for 18 months 525=00

Total working expenditure on capital investment per acre Rs.4755=00

C Preparation of land. Rs.900=00
Plowing, harrowing, preparing water-channels etc.
Total 900=00

D Seeds & planting

Seeds 1000=00

Planting - wages 138=00

Total 1138=00

E Fertilizers

Fertilizers & spreading them 3461=00

F Water

1. 40 turns of water 1200=00

2. Irrigating labour wages. 600=00

Total 1800=00

G Land care & development in the interval Total 680=00

H Crop protection

Pesticides & their spraying total 280=00

I Other expenditure

1. Repairs of implements 100=00

2. Education tax, employment Guarantee scheme tax 110=00
3. Fertilizers, seeds pesticides transport 200=00

4. Visits to Bank, Revenue, Irrigation dept.
   travel expenditure 100=00

   510=00

   Net total 13,534=00

J Working Production Cost

a) Interest on working cost of production minus
   item 'B' that is 13,534 - 4755 = 8779=00 1,580=00

   At 12% p.a. for 18 months.

b) Management charges at 10% 1,353=00
   on Rs. 13,534=00

K Total cost of Production 15,957=00

L Profit at 12% on total cost 1,995=00

M Production per acre - 55 tonnes. 17852=00

   Per ton cost of production
   17,952=00 = 326=00 per tonne
   55 tonnes.

   Cost of production of sugar-cane on well-irrigation
   approximately Rs.390=00 per tonne

   These calculations are based on the method evolved
   by the Shetkari Sanghatana itself. About this method
Sharad Joshi says, "Shetkari Sanghatana's method of calculating cost of production is different. We call it The *model method of cultivation* on the basis of which cost of prod is calculated. This means that though today the small farmer cannot use certain inputs, the price is to be paid assuming that he does so. What would be the maximum impact (of this measure)? It would mean that he (the small farmer) has had one more year to effect land/agricultural improvements. If this principle of model agriculture is not assumed, then notions of agriculture would not improve, productivity will not rise and poverty of the peasant will not be removed. (Joshi : December. 1982 : p.21)

Joshi contrasts the *model method of cultivation* to calculate cost of production with two other methods, namely, the Random Sampling Method and the Representative Farm Method.

In the Random Sampling Method which was used by the APC, random samples of actual farms are surveyed and accordingly the costs of fertilizers etc. are calculated. The major danger involved in this method, as seen by Joshi, is that most of the samples are of small farmers. Small farmers do not use improved techniques or chemical fertilizers and thus the costs calculated are low. As the costs are low improved techniques cannot be used resulting in a kind of vicious circle.

The Representative Farm Method involves selection of a farm which would be typical in terms of the conditions (soil, climate, availability of irrigation, inputs etc.) prevailing as far as the cultivation of a particular crop is concerned. The actual cost of cultivation on that farm is then worked out. The actual
cost of cultivation on that farm is then considered the average cost of production and thus forms the basis for price fixation. This method too according to the Sanghatana, can not do justice to the varied conditions of cultivation (and hence costs of it) under which the farmer labours.

According to Joshi the defects of both these systems are removed in the model method.

The above-mentioned examples are given in detail mainly to illustrate the method used by the Shetkari Sanghatana to calculate the cost of production of agricultural commodities. Also, it is not a mere exercise at calculations but the prices derived thereby are the basis on which the Sanghatana has made demands for support prices and organized the peasantry for agitations. These calculations, however, are controversial and objections have been raised to some of its aspects. These objections in fact, question the very basis of the movement. The crux of this ideology is the demand for remunerative prices and what is remunerative itself becomes debatable. The objections and the questions raised about calculations of the cost of production will be dealt with at a later stage.

The Sanghatana does not consider the demand for remunerative prices from the government, as an act of begging, nor does it think that it helps centralisation. "In the last thirty years, especially during the period of famine farmers have provided food grains to the government at a loss to themselves. It means that the government assumes that agricultural prices are not determined by just the demand and supply principle but that the prices have some regulatory mechanism or public utility price mechanism. Our demand is that for this
very reason the government must give us support prices." (Joshi: December 1982: pp. 24)

According to Joshi, in most of the developed countries, agriculture is subsidised. In developing countries also agricultural subsidies should be considered essential to keep the economic balance, but if the government is not prepared for this mechanism of buying the produce or providing support prices - it should accept the principle of a completely free market economy. In that case there cannot be controls in times of scarcity and free market in times of plenty. There cannot even be any restrictions on exports of agricultural commodities. The Government will have to give up the policy of Indian Preference. It can choose either alternative, total controls or totally free market but only one of them. Only thus can the injustice done to farmers be removed. (op. cit.: December 1982: pp. 24-25)

Joshi suggests one more way for the government to act in, which lies between total controls and totally free market. He calls it the "safety fuse mechanism". It means that the government intervenes only when it is necessary. Thus there are three ways by which the farmer can get remunerative prices:

1) Total Controls system.
2) Free market system
3) Government intervention in the market only when necessary.

In the last method government allows the farmers to obtain remunerative prices in the market but give an assurance that prices will not be allowed to fall below the cost of production.

Joshi, however, cautions the farmers that if they
wish the government to buy all their produce at a particular price, they will have to accept control over production. No government can buy unlimited quantity that is produced. "When we talk about control over prices we automatically accept control over the total production." (op. cit.: pp. 26)

This statement is important to note since some critics have alleged that Joshi demands support prices for unlimited production. (Padhye: 1985: p. 125)

Joshi suggests three more ways to boost the price of agricultural produce so that the cost of production is definitely covered.

a) Make provision for storage of the produce: Prices fall because all the produce comes to the market at the same time. If it is stored and brought to market when market is favourable the farmers would benefit from it. Bank advances can also be obtained against the stored produce.

b) Reduce dependence on traditional crops and encourage new varieties/types of crops.

c) Instead of taking the agricultural produce in its raw form, it should be processed.

These steps, he maintains, would be helpful but cannot replace the basic consideration of remunerative prices.

**One-Point Programme**

The *Shetkari Sanghatana* has made the demand for remunerative prices its one-point programme. According
to Joshi, remunerative prices to the farmers will be the beginning of the real developmental process in rural India. Remunerative prices will be followed by the rest of the things. Though storage and processing facilities and bank advances also help the farmers to get better prices, these programmes are possible only after the demand for support prices is fulfilled. Remunerative prices will help the accumulation of capital in rural areas leading to a developmental process from within.

In Joshi's words, "In fact, remunerative prices for agricultural produce has been proclaimed as "one-point programme" not only for the betterment of the farmers' lot but for the economic development of the nation as a whole". (Joshi : 85 : p. 76).

"While admitting fully the multiplicity of the problems faced by the agrarian communities, remunerative prices are treated as sine qua non for the betterment of agriculture. All other programmes, including those of subsidies and facilities come to a nought if the ultimate end product fetches a price which is less than its cost of production. For these reasons, while attention is given to some of the local problems like the provision of roads, electricity, water etc., for facilitating the organizational effort, remunerative prices are treated as the single point objective of the movement." (op.cit.: pp. 78)

**Effect of the One-Point Programme**

The *Shetkari Sanghatana* has maintained that its one-point programme (struggle for remunerative prices) is essentially a programme for eradication of poverty.
The effects of the remunerative prices will come through in three stages.

(1) The first phase will be of one year immediately after the remunerative prices are received. This is the short-term phase.

(2) The second phase will last for 2-3 years after that. This is the mid-term phase, and

(3) The third phase will be of 3 to 5 years duration. This is the long-term phase.

In the short-term phase farmers will free their mortgaged lands. They will use better seeds, more fertilizers and pesticides and try to increase production. Another visible impact in the short-term phase will be of repayment of loans taken from the cooperative credit societies. (Joshi / Mhatre : 1982 : pp.122 - 125.) It is claimed that when onion farmers got remunerative prices in Nasik district, this particular phenomenon was seen. With more money in their hands farmers may also indulge in some luxury - if it can be so called - good living, buying clothes etc. The increase in prices will also lead to an increase in the wages of farm labourers.

The mid-term phase will see the farmer investing money in land development activities like digging wells or bunding. He will also cultivate different crops. He may make arrangement of small godowns for the storage of his produce.

The long-term impact of remunerative prices will be very important. The farmer will think of going beyond agriculture and will turn to small industries, complimentary to his produce. These could be small processing industries like a mill for making chili powder or an oil-press for groundnuts etc.
These industries will increase employment opportunities in the rural areas. The farmer will find these industries supplementary to his agricultural work and thereby eradicate the disguised unemployment in the rural areas. (ibid.)

Joshi argues that the intervention measures designed by various economists to overcome the periodic economic crises do not lead to development but only engender inflation. Only Keynesian measures provide remunerative prices for agricultural produce and lead to development. Once money circulates in the country side it leads to capital accumulation and industrialization in the rural areas. An even greater impact would be that the high-cost economy which prevails in India - based on restricted markets, limited production and high profit-rate - can be converted into a low-loss economy by transforming the needs of Bharat into market demands. (Joshi: December. 82 :, p. 28)

The Shetkari Sanghatana enunciates a blue-print for development which will materialise after the objective of remunerative prices is achieved. It postulates four basic assumptions in support of this blue-print.

"a) The farmers, contrary to the general belief and presumptions particularly held by the champions of imbalanced growth, respond rationally to price movements. Given the necessary inducements - or in the absence of disincentives/deterrents - farmers react by increasing the acreage, by adding to the investments, by adopting improved methods and by even innovating technology.

"b) The farmers' response to the price inducements increases the demand for farm labour etc., so that the rate of increase of farm wages is higher than the rate
of increase of agricultural prices. As a consequence labour is a greater beneficiary proportion-wise of remunerative prices.

"c) In the drastic India - Bharat type of systems the prices received by the farmers are not directly related to the prices the consumers are required to pay. The farmers’ prices are an independent function of the incomes in the victim-entity while the consumers’ prices are a function of the incomes in the parasitic modern sector. The profit-margin of the intermediaries is merely a resultant function; hence trader intermediaries are not the cause but the beneficiaries of the farmers’ exploitation.

"d) The farmers, as much as their urban counterpart, follow a reasoned pattern of behaviour in the matter of utilisation of incremental incomes received by way of improved prices. They undertake non-agricultural activities, thus creating possibilities of self-employment, employment for family-members or even for outsiders. Some of the more remarkable spurts in industrial activity have come immediately following temporary reprieves in agricultural price conditions.

As a logical consequence of the postulates above, it is maintained that economic development is as natural as biological growth. If the wheel of economic progress is found to be stuck, it is because it is being deliberately obstructed by malicious interference with the natural process of capital accumulation. The real reasons for the vicious circle of underdevelopment is the colonial or neo-colonial expropriation of agricultural surplus. If only the governments of the third world countries would give up their efforts to intensify and perpetuate poverty of their nations, the
poverty would disappear on its own." (Joshi : 1985 :, pp. 78-80).

Rural Stratification

A major aspect of the Shetkari Sanghatana’s ideology is the stand regarding rural stratification. Generally speaking, the Shetkari Sanghatana argues in favour of the unity of the rural agrarian classes. According to Joshi, "In order to understand the concept of Bharat Vs India, the assumption has to be that all those who earn their living off agriculture, stand on the same footing." (Joshi / Mhatre : 1982 - p. 77)

He agrees that there are class differences among the peasants/agriculturists such as big farmers, small farmers, marginal farmers and landless labourers. "But these are similar to those found in the industrial sector. In both societies - of India and Bharat - there are various hierarchies. We have drawn the line of conflict at the point where the contradiction is most vital." (op.cit.: - p. 77-78) This is what he calls the significant line of contradiction. Joshi argues that this line of contradiction keeps shifting. During the anti-British agitation, the significant line of contradiction was between England and Hindustan. This consciousness dominated the freedom struggle. At that time it was difficult to resolve other contradictions within the nation. Whether politics should precede social reforms or vice versa was a much debated issue then. Yet, whenever a question of nationalist politics or economics arose, the answer was clear. It was that unless the political obstacle, namely, the exploitative colonial machinery is destroyed, no economic or social
reforms can begin.

"In the similar manner today the contradiction between India and Bharat is crucial and unless it is resolved, the contradictions within rural areas cannot be tackled." (op.cit.: pp. 78)

"Poverty in rural areas exists because no one there gets a fair remuneration for his labour. Big farmers, small farmers, marginal farmers and landless labourers are not different classes in the way Marx uses the term 'class'. If they are considered to be different classes then conflict between them must be taken to be inevitable. But they are not, in the first place, different classes. The big farmer who today has 20 acres of land, or the one who is left with only two acres; or the one who has completely lost his land and lives off wage labour or has migrated to the city in search of employment are only (the examples of) the advancing stages of rural poverty. (op.cit.: pp. 78 emphasis original)

Joshi adds that the farmer who has 20 acres of land as his only means of income today, cannot double his land to 40 acres since agriculture is not profitable. He will then divide his land and give 10 acres each to his two sons. Thus the next generation will be hold 10 acres each and in its turn will divide the land for the third generation. The third generation will consist of holders of 5 acres of land that is, small farmers. The fourth generation will be of marginal farmers and the fifth generation of landless labourers or part-time farm labourers or migrants to the cities for work. This will occur if it is assumed that in each generation there are only two sons. The reason for this decline is the denial of remunerative prices to agricultural produce. (op.cit.: pp.78-79)
Joshi does speak about the specific problems of the landless labourers even as he asserts his contention regarding the essential unity of the agrarian classes. Specifically, he discusses the issue of benefit to the landless labourers by their participation in the movement for remunerative prices. He asserts that remunerative prices would help the labourer directly. The farmer will (willingly) pay increased wages to the labourers if he gets remunerative prices, Joshi asserts.

He agrees fully that today the labourer is exploited by the farmers. His analysis of this exploitation is that in the present circumstances both, the farmer and the labourer are exploited. In this situation, as the farmer is in a relatively stronger position, he passes the maximum burden of this exploitation onto the labourer. He is not always successful in doing that. In areas where there are industries and thus possibilities of other employment, it is not possible. In interior areas and in the period of drought, however, the labourer gets a very low wage. (Joshi: 1982: pp. 11) Joshi admits that in such places, there has to be some struggle for wages.

Joshi argues that the farmers need not use low rates of wage while calculating their cost of production. "We should include just rates of wages and calculate the cost of production, only then will it be possible to pay such wages to the labourers" according to Joshi. V.M. Dandekar's demand for value of labour power is also held by him to be an acceptable demand. The issue, however, becomes merely academic when the government is not ready to accept calculations based on wages specified by the Minimum Wages Act while computing prices. Even if the value of labour power is determined,
its realisation depends on the prices that the farmers receive. Hence, it has to be accommodated in the basic framework of the cost of production. (op.cit.: pp.12)

Joshi does say that the wages of the labourers will not increase automatically; pressure for the same will have to be mounted. In the same vein, however, he adds that he has not seen any evidence which suggests that the farmer does not pass a part of the profit to the labourer. (ibid.) He quotes the examples of the increased wages in the areas growing sugar-cane and onion after the remunerative prices for them were granted. "My answer will not be 'if this does not happen now, we will raise a struggle later'. Shetkari Sanghatana will guarantee that the wage rate included in the calculation of the cost of production will be paid." (ibid.).

Joshi thus concludes that it is not that there is no tension between the farmer and the agricultural labourer. Unless an end is put to the exploitation of agriculture the problem of the farmer and that of the agricultural worker will not be resolved. Through this exploitation a farmer turns into a labourer and finally is forced to migrate to the cities. It is just the question of stages.

Joshi stresses that, increase in the agricultural wages is a major aspect of the Shetkari Sanghatana’s ideology. The demand for remunerative prices is linked to the issue. Labourers must get the wages included in the calculation (of prices), when the demand is met.

He alleges, however, that there is a conspiracy to divide the agrarian classes. "It is just a conspiracy on the part of the Indian elite to try and divide Bharat on
the lines of big, medium and small farmers. There is no line of contradiction between the big and the small with regard to remunerative prices. (Joshi: 1985: p.3) He further asks, "If socialism means redistribution of land why should it not mean redistribution of industrial property?" (ibid.)

Joshi is opposed to the idea of land redistribution so long as agriculture remains non-profitable. He compares the idea (of land redistribution) with the notion of presenting an elephant to a beggar. (Joshi: December 1962: pp.17)

He lampoons the newspaper editors of Pune & Bombay for criticising the Shetkari Sanghatana's agitation as that of the big farmers. To their charge, he answers that the agitation is still in its infancy (in 1982) and hence, it is too early to jump to conclusions and pass judgments. And even if it was an agitation of the big farmers, he asks, is the demand for remunerative prices which cover the cost of production, unjustified? (ibid.)

Joshi agrees that the farm labourers, tribals and the scheduled castes have not joined the agitation in the expected numbers. He does, however, maintain that labourers will not get anything unless farmers get the remunerative prices in the first place. Joshi alleges that both the capitalists and the communists are trying to create rift among the peasants and the farm labourers. This rift, he avers, is to the advantage of the capitalist class.

According to Joshi the artisans, the landless labourer the small peasants, the middle peasants, and even the large holders as also the migrant refugees from the rural areas to the slums and the pavements of the
cities, share interests in common. In spite of appearances to the contrary, the cause of the misery in the countryside is not the slightly better off farmer in the neighbourhood but an outside exploiter who exploits all of them". (Joshi: 1985: p.75)

Joshi's position regarding agrarian class unity is thus consistence with the internal logic of his ideology and forms an element of the strategy of the agitation.

In this context Joshi says that the government policy deliberately denies remunerative prices to the farmers, any discussion on the question of agricultural wages is a political game to which the leftists fall prey. (Joshi/Mhatre: 1982: pp.85)

He also criticizes the leftists for blindly following the Soviet formulation regarding agrarian relations. "In the Russian debate, Lenin's agrarian policy, Stalin's agrarian policy and Preobrazenski's writings about these clearly say", if we want to increasingly avail of agrarian capital for industrial development, the Kulak, that is the big farmer will oppose it. If he runs his agriculture like a business we will not afford to buy his produce. So this entire class has to be suppressed." Therefore this class was liquidated with the help of the army and collective farming - State farming was started with the help of the labourers. ......(To consider) farm labour as leftist and farmer as feudal and backward has that Russian background. This cannot be applied to the Indian situation. One does not find the Kulak described by Lenin in Maharashtra. (Joshi/ Mhatre: 1982: pp. 85-86)

To the allegation that the Shetkari Sanghatana represents big farmers, Joshi says that if a list of the
first thousand big farmers is studied, it will be found that not even one is in the Sanghatana. He refuses to accept the contradiction between the big farmer and the farm labourer. "We have shown that the wages rise faster than prices and we also say that if later on this is not the case, I stand committed to agitating for the labourers against the farmer. (Joshi: interview by Claude Alvarez: The Illustrated Weekly of India: February 24, 1985: pp. 14-15)

In another context Joshi owns up the class-character of the Shetkari Sanghatana and justifies it for a totally different reason. In his views on revolution he puts forth the concept of Exploiter No.1 and Exploiter No.2. He says, "We hold that in history no revolution has ever been brought about by the really oppressed. This is a myth." He postulates that in every society there is an Exploiter No.1 and an Exploiter No.2 who is possibly not yet an actual exploiter but could be an aspiring exploiter. Revolutions in history appear to have been brought about more by the exploiter No.2 than by the Exploited. Thought the name and philosophy of the exploited is always used in revolution, its spearhead is really, the Exploiter No.2 because he alone has the leisure and the means to organise the revolution. Joshi cites Mao's somersault over the definition of the middle peasant as an excellent example.

Joshi quotes approvingly, a medical friend of his who while professing total ignorance of economics questioned the claim that the most oppressed and the most miserable people rise up and cause revolutions. "This is medically untrue. At a very early level of malnutrition people become incapable of resistance". Joshi, hence, believes that real revolutions, where
there is a qualitative change, are brought about with a double somersault action. Utilise Exploiter No. 2 for doing away with Exploiter No.1, is his recommendation, and then make a quick second somersault. That, however, depends on skill, he cautions. (ibid)

"I know I will not be able to do it but I am hoping that this Sanghatana will be able to bring about this second somersault. There is no other way. In every village, you can break the sowcar's head and you will still have brought about nothing. If it is not possible, of course nothing is lost. You can also always start with the second level tomorrow as you have gone one step ahead. Thus we are no soap-box unionists." (ibid)

It is interesting to note that, in these formulations of 1982 - 1985, Sharad Joshi's views on agrarian classes or rural stratification come close to some CPI(M) formulations at that time. One can find a similarity of positions, viz. 'agrarian unity for strategic reasons' in the speeches and writings of Harkishan Singh Surjeet, as well as in CPI(M) policy documents. ("The Peasant Upsurge and Remunerative Price Issue" - Central Committee Document, CPI(M), April 1981).

**Views on History**

Sharad Joshi has expressed his views on history and culture at various times. These views come in the form of a 'new' interpretation of history which serves a purpose in his ideological formulation.

Joshi has restricted the span his interpretation
of history to the medieval period and spatially limited it to Maharashtra. He, however, starts with the examination of the myth of 'Baliraja' (Joshi, Gote and Basargekar : 1988 : P.1). The story of Bali as found in the scriptures, (puranas) according to Joshi, is either a humbug or a parable. He partly subscribes to Jotirao Phule's interpretation of this story as 'the beginning of the aggression of Bramhinical rule (Bhatshahi) on peasants.'

But though the story of Bali is intriguingly vague in the Puranas, the women in villages have kept his memory alive for generations. During Diwali they express the wish "let all the evil disappear and the kingdom of Bali come." Joshi mentions the story of Bali because of this folklore. He had used this above phrase, with some modification, 'Ida Pida Talnar, Baliche Rajya Yenar', as a slogan in his movement.

Joshi's main contention is that all history so far is the history of the loot of the peasants. One does not find a kingdom of peasants as such. They are the ryots, that is subjects. They are expected to toil and grow crops for those who call themselves kings to take away by either sweet talks or by force. History shows kings establishing rule over one area and battling with other kings over the right to loot the peasant in that territory. (ibid)

Joshi criticises historical works written so far. He says, only if surplus is created in agriculture, then alone can others carry out non-agricultural activities. All the other occupations are dependent for their existence upon the availability of agricultural surplus. Recorded history, however shows only non-agricultural activities and their practitioner's plunder of the
Wealth created by agriculture; slavery; plunderers; bards who praise the kings; dancers; religious heads etc. He says that, the historians have avoided the question of the source of this wealth. They have not even wondered whether the technology and art developed with this wealth reached the farmer who created the wealth. This occurred because those who wrote history and historical accounts (Bakhars) were not from peasant communities; they were from the ruling, priestly or commercial communities living off the loot of agriculture. It was, obviously, not convenient for them to analyze the exploitation of peasants. (op.cit. pp.8-9)

Western historians wrote history supporting the imperial rule wherein they emphasised the ignorance, cowardice, lethargy, selfishness and lack of patriotism of the native rulers, states Joshi. As a reaction, during the Indian freedom struggle, many Indian historians interpreted history so as to preserve India's identity and promote self-respect and nationalism. Both these methods lacked the objective and impartial research approach necessary for finding out the truth. (ibid)

Marxist historians analysed Indian history in the context of their particular historical philosophy. Though they have written extensively about ancient Indian history, their work of analysing history from the period of Muslim aggression onwards has been trivial. They have neglected this entire historical period by stamping it 'internal battles of the medieval kings'. "Had they examined this history from the theoretical perspective, they would have realised that the Marxist analysis also does not give the total meaning of history." (op.cit.: pp : 11)
Joshi says that in the different historiographies the condition of the farmer has found no place. The historical interpretation attempted by Mahatma Phule is an exception. Phule analysed the history of five thousand years with the theme of the 'slavery of the Shudras'. But his work has no sanction, among the historians.

Joshi's entire approach towards history is reflected in the following argument. "A new epoch started with the creation of surplus in the agriculture. This new system consisted of the peasants who toiled to grow food grains and the robbers who looted it. As the number of robbers increased they were transformed into rulers and kings. The beginning of the State is in plunder itself. Every head of the looters' gang created his own armed force. The only means available for the maintenance of this force and for the luxury of the chief was the plunder of surrounding agriculture. Sometime later, this loot was regularised into the system of revenue. The chiefs began to consider it their right to claim a part of production from peasants in their areas. A chief dissatisfied with the loot in his own state, would use the army to attack the neighbouring states. ....... The most profitable way to earn wealth was not to wield the plough ...... but to use the sword.

"It is natural that the interrelationship between the king and the ryot had some impact on the major political transitions mentioned in history. If there was affectionate good-will between the king and the subjects, the resulting loyalty of ryots towards the king could lead to an active resistance by the subjects to political action directed against their king. Guerrilla strategy requires, apart from favourable topography, a favourable society as well. If the
relations are only exploitative, the subjects may be totally unconcerned about the king's wars. At times they may even be anti-king. This subject king relationship is a key which explains many historical incidents". (op. cit.: pp.13)

Joshi traces three historical transitions in Maharashtra. The rule of the natives was replaced by the rule of Muslims, which was replaced by the Marathas who in turn were replaced by the British.

Joshi mentions that many historians have attributed the defeat of the Yadav Kings of Devgiri by the Muslims to the lack of 'one nation' feeling. He then asks, how nationalist feelings can at all emerge if the relationship of the people with their own king is characterized by blood and tears? Nation, in the sense of one or united people, did not exist in Maharashtra prior to the Muslim rule. He adds that it was not created during the period of the British rule and does not exist even today.

In Maharashtra since the time of the plunder of agriculture, the efforts to create a united nation that would benefit the peasants and artisans were made only in one short period. The hero of this period was Chhatrapati Shivaji. The main contribution of Shivaji, according to Sharad Joshi, was to create, though in a limited territory, a new type of State wherein the relations were not of exploitations. This State was such that all the people could follow their respective occupations without fear and develop them.

Shivaji built up a new kind of 'Swarajya' which was not created with the help of any feudal exploiters. The soldiers of 'Swarajya' came from the peasants living off
agriculture. Their King, Shivaji, knew their problems and grievances and cared for them. The feudal intermediaries between the peasants and the king were brought under firm control and could no longer exploit the farmers. This was the nature of the 'Maharashtra Dharma' which was rekindled by Shivaji Maharaj. (op. cit.: pp.98-99) But the flame of Maharashtra Dharma did not burn long after Shivaji.

Joshi's explanation of the history after Shivaji is rather brief. The society relapsed into feudalism after Shivaji, based on the system of loot and plunder. The nation became fragmented and the foreigners could conquer it. The people fed up with continuous wars and plunders actually welcomed the British rule.

The British initially attempted to destroy the existent feudal system in India. However, after the rebellion of 1857, they gave up their efforts and created a system which would not interfere with the religious and social structure. In the new system, the earlier exploiters changed their method and means of exploitation. The pen of the clerk replaced the sword. The privileged Indians under the British rule, being dissatisfied with what they were getting started the movement of Independence and thus when the British left the country the entire political and economic power of the nation came in the hands of this class. In all these stages the condition of the peasantry was miserable. India thus has not become one 'nation' even today in the sense of 'one people'.

"Before Ramdevraya the looters were native, then they were the Muslims then the Brahmins and then the British. After the departure of the British there came the Khadi cap clad rulers. But the nature of the rulers
as a band of thieves has remained unchanged". (op.cit.: pp.101) The roots of the peasant problem go that deep in history.

In his analysis of history, Joshi acknowledges his debt to Jotirao Phule as his precursor. He has evaluated Phule's thoughts at length, (Joshi : February 1984) Phule is significant for Joshi because in 'Shetkaryacha Asood' Phule has described the exploitation of farmers. According to Joshi, the coercive exploitation of the productive society from the beginning of the universe is the central theme of Phule's thoughts. (Joshi : February 1984/ March 1989: p. 11) In order to explain the exploitation of the Shudras by the upper castes it was essential for Phule to attack various concepts including that of the origin of the universe in the Brahminical scriptures.

However, according to Joshi, Phule's thought was not casteist but rather it was economic. "Till Phule's time, the main factor in economic history was caste ." (op.cit.: pp.11) Phule had identified Brahmins as exploiters and Brahminism (Bhatshahi) as the system of oppression. Brahmins could loot the farmers because they had forbidden the Shudras from acquiring knowledge. So, educating the oppressed Shudras, to him, was the way to end this exploitation.

Joshi compliments Jotirao for recognising the true nature of history; namely, the exploitation of agriculture leading to capital formation. He, however, points out the limitations of Jotirao. He criticises Jotirao for turning towards subjective monotheism to avoid the Hindu religious system instead of taking a materialistic position. He faults Jotirao for his conclusion that "non-knowledge" (Avidya) was the reason
for the farmer's doom, which was the result of Phule's subjectivism. (op.cit.: pp. 38) He points out that Jotirao could not take a scientific position that material conditions determine ideas and not the other way round.

Here, Joshi compares Jotirao with his contemporary Marx. While Jotirao was engrossed with religions concepts, Marx had enunciated his revolutionary materialistic interpretation of history and had given to the world the first complete system of thought. Marx had predicted the class struggle and the establishment of ultimate class-less society under the leadership of the working class.

While complimenting both these thinkers, Joshi argues that the theories of both were limited because of their times and the societies in which they lived. Had Marx had a peasant background he would have realised that the exploitation of the peasants in colonies was more important than the exploitation of the workers in the European countries. As long as the exploitation of the third world was possible, the exploitation of workers in the imperial countries was not inevitable.

Though Jotirao had felt the eternality of the exploitation of peasants, he had not realised it. He did not realise that Brahminism (Bhatshahi) was only the contemporary form of that exploitation; that this was an inevitable part of the economic history. Unlike Marx, Jotirao did not realise the intrinsic nature of the exploitation of the farmers as the only means of capital formation. Marx had his bias against the peasants and considered the working class the vanguard of revolution. He did not realise that real exploitation lay in (bleeding) the primary economies of the Third World. He
did not realise that the workers of one country do not struggle for the cause of workers in another country. The worker considers the good of his owner more important than his starving comrade. Rosa Luxembourg realised it later, but not Marx.

**Culture, Literature etc.**

Joshi's views on culture and literature have to be taken into account as they form a part of his worldview. Literature and culture are interpreted by him from the 'peasant' point of view. His attempt is to show how the miseries and exploitation of farmers are expressed in various customs, usages etc., and how literature which has been dominated by non-agrarian classes has either distorted this picture of rural life or has not touched it at all.

Joshi contends that the portrayal of agrarian life is removed from reality in these works of arts. Even when there is a rare portrayal of the reality it is limited to just a section of the rural society. Generally the scheduled castes, the tribals and the landless labourers are portrayed. He cites films like *Damul, Aakrosh, Paar* etc. as examples.

However, these sections represented in good literature and films constitute just a small segment of the rural society and the bulk is ignored. Joshi objects to the statements made by such films, that, the misery of the most deprived people is caused by the relatively better-off neighbour in the immediate vicinity, an ordinary farmer, a money lender, trader, priest or *Sarpanch* etc. They are made out to be the villains of the piece. The thrust of the accusations is to imply slyly or maintain brazenly that the squalor of the
country side has nothing to do with the growing affluence of the urban areas, and that the urban white-collar are the only true allies of the most deprived rural people in their fight against their rural oppressors. “The attention given to the most miserable rural groups appears to be a vast divide and rule gambit rather than a sincere expression of sympathy and kindness”. (Joshi : May 1988: pp.48)

Joshi has attempted an interpretation of different customs from the ‘peasant’ point of view. One interesting example is that of the annual pilgrimage of thousands of farmers to Pandharpur (Waari) at the beginning of the monsoon. Joshi says that it is difficult to believe that a majority of farmers from dry-land areas leave their farm-work right in the midst of the 'Kharif’ season to go to Pandharpur for a pilgrimage. It cannot be an act of mere devotion. The pilgrim groups start from the non-irrigated areas in which there is little underground water. These farmers, forced by natural and other calamities, somehow to survive till the crops come to hands have to migrate to other areas for survival. Their natural choice was to go to areas near Pandharpur, rich with water resources. The farmers there would be ready to feed them. The Waari (pilgrimage) of Pandharpur was the refuge of the destitute farmers. The Waarkari sect removed the element of servility in this interaction. The farmers going to Pandharpur became the holy pilgrims and those who fed them got pious credit. The Bhakti sect helped the society survive in the most destitute condition. (Joshi, Gote, Basargekar : April 1988 : pp. 27)

Joshi similarly interprets the superstitions prevalent among farmers. In a letter addressed to Vidnyan Yatri Samiti (Science Campaign Committee)
Bhosari branch in October, 1982, he says that faith and superstition are the products of uncertainty and ignorance. However, they cannot be eradicated merely by the spread of thought or education. Faiths and superstitions of farmers are dependent on the condition of agriculture. The uncertainty of rains does not let farmers cultivate a scientific attitude. The crop as well as the life of his children depends on the rains which make the farmer gamble with agriculture. Though he will understand scientificism he will not let himself be convinced about it. Modern medical help is not available to him and if it is available, he cannot afford it. He then falls back on the quacks in order to comfort himself that he has provided at least some medical help to his family. He then conjures up tales of the effectiveness of such quacks. When the farmer gets security against his crop failure due to the whims of the nature; that is, when he gets his cost of production, he will not have to ‘learn’ scientific attitudes. Not only will all superstitions, myths and quacks go, but things like Yoga, Kundalini, Geeta, saints and so called philosophers favorite with the urban mind will also be debunked. (Joshi : December 1982 : pp. 74-75)

Thoughts on Communalism and Casteism

In his initial writings and speeches Joshi had not paid much attention to the question of communalism. It was only from mid-1984 that Joshi started writing about it. In 1984 he first discussed communalism in the context of Punjab; then in 1985 he wrote about casteism in the context of the debate over reservations for the dalits; and from 1987 onwards he clearly attacked Hindu
Joshi’s main attack on communalism is that it diverts attention from economic issues and disrupts ‘economist’ movements. Struggles between farmers and non-farmers, or between poor agricultural labourers and their exploiters (the landlords), are often distorted by dodging the economic issues involved and by giving these struggles a communal colour. “The history of Indian parochial conflicts shows that they flare up principally in periods of stagnation, regression and despair and disappear in face of dynamism, growth and hope.” (Joshi: May 1988 : pp. 66) Joshi’s views on communalism and casteism are basically enunciated in his books “Shoshakanna Poshak - Jaatiyavadacha Bhmasasoor” and “Bharat Eye-view”. (pp. 66-73)

Joshi wonders why the economism even of giants like Mahatma Gandhi and Sir Choturam failed in the face of parochial chicanery. His answer to this question is that it is probably a consequence of civilization. “Men do not like to appear to be fighting for bread or even for butter. They like to feel and let feel that there is a principle involved..... Castes, language, religion and region provide ready made principles for which men can be made willingly to die and brutally to kill. It is perhaps, related to the primary urge to seek security in community. May be the fraternity of an economic class has identity of interests but not the means and structures for securing them. The fact remains that time and time again honest economic movements have had to beat a retreat before contrived and even dishonest parochial onslaughts.” (Joshi: May 1988 : pp. 87)

In support of this argument Joshi cites the examples of the Mopala land labourers’ struggles against
the Hindu priestly caste landlords in Kerala or the struggles against the Hindu landlords waged by the landless - preponderantly Muslim - in Sindh and East Bengal. These purely economic struggles were converted into communal ones. He similarly tries to explain casteism and regionalism. "The genuine grievances of a Maratha unemployed youth in Bombay are tapped by regional patriots blaspheming even the great Shivaji. The hunger pangs of the Gujarati youth are similarly turned to their advantage by the pro or anti-reservationists. Brothers get at each others' throats trying to snatch from each others' hands more than their just share because there is just not enough to go round. The funny thing is they need to shriek slogans of caste/religion rather than beg piteously for bread." (Joshi May 1988 : pp. 68)

According to Joshi the problems of the dalit and the Muslim Communities lie in their economic backwardness. He also holds that the leaders of these communities have a vested interests to keep these communities alienated from the mainstream. In that, he sees a danger. These two major blocks of backwardness may unite and pose a threat to national integrity. The only way to ward off such a danger is to stop the present squeeze on agriculture and the artisanat.

He analyses the Punjab problem in the same framework. To him the Sikh question is basically agrarian in character. This problem, he claims is linked to the agriculture price policies. His formulation of the Punjab problem is as follows: "The green revolution brought about a technical transformation in the agriculture in Punjab. It was principally the contribution of the Punjab farmer that made the country get out of its chronic food-shortages and reach self-sufficiency. Paradoxically, as a consequence of the
anti-farmer price policies of the Centre, the economic benefits of the green revolution devolved on the traders and on the consumers rather than on the farmers. Traders were largely Hindus and the farmers happened to be in quasi-totality Sikhs. This is the basic stuff of the Punjab imbroglio." (Joshi: op. cit: pp.71)

The non-political and secular Bharati Kisan Union (BKU) Joshi states, has voiced the grievances of the Punjab farmers from 1970. They have demanded either reduction in input prices or increase in produce prices. The Akalis however, have plagiarized these economic demands of the BKU. They were able to take advantage of the simmering discontent amongst the farmers. Had the Central government granted the demands of BKU in 1984, the communalists would have been totally shorn of whatever little support they enjoyed in the countryside. "The solution of the problems of Punjab peasantry alone would provide a lasting solution. (op. cit.: pp.73)

The Shetkari Sanghatana's stand on the question of communalism, on the issue of reservations of posts for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes etc. has been determined by this ideological position.

WOMEN'S QUESTION

Sharad Joshi's views on women's question were first published in October 1986, before the rural women's meeting at Chandwad in Nasik district on 9-10th November 1986. The Sanghatana had organized this meeting to discuss the problems faced by the peasant women. The organization of the women in the agrarian sector was considered crucial by the Sanghatana leadership and they had to work-out their views regarding the women's
questions in order to organise them and ensure their wider participation in the movement.

In the booklet "Striyancha Prashna: Chandwadchi Shidori," (Joshi: November 1986) there is a discussion of various problems faced by women in different walks of life. The problems of peasant women have been specifically mentioned. It has been pointed out that the general solution of peasant problems will not automatically solve the problems of the women from peasant families. It is maintained that the women of India are also oppressed and are (potential) allies of the rural women's movement. In the subsequent discussion, equality between men and women has been stressed.

Joshi has tried to locate the reasons for the secondary status that women have to suffer in today's society; and has discussed the Marxist and feminist analysis of this question. He claims that Marx's concepts of 'class', surplus value and division of labour etc. are inadequate to analyse the women's question. He considers 'patriarchy' as an independent social force; but where as Marxists have stressed economic factors and feminists the sexual-biological contradictions, Joshi concentrates on the use of violence and force. According to him the main cause for women's slavery is the control of the means of violence by men. Women were equal to men or perhaps even dominant in prehistoric societies, but with the rise of agrarian production and surplus they became enslaved. The main form of surplus extraction throughout history has been through the use of violence and force. Peasant production by itself is peaceful and has had nothing to do with the rise of State, armies and family suppression; but the weapons and tools in the hands of
hunters turned into means of looting banditry, slavery and oppression. In the process, with men murdered and crops seized, women were raped and enslaved, and then bound to the home as a supposed protection from rape and slavery.

The factors responsible for women's enslavement, namely violence and force, thus located, the Sanghatana chalked out its programme to counter them. The solution to women's problem thus lies in giving them political power, and thereby curbing the source of power to perpetrate atrocities against women. Women have to be given a safer and securer social atmosphere. Women, especially the peasant women working in the fields should get proper remuneration for their work. They should also fight against various injustices inflicted on them. The Shetkari Sanghatana proposed the formation of a front of rural women from Maharashtra to launch these struggles. In these struggles they should also try to get the women from 'India' as their allies. This struggle will end women's slavery.

An interesting thing to note in Joshi's booklet is that while the Marxist and leftist ideas are ridiculed, Marxist concepts and methods of analysis have been used. Similarly the songs of women from left women's groups and parties have been used.

Views of the Sanghatana: A Summary

The ideology of the Shetkari Sanghatana can be put in a nut shell in the following points.
The terms of trade between industry and agriculture have remained adverse to agriculture since independence resulting in the poverty of the agrarian sector as a whole. This is the result of the conspiracy of India against Bharat to expropriate surplus created by agriculture and use it for industry and urban areas.

Agricultural sector should fight this injustice unitedly. There are no real 'classes' in agriculture, only 'stages' of poverty. The significant line of contradiction lies not within the agrarian sector but between India and Bharat. Talking about 'classes' within agricultural sector is the 'divide and rule' strategy of India. It is the common interest of all the agrarian strata to demand remunerative prices for agricultural commodities.

Remunerative prices to agricultural commodities provide the only solution to the poverty of peasantry. It is the only alternative developmental strategy which will do away with the stagnation in the economy.

Thus, terms of trade, sector rather than class, and alternative development through remunerative price-policy for agriculture are the pivotal issues.

Joshi's formulation about terms of trade is controversial. Various studies have shown that the terms of trade have not been against but in favour of agriculture, barring a period between mid 1970s to early 1980s, when the terms had shifted against agriculture. His formulation of 'Bharat Vs India' is partial, inadequate and misleading. To talk only in sectoral terms means to make an attempt to gloss over the underlying class contradictions. When Joshi makes remunerative or higher prices as his 'one-point pro-
gramme' he basically pleads the case for the rich peasants and not the entire agrarian sector - which includes poor peasants and landless labourers.

His entire ideology serves the economics and politics of a particular class, namely the rich peasantry and to some extent, the middle peasantry, in the given situation. The ideology which has been instrumental in mobilizing large masses of peasants in the movement is populist in the true sense of the term.

The Terms of Trade Controversy:

The economic development in India after independence has not been homogeneous or even. Uneven rates of growth between regions and sectors have been a marked phenomenon. Official policy, even in specific economic matters, has not followed a uniform pattern. Shifts in policy have occurred in response to external as well as internal developments, or with alteration of the composition of the government or with change in relationship between the Centre and the States.

These changes and alterations in policy manifest themselves principally in the changing terms of trade. On the assumption of a two-sector economy, other things remaining the same, it is these movements in the terms of trade which determine the distribution of aggregate national income between agriculture and industry. They also determine the distribution of farm income between landless labourers and small farmers on the one hand and the rich peasants on the other. In addition, they allocate the distribution of aggregate industrial income between the bourgeoisie and the working class. A
favourable or adverse shift in terms of trade results in a rise or decline respectively in the relative income of the classes or groups of the respective sectors who determine the policies affecting the terms of trade. The tilt in the terms of trade, therefore, is indicative of the dominant class interests.

On the basis of the available data and studies, most of the experts have observed that the terms of trade have been favourable to agriculture rather than industry. As early as 1961, Khusro was arguing that the net barter terms of trade between 1948 and 1959 had from about 1951 started to shift steadily in favour of agriculture. (Khusro: Economic Weekly: February 1961.)

Thereafter, Thamarajakshi showed that over the period 1951-1966, from about the mid-1950s the net barter terms of trade have moved somewhat in favour of agriculture while the income terms of trade have done so to a substantial extent. (Thamarajakshi: EPW: 28 June 1969) In her well-acknowledged work Thamarajakshi has come to an important conclusion concerning the movement of prices. According to her, prices paid to agricultural sector rose at a rate of 3.14 per cent per annum. At the same time, prices paid by the agricultural sector (for farm production and household consumption) rose at a rate of 2.62 per cent. Thus the price rise of farm products exceeded that of non-agricultural goods purchased by farmers and farm families. Within this price rise of agricultural products however, that of industrial raw materials rose by only 2.92 per cent. Thus the major effect has been that of rise in prices of food grains. Because of this, within the non-agricultural sector consumers suffer more than the manufacturers. At the same time, she observes that the 2.62 per cent price rise in non-agricultural commodities
can be disaggregated into price rises of goods purchased for agricultural intermediate and final uses: the figures are 3.01 per cent and 2.57 per cent respectively. That is, the brunt of the rise in prices paid by the agricultural sector has been borne by farmers as producers and not as household consumers purchasing sugar and clothing. Thamarajakshi's conclusion is that the agricultural sector has benefited from economic development by experiencing improving terms of trade in respect to non-agriculture. At the same time it has contributed by raising marketed surplus as well as its own absolute volume of demand for non-agricultural products.

However, in her analysis, the marketed surplus is not the function of net barter terms of trade but it is positively and significantly related to output as well as time: that is, marketed surplus rises with rising output and over the years. (ibid.)

According to Ashok Mitra, the terms of trade have become entrenched in favour of agriculture evidenced by a shift of nearly 50 per cent of weighted terms of trade between 1951-52 and 1953-54. This trend of tilt towards agriculture has become stronger since mid-'60s. The total effect of such high farm prices according to Mitra is industrial recession and national economic stagnation. Mitra refers to net barter terms of trade, that is, straight comparison of prices. He uses these relative prices to support his argument about the class-bias in the determination of prices. His argument deals with accumulation in an economy emerging from a semi-feudal state of agriculture and general economic stagnation.

According to Mitra, in 1970s a remarkable shift
took place in terms of trade between agriculture and industry in India. With 1961-62 as the base year, in 1973-74, the official price index of food articles was 363.6; of food-grains 400.7, of industrial raw material 327.4, of manufactures as a group 254.5, of machinery and transport equipment 254.5 and of finished products 238.6. (Mitra: 1979: pp.108) Overall, the weighted terms of trade moved by nearly 50 per cent in favour of agriculture over industry. This shift in terms of trade towards agriculture reflects, according to Mitra, the extent of decline in the relative unit value of non-farm output and the rise in the relative unit value of farm products. During 1965-66 to 1970-71, the index of farm production (base triennium ending 1961-62 = 100) rose by 25 per cent, while the index of industrial output over these years rose by about 20 per cent. Even so, the terms of trade moved in favour not of industry but of agriculture, to the extent of around 25 per cent. Mitra observed that for the entire period from the early 60s till 1974-75, the rate of growth in the organized industrial sector was greater than that in agriculture since in more recent years there has been a perceptible fall in the rates of increase in farm output. This development can be related at least partly to the shift in terms of trade, differential price incentives, fiscal and monetary policies. (ibid.)

A similar view has been expressed by Utsa Patnaik. She says, "Up to the mid-1970's the agriculture - manufacture terms of trade show a steadily widening 'scissors' in favour of agriculture, taking 1960 as the base. After 1975, in the last decade, on the whole manufactured goods prices have tended to rise at a slightly faster rate than agricultural prices, narrowing - but not reversing - the 'scissors' with base 1960, while with a shift of the base year to 1970, terms of
trade are seen to deteriorate for agriculture by about 13 per cent from 1975 up to 1978 and hold fairly steady subsequently. (Patnaik : 1986) Utsa Patnaik has based her conclusions on the data for the period after 1970 provided by V. K. R. V. Rao, Chairman, Agricultural Prices Commission. Rao also has observed that for the entire period mentioned earlier, primary sector prices rose at a faster rate.

Though Patnaik has observed a 13 per cent decline for agricultural prices from 1975 to 1978, she has also mentioned another way by which agriculture has gained. It is through a range of direct transfers to the rural rich and state expenditures which were as good as transfers that took place in the meanwhile. She specifies them as the provision of credit at negative real interest rates, subsidized inputs, guaranteed remunerative procurement prices and expenditures on schemes such as National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) etc. (The expenditures on these schemes which are ostensibly meant for the rural poor, also have a substantial spin-off in benefits for the rural rich through the building of infrastructural facilities like roads and through the contract work for materials transport undertaken by the tractor and truck-owning landlords, as well as supply of materials like bricks from landlord-owned brick-kilns.)

According to G.S. Gupta, the terms of trade moved against agriculture in 1973-75 and 1979-80. (Gupta : EPW 27/9/1980) He has observed that the movement was quite sharp in 1979-80, being 9.4 per cent over 1978-79. In this period according to the official index numbers of prices, the relative terms of trade between agriculture and industrial products moved adversely against
agriculture. (ibid) This was perhaps the immediate cause for the dissatisfaction among the peasantry which was articulated in the movement.

A general consensus about the trend of the terms of trade therefore seems to be that they were consistently in favour of agriculture during the period 1951 to 1973 and then from mid 70s moved against agriculture till 1980. Then they became steady and subsequently have shifted once again in favour of agriculture by the end of the decade. Figures quoted by Shreenivas Khandewale show the changing indices of agricultural and industrial prices between 1980-85 and 1985-86. Agricultural prices increased by 9.5 per cent during 1980-85 while industrial prices increased by 7.1 per cent during the same period. During 1985-86, the increase in agricultural prices was 8.1 per cent and 7.0 per cent in industrial prices. Thus, the increase in the prices of agriculture was sharper than that of the industrial prices. (Khandewale : 1990 : p. 215)

There is, however, a counter-argument according to which the terms of trade have consistently been adverse to agriculture. The proponents of this argument are D.S. Tyagi and A.S. Kahlon. Tyagi in his article in 1979 challenged Ashok Mitra's argument about the terms of trade being favourable to agriculture. Tyagi's objection is that Mitra has used official index which is flawed because it overestimates price rises in agriculture and simultaneously underestimates industrial price rises.

Kahlon and Tyagi have in the same manner faulted Thamarajakshi for her conclusions similar to those of Mitra. They have pointed out several kinds of faults: the use of wholesale prices, the method of constructing price indices, misspecification of the composition of
trade, the method of estimating marketed surplus and the choice of base and terminal years. Their objection to Thamarajakshi is again that prices paid to farmers are overestimated while prices paid by them for non-agricultural goods are underestimated. (Kahlon & Tyagi : EPW December 1980: pp. A173-A184)

The objections raised by Kahlon and Tyagi to the arguments and conclusions of Mitra and Thamarajakshi are dealt with by Nalini Vittal at length. (Vittal : EPW : December 27 1986 : pp.A147-166) Tyagi in his analysis of Mitra’s views has devoted his attention solely to the methodology of calculating net barter terms of trade. Tyagi has faulted Mitra for choosing inappropriate base years and for “getting his sums wrong”, i.e. for not adjusting rapidly rising official indices to reflect (slower) changes in prices received for agricultural commodities.

Nalini Vittal in her critical appraisal of Tyagi’s paper points out that Tyagi does not deal with Mitra’s frame of analysis at all. He makes a technocratic critique of Mitra’s holistic approach, without dealing with the notion of accumulation or the three ‘sets’ of terms of trade identified by Mitra. He does not either deal with the expression of class relations through relative prices, or their net effect on the economy.

She observes that “the problem with base years is well known, and in any case, Tyagi himself can find no evidence of consistent anti-agrarian bias. What he is trying to refute is the notion of pro-agricultural bias put forward by Mitra. But he resorts to no theoretical model supported by new data, merely to an exercise in recalculation which would be acceptable, though limited, if his exercise were entirely flawless. That is
to say, if indices have limitations, they have all-round limitations. They cannot be considered appropriate for measuring one movement and inadequate for another. "(op. cit: pp.A-149) She opines that Tyagi’s analysis is inadequate because it depends on selective evidence. According to her, Tyagi’s analysis “smacks suspiciously of a recently emerging lobby in the literature which argues for high prices to provide a fair deal and an incentive to farmers. This could be labeled the Ludhiana school of Indian Agricultural Economics which seems to take a position similar to that taken by the large surplus producing farmers of Punjab. Nobody from this group has much to say on why marketed surplus is increasing in volume and as a proportion to the output, if prices are indeed poor.” (ibid.)

Nalini Vittal has similarly examined Kahlon and Tyagi’s criticism of Thanarajakshi and shown that the former have made serious errors of calculations. She has shown how their objections to her using wholesale prices are untenable and their alternative methodology faulty. She indicates an attempt on their part to show the farm prices depressed vis-a-vis the industrial prices. She finds Kahlon and Tyagi committing errors of both commission and omission. But her major charge against them is that they have alienated the study of terms of trade from its context. (op. cit: pp.A-162)

‘Bharat Vs India’ in a way is a distorted logic of the terms of trade debate. The terms of trade have been tilted; but not as Joshi maintains, against agriculture. They have generally been favourable to agriculture. Joshi, however, to press his point, talks of exploitation of agriculture right from the time of independence (and in fact even before that). To support the argument he does not give any data, though
conveniently he quotes only Tyagi's and Kahlon's views. (Joshi 1985: pp.19 and 25) Interestingly he faults the works of Thamarajakshi and others as jugglery in purely academic matters driven by a bias (against agriculture). He expresses his displeasure at Thamarajakshi's work being cited but not about those of Kahlon and Tyagi. This is attributed again to the 'Indian' scholars' bias against agriculture.

He declares in the same article (op.cit.: pp.24) "It needs to be clearly understood that we are not discussing here the relative movement of prices or the inter-sectoral terms of trade. We are talking about agricultural prices as compared not with non-agricultural prices but as compared with their own real cost of production. Computation of inter-sectoral terms of trade is so vitiated by the defective data base as also use of incorrect price statistics, choice of inappropriate weightages and base periods that the results are entirely worthless as basis for serious discussions, leave apart political decisions." (Emphasis original). He says further "Despite the works of Ashok Dar, Sethi, Dantwala, Ashok Mitra, Sidhu and Singh, Thamarajakshi Venkataraman and even Kahlon and Tyagi, it is the experience of the farmers that everything they need to purchase is becoming more and more expensive by leaps and bounds while everything that he produces hardly appreciates in value at all. The terms of trade have been moving against agriculture not over the last three years or over the last ten years but demonstrably at least since the depression of the 1920s." (op.cit.: pp.25 : emphasis added)

Joshi is obviously not interested in furnishing any data, but cites the 'hard evidence' of the farmer's experience. Even if this evidence is accepted the question is which farmer's experience is Joshi
describing? None of the scholars whom Joshi brushes aside and who argue that terms of trade have been favourable to agriculture, have said that agriculture as a whole has been benefited by the favourable trend. Ashok Mitra or Thamarajakshi or Dantwala are certainly not saying it. Mitra has argued and so has Utsa Patnaik, that it is the rich peasants (rural oligarchs according to Mitra and landlord-capitalists according to Utsa Patnaik) who are the beneficiaries of the favourable terms of trade to agriculture. The experience of the farmer which Joshi talks about can be true. But it is the experience of a poor farmer and not that of a rich farmer whose interests Joshi represents.

Also, though Joshi has talked about adverse terms of trade right from the 1920s, by his own admission, till 1980 the condition was not conducive to start an agitation of farmers on the issue of remunerative prices. "Farmers would not have listened to us in 1975-77." (Joshi / Mhatre : 1982 : pp.5-6) He explains that till 1977 all the food grains and other farm products were in scarcity and so with higher production farmer could get more money. However, from 1977, with bumper crop, farm produce was plentifully available in markets. As there was no demand, the prices fell. For the first time there was a condition wherein surplus production was leading to losses. (ibid.) So, by his own admission Joshi has accepted the fact that till about 1979-80, the terms of trade were not unfavourable to farmers (meaning, farmers could make profits). It was with this background of the short periodic shift during 1975-1980 in the terms of trade against agriculture that Joshi built up his argument of the 'consistent' exploitation of agriculture. He says that (besides the situation post 1977 mentioned above) the political situation in the country helped the Sanghatana to put this argument
before the people. "Emergency in 1975, then elections in 1977, then again elections, one ruling party replaced by another, which was again succeeded by the first, political defections by the leaders etc. all created disillusionment in the minds of common people about all political parties. On this background we forcefully put our thought that "Government is cheating the farmers for 33 years" before the farmers, which they hear and applaud. "In 1975 when there was no such disillusionment people would not have listened to us." (op. cit.: pp.6)

Thus, it is clear that Joshi’s argument that terms of trade for agriculture have been adverse right from the time of independence is a mere rhetoric having only propaganda value. According to Joshi, the terms of trade have been adverse to agriculture as a result of deliberate policy followed by the Government. “The modus operandi designed to keep the farm prices low was simple and direct...... Levy procurement in times of scarcity and total indifference in times of abundance - that is official policy. Heads or tails, the farmer stands to lose.” (Joshi: 1985 : pp.16-17)

To illustrate his point he has observed that almost throughout the period up to 1977 food grains were compulsorily procured from farmers to meet the shortages. The levy prices were as much as 40% to 50% lower than the prevailing open market prices.

Joshi’s argument about levy procurement is however, not supported by the reality. As V.M. Dandekar says “most of the levy procurement of food grains was not compulsory. Though much was talked about the monopoly procurement of Jowar in Maharashtra and rice in Assam, the actual procurement in them was negligible. Levy on rice was not on producers but on the rice-mill owners or
traders." (Dandekar : 1983 : pp.3) This is supported by M.V. Nadkarni who has mentioned that the procurement of food grains as a proportion of production has never been high. It increased from 6.3 per cent in 1965-66 to only 13.8 per cent in 1983. The proportion has been highest in the case of wheat, but even in 1982-83 it was only about 20 per cent. Rice came next with 15 per cent of its output procured in the same year. (Nadkarni: 1987: pp.203-204) He has also noted that the coexistence of the procurement system with the free market has exerted an upward pressure on the free prices. (ibid.) Dandekar has also expressed the same opinion. Dandekar further says that producers should not have to bear loss in this system, otherwise the production of necessary commodities will go down. "The loss of farmers due to compulsory levy procurement in the times of scarcity was indeed an injustice. But to ask to buy some body's cotton or onion at a higher price because somebody else's rice or jowar was bought at lower prices would not be proper." Joshi's argument that there is no levy on industrial goods at all is also not correct. There has been levy on cement, tin, kerosene, cloth etc. Farmers themselves get cement and tin at controlled prices. As a policy, levy procurement of essential commodities to make them available to poorer sections at reasonable rates is not wrong. (Dandekar : op.cit.)

Charan Singh has also supported this opinion. (Charan Singh : 1979: pp.39)

Another argument Joshi puts forth is that "Agriculture is subject to a set of rules, patently discriminatory. ...... Export of farm produce is most tardily permitted and halted at the slightest excuse. Export bans are imposed even in cases where internal prices are well below the cost of production....... The
export market of onions has been totally ruined by vacillating export policies." (Joshi: 1985: pp.17)

Again, Dandekar refutes Joshi's charge of a discriminatory export policy. India needs to export as many items as she can to earn the foreign exchange. The reality about the farm produce is that (apart from tea, coffee, jute, cashew-nuts, tobacco etc.) our agricultural commodities cannot stand the competition of the international market. So, through exports of farm-products one cannot dream of eradicating rural poverty. (Dandekar: op.cit.: pp.4)

In order to understand the relevance of the terms of trade debate and Sharad Joshi's insistence on 'fair' or 'remunerative' or higher prices for agricultural produce to, thereby, shift the terms of trade, it is essential to see

(1) How the shifts in the terms of trade are arranged; and why; and
(2) What is the impact of the terms of trade favourable to agriculture on the entire economy.

It is also important to see who gains by such terms.

How the shifts in the terms of trade are determined.

The tussle over the terms of trade is political in nature. The terms of trade determine the allocation of real incomes within a community and over a period of time influence the distribution of real assets. As Ashok Mitra says, "One of the principal aims of all political
activities in a class-ridden society is to influence not just the distribution of property, but also the structure of market prices, since apart from confiscation or appropriation, it is only through an adjustment of prices that the relative shares of assets and incomes going to different social groups and classes is reallocable." (Mitra: 1979: pp.3) Prices then become a major instrument in the hands of those who can use the state-apparatus to further sectoral interests. Thus, the shifts in the terms of trade are determined politically.

Even Joshi ascribes the manipulation of the terms of trade to political forces. In his scheme, it is India which deliberately denies fair prices to agriculture and thus exploits it. India according to him "is that notional entity that has inherited from the British the mantle of economic, social, cultural and educational exploitation". (Joshi: 1985: pp. 75). Even so, his concept of India is unclear. At other times he uses different terms like 'State', 'government', 'rulers' or the 'urban elite' or 'native elite' to indicate the exploiters of Bharat, which also is similarly an unclear term. This lack of clarity regarding 'who really exploits' seems to have a purpose. It is to obscure the class relations behind the terms of trade manipulations. Joshi initially accepted the existence of different classes within agriculture, but maintained that the "significant line of contradictions lay not within agriculture but between India and Bharat" (Joshi/Mhatre: 1982: pp.98). In the further development of his argument, however, he even denies the concept of 'class' as such. It is then posed as a simple confrontation between 'country' and 'town' without any complexities. In this scheme the 'State' at times is taken to be a kind of autonomous entity in the hands of, or dominated
by India; and at other times it is synonymous with India. This formulation is not only an oversimplification of a complex process of the terms of trade, but also presents a distorted picture of the same.

As seen earlier, the terms of trade have generally remained favourable to agriculture. This favourable shift towards agriculture has been accomplished by a political arrangement between the industrial capitalists and the rich peasants. In a parliamentary democratic set-up it becomes essential for the urban industrialists to get support of the rural electorate in order to maintain control over the political institutions. This is achieved by reaching an agreement with the rich peasantry and traders who have the capacity to mobilize the small peasants and landless labourers, and to ensure their votes. This electoral influence of the rural rich over the rural poor becomes possible because of the economic vulnerability, ignorance and political as well as organizational backwardness of the latter. Their vulnerability establishes a kind of unequal exchange between them and the surplus raising farmers and traders who exercise virtual control over them. The urban bourgeoisie finds this controlling power of the rural rich convenient and comes to an arrangement with them. The industrial bourgeoisie makes various concessions to the rural rich for this political alliance. The shift in the terms of trade in favour of the farm sector is the major price paid to cement their political coalition (Mitra: op.cit.: pp. 142). Other concessions include a number of capital development projects for agriculture and fiscal and monetary transfers, subsidized inputs, low rates for irrigation and power, low direct taxes on agriculture etc. Also as a part of the implicit political contract, there has been no insistence on the
implementation of any meaningful measures for land reforms, in spite of intermittent declaration of the intent and legislations.

Monetary quantification of these direct and indirect gains to the rich farmers is not easy. Apart from the favourable terms of trade, the official policy results in generating an additional flow to the affluent farmers. The big farmers have increasingly benefited from sources like public financial institutions and the banking sector. With the nationalization of commercial banks, direct and indirect credit to agriculture has increased. The overwhelming proportion of these additional funds, including bank credit, intended for agriculture has gone to the surplus-raising farmers.

In return of these concessions to the rich farmers, several compensatory gains accrue to the urban bourgeoisie. Their political liaisons enables them to establish complete command over the industrial and foreign trade policies of the government. In a system dominated by administrative controls, the opportunity to influence state power ensures that, these controls are wielded in a manner that will maximize the economic benefits to the bourgeoisie. They manoeuvre banking and foreign exchange policies to their own advantage and control special subsidies, such as those for exports. In so far as fiscal resources are concerned, once provision is made towards meeting the requirements of the rich peasantry, the balance is available to cater to the interests of the urban industrialists. Spheres of influence are thus demarcated leading to mutual satisfaction. Unless some uncharacteristic or unexpected factors intervene, the political alliance between the two classes could continue indefinitely. The urban proletariat and the rural labourers however are left out
The impact of the shift in terms of trade favourable to agriculture.

The shift in the terms of trade in favour of agriculture generally leads to a shift in income distribution in favour of the relatively richer farmers. This is so, because it is this stratum of agricultural sector which constitutes approximately 8 to 10 per cent of all the landholders, who bring at least 70 per cent to 75 per cent of the supplies to the markets. (Patnaik: op.cit.: pp.21) Thus, benefits of the rising food prices primarily accrue to them. According to Mitra, "In certain regions, the accretion of additional income with affluent rural sections may result in a rise in the level of money earnings of wage labour as also to an increase in the incomes of small farmers." He, however, has maintained that this 'percolation' effect can have only a limited significance because a major part of their earnings would be eaten up by the rising food prices. (Mitra: op.cit.: pp.144) The expenditure on their food requirements in most cases outstrips the increase in their money earnings. The rise in farm prices contributes, either immediately or with a time lag, to a corresponding increase in the price of industrial commodities as well. Essential commodities become dearer, and the level of real incomes of small peasants and farm labourers worsens further. Thus, the poorer sections of the rural community get caught in a pincer on account of the movements in relative prices. To maintain their level of food intake they have to pay more. They also have to pay higher prices for a whole range of industrial goods.
While the poorer section of agriculturists thus suffers in case of favourable shift towards agriculture, each such shift contributes to the holding power of surplus producing farmers and traders enabling them to bid for even higher prices. The increased economic power helps them also to hold on to their political base, thus further increasing their bargaining power vis-a-vis the industrial capitalists.

The effect of such a shift in terms of trade on industry is also important. Other things remaining the same, the unit cost of industrial output rises over the years as a result of the movement in relative prices against industry. This is the result of the increase in farm prices including the prices of industrial raw material. However there is a constraint on raising the product price as it may adversely affect the demand.

The rise in food prices erodes the level of real incomes of the industrial working class and it demands compensatory adjustments in wage rates. However, the bourgeoisie resist such adjustments. The compensation offered to the workers is not proportionate to the rise in the cost of living. Sometimes to avoid the increasing wage-bills resulting from the rising food prices, industrialists try to substitute labour by other inputs, including capital and mechanization.

As a result of the erosion of the real incomes of the majority of population in urban and rural areas, the demand for mass consumption goods is leveled off. As the income generated over this period has flowed into the hands of a small fraction of community a number of luxury consumer goods industries spring up to satisfy their relatively sophisticated requirements. This leads to the emergence of high cost - high price - low demand
The general direction of state policy turns increasingly against labour and fixed income groups. Because of the nature of the political alliance, direct taxes on agriculture cannot be increased; and yet subsidies have to be arranged for the richer peasantry as well as to compensate the bourgeoisie for the loss suffered by them because of the tilt in terms of trade. The burden of the additional resource mobilisation efforts falls by and large on indirect taxes on commodities mostly consumed by the poor people and the fixed income groups. All this results into a distorted pattern of income distribution in the economy. It also leads to retarded growth.

This process operates in Indian economy. The class alliance of rich farmers, traders and capitalists is more or less institutionalised. There is a nexus between the rich farmers and traders as the former control the marketable surplus. It is also not uncommon to find rich peasants themselves involved in trading and money lending. Similarly, many industrial houses also have their trading counterparts. This strengthens their political alliance further.

The class-alliance reached thus is, though stable, by no means static. The industrial bourgeoisie and the rich peasantry compete with each other for dominance within the alliance. The rural rich class has from time to time expressed its displeasure at the hegemonic position of the bourgeoisie. This is, however, done by resorting to political pressure tactics. The competition for hegemony is always carefully translated into a "debate over developmental strategies". When the economic gains are seen to be depleting by one of the
classes in the alliance, it resorts to the pressure tactics to regain its position.

When in the mid to late '70s the shift in the terms of trade changed from favourable to adverse for agriculture, the demand to tilt the terms thorough 'remunerative' prices was voiced by farmers' movements all over the country. They also demanded the lowering of input prices. Thus, the thrust of the movement was to regain favourable terms of trade. The Shetkari Sanghatana insisted on 'remunerative prices' for farm produce as its 'one point programme' claiming that 'remunerative prices' was the key to the development of the nation. Joshi argues that remunerative prices to the agricultural produce is the only solution to the problem of rural poverty.

Remunerative Prices:

The issue of remunerative prices has to be examined in the context of earlier discussion. As seen earlier, the terms of trade were favourable to agriculture for most of the period after 1951 with the exception of a brief period in late 1970s. This means that agricultural commodities were getting prices higher than those of industrial commodities, contrary to what Joshi has argued. It is also noted that higher agricultural prices have not benefited the agrarian sector as a whole but only the small class of the rich peasants. The favourable terms of trade have not led to the alleviation of poverty in the rural areas. In fact rising food prices have adversely affected the condition of poorer sections in both rural and urban sectors. There is of course, no denying the fact that poverty in rural
areas is starker than in the urban areas and this disparity has to be removed. But whether remunerative prices can accomplish that as claimed by Joshi is the question.

The first problem that is faced in this context is the determination of the remunerative prices. Remunerative price, according to Joshi, has to be based on the cost of production of a commodity plus reasonable profit. There is of course nothing disputable about this concept of remunerative price and no one can say that producers should be denied remunerative prices. The controversy is, however, over the method of calculating the cost of production of a commodity.

Joshi has been strongly critical of the methods of the Agricultural Price Commission (APC) for determining the cost of production of the farm produce. He considered it to be a major instrument of exploitation of farmers. Therefore an important demand of the Shetkari Sanghatana in 1984 was the scrapping of the APC. Experts are of the opinion that the question of determining agricultural prices covering the cost of production has its difficulties. The question of price fixation by the government, taking into account the cost of production, arises only in the case of procurement and support operations and that, by and large, market prices prevail above the procurement and support prices.

The major points of contention in the calculations of the cost of production seem to be the inclusion of rental value of owned land, value of family labour and the wages paid to the hired labour. The rest of the items like prices of fertilizers and pesticides and other actual expenses etc. are matters of minor disagreements and can be sorted out. In fact such
reasonable demands were accepted by the government.

Four concepts of costs were taken into account by the APC in recommending prices. These concepts are:

- A1 = All actual expenses in cash and kind incurred by owner operators;
- A2 = Cost A1 + rent paid for leased in land;
- B = Cost A2 + rental value of owned land (net of land revenue) and interest on owned fixed capital excluding land;
- C = Cost B + imputed value of family labour.

The APC has been taking into account two cost concepts in recommending prices:

a) cost A3 which is cost A2 plus imputed cost of family labour and

b) the most comprehensive of cost concepts – cost C. (Nadkarni: 1987: pp.179)

M. V. Nadkarni opines that the policy seems to cover the former by a comfortably good margin, and at least just covers the latter as far as practicable, though not necessarily for every state and every year. Cost A3 ensures only the survival of the farm and farm family in the short run, while covering cost C would ensure reproduction of its capital in the long run, according to the Farm Management Studies.

Nadkarni however notes that a policy covering cost C has some difficulties as it tends to inflate the
costs. He questioned the inclusion of imputed rent on owned land. "When leasing is not common, it can even lead to arbitrary valuation. In fact leasing is not so common now as it was in the fifties and the difference between Cost A1 and Cost A2 is often not there, or marginal where it exists. It is important here to distinguish between rent as an allowance for land improvement in the nature of capital involved in such improvement (which could as well be included as imputed interest on such capital), and rent which is a surplus over costs whether appropriated by landlords or not. The latter cannot be a part of the costs for price fixing; actually it is a reflection of profitability itself". (Nadkarni: op.cit.: pp.180: emphasis original) As Nadkarni explains further, land rent in agriculture is not comparable with rent of land and buildings in industry, since the latter clearly are costs. Sharad Joshi, however, includes this item in the calculations of the cost of production. Such a practice could inflate the costs significantly.

Another issue of the controversy is about the wage-rates to be included in the calculation of the cost of production. There is no dispute about the computation of the value of family labour. When outside labour is hired what rates are to be taken into account in calculations is the point of debate. Experts have been of the opinion that it should be calculated on the basis of actual wage-rates paid to the labour and not unimplemented wage-rates. Joshi, however, has insisted that minimum wage-rates fixed by the Government should be included. He in fact argues that the minimum wage-rates are low and inadequate. So higher wages should be granted by the government and farmers should include such wage-rates in their calculations. This has also been criticised as a method of inflating the cost of production, as farmers
will calculate the higher wage rates while they actually pay much less to the labourers. Joshi’s argument is that if the farmers get remunerative prices they will certainly give higher wages to labourers. He says that when the prices of farm produce go up, the wage rates also go up. As long as farmers do not get remunerative prices, labourers should not demand higher wages.

This argument, however, does not seem to be tenable. Khandewale says that historically also such an argument does no stand. In the Zamindari system when the landlord certainly had the financial capacity to pay ‘reasonable’ wages, the labourers were not getting them. Landlords with vast landholdings, on the contrary, were indulging in the practices of bonded labour and other kinds of extortions. (Khandewale: op.cit.: pp.213)

The wage rates do not depend merely on the price of the agricultural commodity. They also depend on an increasing demand for labour which may result following either Government schemes like the Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS), or new industries which absorb more labour. If there is scarcity of labour the wage rates go up. Similarly, successful organization among labourers which demands higher wages at times can lead to wage increase. However, automatic wage-increase after the agricultural price increase is not experienced.

M. V. Nadkarni in this context cites the example of the dalits (landless labourers) in Karnataka who reject the view that once price improves agricultural wages too will improve. In Shimoga district both paddy and sugarcane prices more than doubled in the preceding decade but wages remained practically the same. In fact, farmers resisted the dalits when they asked for the implementation of at least the minimum wages. Nadkarni
notes that wages are kept down also through an increasing trend towards mechanization. Though wages of skilled labour operating machines go up, the wages of labour in non-mechanised operations do not. (Nadkarni: op.cit.: pp.152)

Utsa Patnaik also supports the observation that the wages do not increase at the same rate as agricultural prices. She notes that in the decade of 1975-85 in spite of increasing agricultural prices, the condition of the agricultural labour did not improve. (Patnaik: op.cit.: pp.17)

V. M. Dandekar also does not agree with Sharad Joshi's 'percolation' theory. He says that unless the purchasing power of the majority of the people working on farms increases, the increase in the prices of farm produce will benefit only those farmers whose produce goes to the market. These increased prices will not be supported by the demand. In which case, production will have to be reduced to keep the prices up. This process certainly will not help eradication of poverty. The other way to keep the prices high will be to increase the purchasing power of those who cannot afford even today's prices... If you sow something at the bottom, it immediately comes up/sprouts. Whatever is poured at the top takes time to reach to the bottom. (Dandekar: op.cit. pp.9)

Dandekar, thus, rejects the 'percolation' theory and wants something to be done for the labourers first, without which Joshi's demand for higher prices will be meaningless for the eradication of rural poverty.

Another problem in determining remunerative prices for the entire country is that costs differ widely
across states and across regions within a state depending on the conditions of production and the agrarian structure. In 1980-81, the cost per quintal of paddy ranged from Rs. 76 in Assam to Rs. 105 in Andhra Pradesh. Even between the two neighbouring states of Punjab and Haryana, a difference was seen. The former produced wheat at a cost of Rs. 102 per quintal and the latter at Rs. 114 per quintal in 1978-79; Madhya Pradesh produced it at only Rs. 87 per quintal in 1977-78. (Nadkarni: op.cit.: pp. 183) Similarly, differences within a state are also significant. Nadkarni observes that though costs differ according to the conditions of production and the agrarian structure, the price variation does not correspond to these differences. The price variations depend not only on differences of quality but also on the condition of the market and the infrastructure.

Under these circumstances the APC adopted support prices which cover the cost of efficient production and provide a reasonable margin of profits. The word 'efficient' does not mean the least cost of production but of reasonably efficient cultivation.

Since a governmental body like the APC cannot effectively control the prices of agricultural inputs and cannot make inefficient and costly farms viable by simply raising the prices, the price policy can at best try to underwrite the cost of reasonably efficient production. In Nadkarni's opinion, "Not even a centrally planned economy, let alone a market economy, can underwrite all costs. Even as an objective, it can only be one of dubious merits." (Nadkarni: op.cit.: pp. 189)

Though Sharad Joshi has used methods of determining
cost of production, which are controversial, at one place he says that costs have to be calculated tactfully. He does say that "If land tax is not counted the costs will come down by 50 per cent. The differences due to unscientific cultivation or inefficiency will not be covered, nor should one expect it. After all, the people should be able to buy it for consumption. Even then, in order to reduce the cost of production we have employed certain tricks. If we ask five times more (than today's prices) we may feel happy. But we will not get those prices and if we get, the economy of the country will collapse within a year". (Joshi/Mhatre: 1982: pp.32)

This argument is important because it explains Joshi's approach towards the determination of cost of production and remunerative prices. Though the demand for remunerative prices is just, the above approach of its determination does not demonstrate 'scientific calculations' but smacks of 'manipulations'. The method is to judge how much price is likely to be accepted and accordingly compute the cost of production. This 'practical' approach gives away the entire logic of his remunerative prices.

The operational part of the remunerative prices is equally vague. He is, often, extremely critical of the role played by the government alleging that during bumper season the government allows auctions and during the lean periods enforces levy, making the farmers lose both ways. So, even if the government stops its policy of deliberately depressing the agricultural prices, the problem of remunerative prices will be solved. (Joshi/Mhatre: op.cit.: pp. 76)

This indicates that he subscribes to the free-
trade competitive market economy. Today most of the agricultural prices, with a few exceptions, are determined in such markets dominated by traders and middleman. It is the traders and middlemen who take advantage of the fluctuations of prices in agricultural commodities. Joshi says that he will not mind free market, if it is really free, in the sense that the government will not then be allowed to procure compulsory levy. However, he does not explain his idea about the various subsidies that the government is expected to give to the farmers. In a totally free market subsidies will have no place. Whether farmers in India will welcome that is doubtful.

Joshi, however, does not want either free market or total controls. He prefers a 'middle way' which he calls 'safety fuse mechanism' wherein the government should intervene only when the price falls below the level of 'cost of production' (Joshi: December 1982: pp.25). Joshi does not clarify whom he expects to determine the 'cost of production' in the absence of government controls; perhaps the Shetkari Sanghatana is to undertake the task. The Government has to accept these declared prices as the floor prices and if the produce coming in the market is not purchased in toto by the traders at these prices, the government has to buy it. So what Joshi seems to want is a totally controlled sellers' market with no fluctuations or adjustments of prices.

Dandekar calls this a dual liberty which is not available to producers of industrial goods. "You may determine the price of your commodity but you then cannot insist on bringing as much quantity of it to the market as you like and insist on its complete purchase, if not by others then by the government." (Dandekar: 138)
There is similar scepticism about Joshi’s claim that remunerative prices to farmers will be the key to the eradication of rural poverty as it will leave a surplus in the hands of the farmers which will be utilised for agro based industries, improvement of farm techniques and increase in the production of farm-produce. It is also claimed that the labourers will get the benefits of this price-rise through ‘percolation’ effect. The fallacy of the latter claim has already been discussed.

Dandekar’s opinion is that unless purchasing power of the rural poor is improved through higher wages and constructive programmes, price-rise will not effect poverty alleviation. It will only benefit the rich peasants who have marketable surplus. Utsa Patnaik has expressed a similar opinion. She says, “Assured and rising food prices primarily benefit this small minority (landlord capitalists) monopolizing the commodity surplus; they also monopolize the application of modern technology which enables them to lower the unit cost of production and brings them super profits. The same price on the other hand, barely covers the cost of production, including the family subsistence of the middle and small peasants.” (Patnaik: op.cit.: pp.18)

Increasing prices strengthen the holding power of surplus farmers and traders. A pattern familiar in India is the combination of farming, money lending and trading. If maximization of profits is the prime objective, the expansion of farming activity beyond a point may come into conflict with the preference towards extending trading and money lending operation: A rise in output, which farm extension brings about cannot but
gnaw away the potential profit from speculative trade and money lending. It is thus possible that, funds advanced to the farm community for stimulating farm output could be diverted to finance money lending and speculation. Conventional price incentives would also have little impact on production and the mechanism of terms of trade may contribute towards stagnation.

This argument cannot be dismissed as mere speculation. In 1972-73, following the failure of the Kharif crop, the government announced an emergency production programme for the Rabi season. Nearly Rs. 250 crores of public funds were distributed in the form of medium and short-term loans to raise an additional output of 15 million tons of food-grains over the level in the preceding year. Despite the massive expenditure, the output fell by almost 4 million tons as a major part of the funds were diverted by big farmers for non-productive purpose. (Mitra: op.cit.: pp.117) It may thus be plausible that under certain conditions, rising farm prices would be a deterrent to increasing market supplies.

If the Shetkari Sanghatana wants to tackle the problem of rural poverty it has to take up the problems of about 65 per cent marginal and small peasants holding not more than 2 hectares of land. Their share in the marketed surplus is quite small compared to the share of the rich and the middle farmers. With regard to cash crops, the small farmers by and large, sell off the major part of their crop in the early part of the season (when the prices are low) to the trader or the money lender from whom they receive crop loans, or to the rich farmer who is often also a trader. Even poorer members of cooperative societies dispose off their cash crops at low prices to the more affluent members of those
societies. It is the latter who then reap the gains as market prices soar towards the close of the season. It is evident that higher prices of farm products will benefit basically the rich peasants and to some extent the middle peasants. The rural poor, however, will face hardships because of it in the long run.

The reliance of landless agricultural labourers on the market for cereals is quite high. The high level of food grain prices therefore goes against the interest of the mass of landless labourers and small farmers. In Nadkarni's opinion, "The basic problem for most of the farmers is not one of low rate of returns as a percentage over costs or low procurement prices but one of holdings of a viable size, large enough to provide a comfortable standard of living to the farm family. This problem cannot be solved merely through an increase in procurement prices." (Nadkarni: op.cit.: pp.196) However, majority of the farmers do not hold such viable holdings. Redistribution of land is one of the solutions. But even then it will not provide such holdings to all because the burden of population on agricultural land is very heavy.

Sharad Joshi, however, is quite averse to the policy of land reforms. In fact, he is opposed to most of the constructive alternative strategies of rural poverty alleviation. Cooperativization of sales and purchases of the farm produce has been suggested by experts as a good alternative to the present trader-middleman dominated market system to protect the farmer's interests and assure him fair prices. (Dandekar: op.cit.: pp.9) Nadkarni opines that as long as the dominance of private trading continues, the scope for destabilising expectations and hoarding would also continue. So an effective countervailing power to
private trade has to develop on an enduring basis which can be in the form of cooperative associations dominated by growers and by a viable chain of consumer cooperatives and or the state public distribution network. (Nadkarni: op:cit.: pp.213)

Merely raising procurement prices is not the solution to the basic problem of insecurity. In Nadkarni’s opinion, “The real price problem is not between rural growers and urban consumers as it is between growers on the one hand and the mediating forces that control agricultural marketing and processing on the other. It is when farmers attend to this issue, and take initiative to resolve it constructively through cooperativization, that they would have taken a big step forward to solve their price problem.” (Nadkarni: ibid.) Dandekar has expressed similar views. Joshi, however, dismisses the cooperative movement since it breeds corruption. He similarly dismisses the EGS as a third rate scheme and fake development programme (Joshi: 1985: pp.4)

All the constructive programmes of the government are also condemned by Joshi. He yes that they breed servility among the rural poor. He himself, however, offers only the ‘higher prices’ one point programme as the panacea to the problem of poverty. The programme not only is ridden with many controversies and problems, but most importantly, the demand for remunerative ‘price’ is basically the rich farmers’ demand. It is however, presented as the demand of all the agriculturists. It is this feature of Joshi’s ideology which determines its class character.
The Precursors

Joshi at one place claims that the idea of agricultural exploitation by industry, namely, his Bharat Vs India dictum has been propounded for the very first time. "So we will not get answer to our question (regarding the poverty of the peasantry) in the context of any isms like socialism or communism". (Joshi/Mhatre: 1982: pp. 59) His claim is that he is the first one to explain the cause of India's rural poverty in terms of the unequal terms of trade between industry and agriculture. However, he briefly acknowledges Rosa Luxembourg for having foreseen the consequences of such a situation (where industrial expansion takes place at the expense of the agriculture). The countries proceeding towards industrial development without the support of external colonies would develop internal colonies to ensure comparable advantages. (Joshi: 1985: pp. 23) But beyond this, he does not quote even Rosa Luxembourg.

However, it is not an original thought as he claims. Though Marx has not dealt with the problem of interchange between town and country at length; it is not true, as alleged by Joshi, that Marx did not give it any thought whatsoever. He explicitly mentions this problem in The German Ideology thus: "The greatest division of material and mental labour is the separation of town and country. The antagonism of town and country begins with the transition from barbarism to civilization, from tribe to State, from locality to nation, and runs through the whole history of civilization to the present day". (Karl Marx: The German Ideology quoted in Mitra: 1979: pp. 19) While discussing the division of labour in industry, and in society in
general, Marx draws attention to what he calls the problem of exchange between spheres of production. He comments further: "The foundation of all highly developed division of labour that is brought about by the exchange of commodities is the cleavage between town and country. It may be said that the whole economic history of society is summed up in the movement of this antithesis. We pass it over, however, for the present." (Karl Marx: Capital: Vol. 1: quoted in Mitra: op. cit.: pp. 19) Marx, however did not develop this theme in his later volumes. Though Marx has not analysed this problem in depth, later Marxists were concerned with it.

The concept of exploitation which connotes an unfairness of exchange, an unfairness arising from the nature of relations of production in a capitalist system, was a central theme in the Marxist analysis and Rosa Luxembourg made a significant contribution to it. Though Joshi does not mention it, Rosa Luxembourg necessarily operated within the Marxist framework and her writings initiated a debate on the issue which Joshi claims has been inaugurated by him. It becomes necessary to find what formulation Rosa Luxembourg had presented in the light of the fact that Joshi keeps referring to her time and again to support his own formulation.

As elucidated by Ashok Mitra, the archetypal application of Luxembourg's model would be where the industrial sector represents a colonial-capitalist hegemony and agriculture is the colonised sector, and capitalists belonging to the former come down hard on the peasantry who populate the farm sector. There is also an implicit issue of terms of trade whenever economic transactions are postulated between either two sectors of an economy - such as industry and agriculture - or between two classes, such as capitalists and
peasants. The colonial power in the model - the class of industrial capitalists here - tries to tilt the terms of trade in its favour and against colonial agriculture (or against peasantry). Luxembourg describes the resulting phenomenon as the "struggle against the peasant economy" which manifests itself in non-equivalent exchange. (Ashok Mitra: op.cit.: pp.31-32) In her frame of analysis, exploitation in production and exploitation in exchange are the processes which go hand in hand, both implying non-equivalence in transactions. The mechanism of exploitation also is similar in the two forms. "Capital cheats labour by offering it a price which is less than the value created by it. Similarly, in the sphere of circulation, the predatory power sells at relatively high prices consumer and investment goods to the exploited sector or class and the latter is forced to give food grains and raw materials to the predatory power - the industrial bourgeoisie at relatively low prices". (Mitra: op.cit.: pp.32)

One can hardly miss the similarity of this argument with that of Joshi's. Rosa Luxembourg does not analyse in her argument, the internal composition of the so-called primitive economy, identical with the farm sector. Thus, wage-labour in the peasant economy is not distinguished from the rich owner farmer. Perhaps in the absence of the capitalist development of agriculture, this distinction was not dealt with. So, one does not find the analysis of the relations between capitalist dominating the industrial sector and the emerging capitalist farmer dominating the farm sector. However, most modern and developing economies have ceased to be homogeneous and the relations of production of advanced capitalist system also start permeating in agriculture once the capitalist development process starts in it. The increasing alienation of small and marginal peasants
from cultivable land leads to acute class-antagonisms in agricultural sector also. In the context of such development Luxembourg’s model and its assumptions need a reexamination. Sharad Joshi, however, has preferred to adopt the model with its inadequacies. That is how he goes on to deny the existence of ‘class’ differences in the agricultural sector. Though at times he accepts the existence of different strata among peasants, he immediately asserts that the main line of conflict lies between agriculture and industry. (Joshi/Mhatre: 1982: pp.98)

Though Rosa Luxembourg distinguishes between the role of the capitalist and that of the alienated worker in the industrial sector, Joshi does not do that. To him, even industrial sector is unified in the process of exploitation of agriculture. Says he, “What is the origin of the surplus-value required for the accumulation of capital? Marxian edict is that, with the minor exception of primitive accumulation, the essential source of surplus-value is the exploitation of labour. The Kisan movement contends that this is not borne by actual facts. That in real life, workers in league with the industrialists exploit non-industrialists.” (Joshi: 1985: pp.83-84)

Another recurring reference in Joshi’s argument is that of Preobrazhenski. This reference comes in the context of Joshi’s advice to the leftists that to accept the concept of agricultural classes is absurd in today’s Indian situation. The conditions in post-revolutionary period in Soviet Russia were different. When power passed into the hands of proletariat, they had a problem of managing agriculture. As agrarian organization was never a subject of Marxism, they handled it the way they could. So economists like Preobrazhenski wrote. “If we
have to accumulate maximum surplus from agriculture for
the expansion of industry, the kulak will oppose it
because he cultivates his farms as a business. We can
never afford to pay for his produce at his prices. So
this entire class has to be suppressed." (quote from
Joshi - not from Preobrazhenski) Therefore this entire
class was liquidated with the help of the army. The rest
of the labourers were organized to start cooperative and
collective farming. Hence the formulation that labourer
is leftist (meaning revolutionary) while farmer is
conservative and feudal, is the result of the situation
in Soviet Union at that time. To subscribe to it now in
India is nothing but bookishness." (Joshi/Mhatre: 1982:
pp85-86; also Joshi: December 1982: pp.14) "The leftists
are falling into the political trap of encouraging the
question of wages of labourers when the problem of
agricultural prices is not solved satisfactorily by the
government." (ibid.) He also argues that the Kulak
described by Lenin is not to be found in Maharashtra. He
specifically says that he is not talking about Bihar. He
says that we can hardly find a farmer with 20 hectares
of irrigated land. He is not ready to call a farmer with
18 acres irrigated land as a big-capitalist farmer. So,
he uses Preobrazhenski to make the leftists buy his
concept of agrarian sector without classes.

He also uses Preobrazhenski's formulation to
suggest that Indian economists like P. C. Joshi have
been subscribing to the policy of exploitation of
agriculture for industrial development. "The Bolsheviks
used the argument to give a moral support to their
action of expropriation of surplus from agriculture; The
Indian agricultural economists are merely voicing it
again." (Joshi: December 1982(b): pp.45)

Joshi has also made use of this argument to
intimidate the farmers with a possibility of use of force against them if they demand higher prices, the way Russian farmers were asking and got killed.

Apart from Rosa Luxembourg’s main proposition, Joshi has also drawn heavily from Michael Lipton’s argument of ‘urban bias’. (Lipton: 1976) Joshi, however, rarely refers to Lipton in his writings. The similarities in their arguments is striking. What Joshi calls Bharat and India Lipton calls country and town or rural and urban. Lipton has propounded in his Urban bias hypothesis, that, accepting the urban rural division as critical, in the vast majority of poor countries development resources - financial, physical and human - are deliberately and systematically allocated so that the share going to rural people is far less and that going to city dwellers is far more than consideration of either efficiency or equity would suggest as desirable. Every mechanism of surplus transfer is relentlessly used to achieve that end. (Lipton: op.cit.: pp.56-63) The basic overall effect of urban bias is to secure the persistence of brute poverty in circumstances of growth. This it does by ensuring that all the benefits of growth go to the city, allowing non to percolate throughout the country side, where the vast mass poverty is located. This is not helped by industrial growth since industry is an exotic, artificial plant, (Lipton: op.cit.: pp.47) excessively protected as a result of urban bias and generating no net employment because of the highly capital intensive nature of industrial investment, again the product of urban bias, which includes collusion of businessmen anxious to avoid labour trouble and the union leaders of a labour aristocracy determined to maintain high wages - elements in the single urban class. Of immense importance, cities extract cheap food and cheap agricultural raw materials,
by a series of 'price twists' which ensure that the inter-sectoral terms of trade favour city and industry: with subsidised inputs going only to big farmers, farm output prices deliberately kept low by the state (via procurement policies, marketing boards), non-farm inputs highly subsidised and output sold at illegitimately high prices. This is the general argument of 'urban bias' by Michael Lipton and one feels that he is reading Sharad Joshi's thoughts in a different terminology. Lipton's book was published in 1977 and Joshi's first agitation started in 1978.

The effort here is not to show that Joshi has borrowed his ideas, but merely to state that his ideas are not 'original' and are not expounded for the first time as he fondly believes and that they have substantial antecedents.

Apart from Rosa Luxembourg, it is to be remembered that there was a long-drawn out debate in the Marxist world on the issue of unequal exchange and accumulation of capital, which Joshi does not acknowledge when he dismisses the Marxist ideology as inadequate to deal with the problem.

Credit however goes to Joshi for bringing this debate into the limelight by translating it into the ideology of a mass-movement. This ideology gave a new lease of life to the farm lobby which was always present on the political scene of India. Right from Mahatma Gandhi, Rajendra Prasad and Vallabhbhai Patel, there have been many leaders to defend the interest of the farm lobby in Indian politics. They had been expressing their views on the strategies of development from farmers' perspective. The ideas of each one of them were different but they created a background of the
"peasant identity" in Indian politics. The major precursors to Sharad Joshi's ideology were Mahatma Gandhi, Charan Singh and Ram Manohar Lohia.

Of these three, Sharad Joshi acknowledges the contribution of Mahatma Gandhi to the peasant movement in India. He uses the Gandhian methods of agitation and certain ideas of Gandhi seem to have influenced him. One can find parallels in Gandhi's ideas and those of Joshi's. It is important, therefore, to go into some of their details.

At the outset, we have to mention the two main differences between Gandhi and Sharad Joshi. Sharad Joshi's ideology has carefully avoided the moralism which is central in Gandhi's ideas. Joshi describes his own ideas as 'scientific' and 'practical', adjectives which can not be applied to Gandhian ideas. Also, in Joshi's formulation, there is no scope for the Gandhian idealism. The two, however, share their views somewhat on agrarian classes, redistribution of land and the use of non-violent means for agitations.

The views of both Gandhi and Joshi, regarding agrarian class-structure, are dominated by their opposition to any division of the agrarian community.

Gandhi explicitly opposed any move against the Zamindars, to dispossess them to redistribute lands confiscated from them. He maintained that the main enemy at the time was the alien government. To the question, "cannot we solve the problem (of miserable existence of agriculturists - tenants) by dispossessing the zamindars and distributing their land among the poor", Gandhi's answer was - "I know that it is impossible for us to do anything for them (agriculturists) today. There are a
thousand and one things that need to be done for the amelioration of the lot of the agriculturists. But so long as the reins of Government are not in the hands of agriculturists' representatives, i.e. so long as we have no Swaraj - Dharmaraj that amelioration is very difficult if not impossible.' -- "We may not forcibly dispossess the Zamindars and Talukdars of their thousands of bighas. And among whom shall we distribute them? We need not dispossess them. They only need a change of heart." (Gandhi: Ed. by V. B. Kher: 1957: pp.191)

To the sowcars and other exploiters also he suggested the same remedy, namely, moral education, and added "The oppressed need no other education except satyagraha and non-cooperation" (Gandhi: op.cit.: pp.192) Gandhi's ideas here find their parallel in Joshi's argument that the main line of contradiction today is between Bharat and India; India which has inherited the colonial yoke of Gandhi's alien ruler. Both are asking the same thing, namely, "don't pick up 'class' issues now." Only, Gandhi's moral overtones are absent in Joshi's argument. Another important difference regarding the issue of redistribution of land is that whereas Gandhi thought that the change of heart of landlords will smoothen the edges of class-differences and class-conflicts making redistribution unnecessary; Sharad Joshi thinks of land-redistribution as meaningless because of the unviability of land in the absence of remunerative prices.

In an article addressed to the Zamindars, in Anrita Bazar Patrika in 1934, Gandhi says, "Once you make your ryots experience a sense of kinship with you and a sense of security that their interest as members of a family will never suffer at your hands, you may be
sure that there cannot be a clash between you and them and no class war.” (Gandhi: op.cit.: pp.201) Sharad Joshi, while explaining the owner (farmer) and labourer relationship in the context of a question whether a farmer will give a right share to the labourer in case he gets remunerative prices, says that the relations between the farmer and the labourer are still of the nature of familiarity and close cordiality. Most of the owners and labourers eat their tiffins together. (Joshi/Mhatre: 1982: pp.92) Though Gandhi and Joshi are not talking about the same thing, the framework of their thinking is similar, as is seen in the above passages.

Both Gandhi and Joshi seem to have expressed concern over the political involvement and overtones of the peasant movement. Both talk about the danger of exploitation of the peasant organization by political vested interests or political parties. Gandhi wrote, “About the Kisan movement too, there is, I fear, an ugly competition to use Kisans for power politics. I consider it to be contrary to the non-violent methods”. (Gandhi: op. cit.: pp.89) He further advises those who would like to know his method of organizing kisans to study the Champaran movement which remained thoroughly non-violent. He says that the violent struggles preceding his struggle were all suppressed. He asks his readers also to study the Kisan movements in Bardoli, Kheda and Borsad and says that “the secret of success lies in a refusal to exploit the Kisans for political purposes outside their own personal and felt grievances.” (Gandhi: op.cit.: pp.90).

Joshi has expressed a similar concern and fear about other political parties and politicians exploiting the movement. He has insisted that the agitation of the Sanghaana should be totally devoid of party politics.
Both Gandhi and Sharad Joshi are wary about the leftists or socialists subverting their movement or organization. In the article mentioned above, Gandhi has heavily warned the left groups within the Congress which wanted to organise the peasantry, should neither to use the name of the Congress name nor work as congressmen (ibid). In an earlier letter addressed to the Kisans of the U. P. in Young India (28.5.31) Gandhi says, "Lastly, let me warn you against listening to the advice, if it has reached you, that you have no need to pay to the Zamindars any rent at all. I hope that you will not listen to such advice no matter who gives it. Congressmen cannot, we do not seek to injure the Zamindars. We aim not at destruction of property. We aim only at its lawful use." (Gandhi: op. cit.: pp.194) Sharad Joshi expressed his wariness about the left's position regarding the agrarian class-structure as a political game to divide his movement. (Joshi: December 1982: pp.18-19) This preoccupation about the left has been expressed amply in all his writings. The anti-left stand and expression of empathy with the rural propertied classes is a very interesting meeting ground for both Gandhi and Sharad Joshi.

It is also interesting to note in this context that when Joshi reviews and appraises the development of peasant movement in India, he says that it was Gandhi who brought the peasant movement which had strayed into the forms of uprisings of outlaws or bandits on to the right path. "The peasant movements were posited once again against the state itself. The peasant movement now became a part of an overall politico-economic movement on the larger scale. It ceased to be divisive of the agrarian community, since the cause chosen emphasised
the role of the prime mover, alien state, rather than this or that section, caste or class of the rural society. Further, it abandoned primitive rustic methods of main force in favour of the new techniques of non-violence and civil disobedience. " (Joshi : 1985 : p.68)

It is important to note that neither in this nor in any other writings, Joshi mentions the Tebhaga or the Telangana movements which were not 'primitive' 'crude' or 'rustic' 'outlaws' uprisings. It is not surprising that he mentions the Champaran, Kheda and Bardoli movements with appreciation.

Charan Singh was in many more ways a more significant precursor or forerunner of Sharad Joshi. Charan Singh, who was a seasoned politician, organized the rich and the middle Jat peasants of Uttar Pradesh and representing their aspirations, led their upsurge in U.P politics. Later he came to epitomise the archetypal peasant patriarch. It was Charan Singh who successfully assured and protected the interests of the rich peasant lobby in national politics as well when he held the finance and home portfolios and subsequently became the Prime Minister for a short period (1977-79). Charan Singh was perhaps the first one who forcefully demanded a better share to agriculture in the national resource allocation vis-a-Vis industry in the fora of national policy making. His ideas about agriculture, agricultural policy and the national economy are found in a number of books which he has written.

Charan Singh considered Mahatma Gandhi as his mentor and like Gandhi believed in the decentralization of economic power and development with village as the centre. (Charan Singh: 1979: pp.vi) However, he disagreed with Gandhi in so far as Gandhi did not favour abolition of the Zamindari system, but instead advocated changing it through the
trusteeship system. Charan Sigh was staunchly in favour of the abolition of Zamindari system. According to him, land tenancy which was the part and the parcel of landlordism, "needs to be replaced by peasant proprietorship which means that landlordism has to be abolished lock, stock and barrel". (Charan Singh: op.cit.: pp.11) Charan Singh preferred peasant proprietorship, that is ownership of the land by the cultivator, as it develops democratic rural society and decentralization of economic activities. Despite his anti-landlordism and preference for peasant proprietorship, Charan Singh opposed land reforms in actual politics.

Ideologically, Charan Singh was both anti-socialist/communist, and anti-capitalist. He attacked the concept of Soviet style of collectivization of agriculture for three reasons. Firstly because collectivization deprives the peasant of his freedom to live by his own direction and initiative. Secondly, the mechanization which is inseparable from collectivization is undesirable. And thirdly, because the average yield per unit of arable land does not increase in the absence of material incentive (Charan Singh: 1947: pp.80-110) Similarly he opposed cooperative agriculture as he considered it synonymous with collectivization. Sharad Joshi too dismisses of collectivization or cooperativization of agriculture but for the reason that corruption permeate these systems and that as long as agricultural prices are unremunerative any system of land holding will not be viable. The anti-communist fervour is, however, common with both.

Charan Singh was quite vocal in his anti-capitalism. He detested the term 'kulak' from the communist lexicon, as also the term capitalist peasant being attached to peasant proprietor. According to him it was wrong to consider peasant proprietorship as a step towards capitalist development. To him, the peasant proprietor was an ideal, non-capitalist being: "To call the peasant a capitalist is a
perversion of facts since the capitalist's job of accumulating capital was never performed by the peasant. A peasant proprietor is neither a capitalist nor a labourer... Although he may occasionally employ others, he is both his own master and his own servant. He does not exploit others: nor is he exploited by the others. (Charan Singh: op.cit.: pp.152) His opposition to capitalism was for the fear that it will threaten peasant proprietorship and with increasing use of mechanisation and wage labour, develop into large farms.

Here again, what he practiced was different from what he professed. Though he was against capitalist development of agriculture, his politics helped the same. He was against large farms for he believed in the "inverse relationship between the size of land holding and the quantity of the farm produce". "Under given conditions, yields per acre accruing to a farmer decline as the size of the farm increase." (Charan Singh: 1979: pp.14) So, the small farms were preferred to the large farms. But his politics which helped the capitalist development of agriculture also affected the farm size. A logical corollary to the advocacy of small farms was land redistribution which Charan Singh opposed to safeguard the interests of his constituency of rich peasants. So, here also was a contradiction between argument and political practice.

Evidently Sharad Joshi shares the anti-Communism of Charan Singh. He too vehemently denies the existence of Kulak in Maharashtra (Joshi/ Mhatre: 1982: pp. 86) and does not like the term capitalist - farmer (ibid.) He agrees with Charan Singh’s definition of the peasant proprietor, (Joshi/ Mhatre: op.cit.: pp.98) but does not agree with the last part of it, namely, ”nor is he exploited by the others”, since all farmers are exploited by the non-agricultural sector, according to his theory. Joshi also does not oppose mechanisation of agriculture as such.
It is important to note that Charan Singh has overlooked the class-differentiation in his writings. In the same way he has neglected the caste factor also. Sharad Joshi finds here a meeting ground as he also denies the class-differentiation in agriculture. On caste issue, however, Joshi has written extensively and has taken a firm stand against the casteist politics which he fears will affect 'economistic' movements like the Shetkari Sanghastana.

The most important aspect of Charan Singh's thoughts which make him Joshi's forerunner is his grasp of the town and country relationship. The 'urban bias' thesis runs through the writings of Charan Singh and he has dealt with the issue of inter-sectoral terms of trade. He consistently advocated a better share to agriculture in the allocation of resources, at the same time opposing the plans of heavy industry in favour of small-scale and cottage industries. However, like Joshi, he does not prescribe merely the 'remunerative price' mechanism, but suggests various other measures for the development of agriculture. He indicates two problems with the policy of agricultural price support. He feels that such policy, "in the final analysis only means that the subsidy in the form of difference between the market price of the commodity and the price guaranteed to be produce by the state will be coming, to a very large extent, from their own pockets." (Charan Singh: 1979: pp.38). Secondly, when the producers ask the state to purchase all the surplus in the circumstances when the production rises and there is undue fall in price, they "are virtually asking for state trading in food grains or state control of distribution of food and thus unwittingly playing into the hands of their opponents." (op. cit.: pp.39) He fears that allowing the state to fix prices will give it a chance to fix prices which will turn the terms of trade in favour of industry, and it will only lead to the control of supplies which is just a step behind collectivization which is feared
This difference of opinion on 'price' issue though it seems trivial, is of vital importance. The positions of the two are different as the vantage points from which they are articulating their thoughts are different. Charan Singh, though he represented the rich-middle farmers lobby, never resorted to any non-party forum. His politics always remained rooted in party politics. Also, having held the position of power and responsibility like those of chief minister, home and finance minister and Prime Minister compelled him to take more responsible political and ideological stands. This was perhaps the reason why there was the kind of contradiction in what he wrote and what he actually did.

The strength of Sharad Joshi's movement and ideology, in contrast, lay in its so-called non-political or to be more precise, non-party nature of organization. 'Remunerative price' was a simple issue to articulate and sharpen the antagonism between masses and the state. As will be discussed later, "price" was the issue which he could successfully transform into a 'non-class' issue, to mobilize the entire peasantry against the non-agricultural sector. In fact, Sharad Joshi's stand is that 'give us remuneration prices, we are not concerned if that leads to inflation or any other economic disaster.' Charan Singh when in power could not possibly take such a reckless stand. Charan Singh did spell out and stress the contradictions between industry and agriculture to substantiate and assert his political position vis-a-vis his colleagues from the industrial lobby; but those contradictions are fully developed and more sharply articulated by Sharad Joshi in his 'populist' discourse and movement. Sharad Joshi, however, does not acknowledge or mention Charan Singh in his writings.
The ideological lineage of Sharad Joshi shows us some common threads in the form of making agriculture the focal point in development; anti-communism/socialism, denial of the agrarian differentiation; upholding the interests of the rich peasantry and so opposing the land redistribution or collectivization. This line of thinking is common to Gandhi, Charan Singh and Sharad Joshi. While including the name of Ram Manohar Lohia as Joshi’s predecessor it must be made clear in the beginning, that he comes in only because of those of his ideas which were heavily partisan to the agriculture. However, being a socialist, Lohia did not share the anti-Left, pro-rich peasant perspective of the other three. His name needs to be mentioned because, contrary to Joshi’s claim of being the first one to talk of agrarian prices, (with the exception of the Peasant and Workers Party which he mentions) Lohia was quite persistent in advocating his view that remunerative prices to agricultural produce are essential for the wellbeing of all the classes in society and for farmers. (Lohia: 1984: pp.7)

But before demanding proper price for agricultural produce, he demands the implementation of land-reforms on the basis of ‘land to the tiller’. His demand of remunerative prices follows land redistribution. With reference to the terms of trade, Lohia says that there should be ‘parity prices’. "As the farmers are unorganized, the government takes undue advantage of it and lets the capitalists determine the prices of industrial goods the way they like. This harms the interests of the farmers". Lohia has also criticised the Governmental policy of levy procurement of food grains. According to him the Government’s estimates regarding production, surplus food grains and the price to be offered are all defective. So there is a wide difference between the levy price and the open market prices. The cost of levy procurement is also very high. Lohia suggested that the levy should not be procured from the farms who pay...
Lohia, however, says that asking only for higher prices can be detrimental to the interests of very poor farmers and landless labourers, because for the major part of the year these classes have to purchase food grains from the market. Therefore it is important to insist on land redistribution along with remunerative prices. He advocates small-scale machinery to help village industries as additional avenues for employment. Lohia also advocates decentralization of administration and economy. He, in fact, presents a total plan for agricultural and village development, taking into account various problems like credit, marketing, inputs, irrigation and infrastructure development, education and health etc. But in this scheme he gives a prominent place to the 'remunerative prices' to the farmers.

In a 1957 note, he wrote "because of the prices (of farm produce) falling in the season and rising in lean periods the farmers are looted annually by about 2 billion rupees." (Lohia: op.cit.: pp.16) He thinks that remunerative prices will be a good incentive to increase the production of agricultural commodities. He clearly says that cooperativization or collectivization of farming are of secondary importance. The most important thing is to put more capital in agriculture.

In a way, on the question of remunerative prices, Joshi comes to share Lohia's ideas though he opposes redistribution of land and other development plans. It is significant that Gandhi, Charan Singh and Lohia have all given a picture of a village central economy with a stress on constructive programmes. Sharad Joshi does agree with a village centred development of economy but ridicules the constructive programmes, especially if they are run or
sponsored by the Government. Joshi's concept of remunerative prices is not in comparison with industrial prices. He does not talk of the 'parity' of prices between industrial and farm produce. But his demand is for determination of farm prices on the basis of their cost of production. In that sense, Joshi's vision/approach is much narrower than that of his predecessors.

The whole exercise of reviewing these ideas brings into sharp focus the fact that in the political debate on agriculture and its development, issues like agricultural prices and the terms of trade had been discussed. It has to be stated, however, that the review is not exhaustive and is restricted only to such ideas which have some connection or link with Sharad Joshi's ideas. The similarities and the differences between them also help to clarify their nature.

The Populist Ideology

The Shetkari Sanghatana's ideology is a 'populist' ideology. The term 'populism' however is not used in the way the functionalist approach uses it. According to the functionalist school, populism is a phenomenon, peculiar to a society which finds itself in a transitional phase between tradition and industrial development. Populism appears from the lack of synchronization between the two phases. It then has features such as 1) an elite imbued with an anti-status quo ideology; 2) a mobilisation of masses generated by a 'revolution of rising expectations'; 3) an ideology with a widespread emotional appeal. (Laclau: 1977: pp.152).

The analysis of populism linked with the transitional phase of development seems to be inadequate since examples of populist experiences are found in developed countries as
well. Similarly, deciding the 'levels' or the 'stages' of development necessary for the populist expression is a difficult thing. The deterministic nature of this analysis also poses certain problems. Hence, a basically neo-Marxist framework is used here.

The term 'populism' is used here in the sense in which Ernesto Laclau uses it. (Laclau: op.cit.)

According to Laclau, "Populism consists in the presentation of popular democratic interpellations as a synthetic antagonistic complex with respect to the dominant ideology." (op.cit.: pp.172-173)

The ideology of the dominant classes consists of the ideological themes of the dominant subjects. It also incorporates the ideological themes of the dominated classes after neutralising their potential antagonism. The antagonisms are neutralised by transforming them into simple differences. When the capacity of the dominant ideology to absorb the antagonistic interpellations by transforming them into simple differences becomes restricted, there is a possibility of such antagonisms developing into populist articulations. "Populism starts at the point where popular-democratic elements are presented as an antagonistic option against the ideology of the dominant bloc." (op. cit.: pp.173) Populism can be both: of the dominant classes and of the dominated classes.

The populism of the Shetakari Sanghatana is the populism of the dominant classes. When the dominant bloc experiences a profound crisis because a fraction of it seeks to impose its hegemony but is unable to do so within the existing structure of the power bloc, its solution is found in a direct appeal by this fraction, to the masses to develop their antagonism towards the State. The dominant class
'populism' however, avoids the development of the revolutionary potential of popular interpellations. It develops the antagonism but keep it within certain limits. Such populism is, therefore, not revolutionary or radical, but more or less reformist.

This framework is used here to analyse the ideology of the Shetkari Sanghatana which is articulated effectively by Sharad Joshi.

The populism of the Shetkari Sanghatana consist of

1) the denial of the existence of classes and an appeal to the 'peasantry' which is projected as synonymous to 'people' (the real India lives in villages);

2) Projection of the demand for 'remunerative price' as the demand of the entire agrarian sector and thus, as, at least apparently, a 'non-class' demand

3) Projection of the state or the ruling bloc as antagonistic to the genuine interests of the peasantry, thus making if the target of attack;

4) articulation of the popular traditions by using the non-class symbols, to express 'people vs. power bloc' contradiction.

One of the main features of the Shetkari Sanghatana's ideology is the insistence on the unity of all the farmers. The slogan "Shetkari Tituka Ek Ek" (All the farmers are one), apart from insisting on unity also denies the existence of any internal contradictions, the classes, within the agriculturists. The ideology, thus makes an appeal to the agrarian sector as a whole, rather than to a particular class of peasantry. The concept of this sectoral unity is
reinforced by juxtaposing it with the urban industrial sector. The agrarian unity is also argued on the basis of its united demand for 'remunerative prices'. It is argued that unremunerative prices have been the sole reason for the poverty of the agricultural sector as a whole. No farmer can ever make any profit because of the deliberate policy of the State not to let farmers get remunerative prices. It is through the unremunerative prices paid for the farm produce that the industrial sector extorts the surplus from the farm sector. It is this exploitation which leaves the farmers poor and diverts all the fruits of development to the industrial urban sector. It is also argued that there is no basic contradiction in the interests of the different strata of peasantry. If the remunerative prices are received by the farmers their positive effects will percolate to all the lower strata also.

It is with this argument that the demand of 'remunerative prices' is projected as a demand of all the peasant classes, in a way, as a non-class and popular demand. In this formulation, the State, Government or the ruling bloc is projected as antagonistic to the genuine interests of the peasantry. So the demands are directed against it. However, to sharpen the edges of the antagonism, there is a persistent reference to a 'conspiracy' to fleece the peasantry on the part of the Government. It is alleged time and time again that no matter who comes to power, the
farmers' demands will not be granted. That if the farmers persist in their demands the State will use repression but not accede to the demands of the farmers.

But, despite the sharpness of the antagonism, the aim is not to suppress the State as a whole. By insisting on adherence to the non-violent means of agitation and conducting the movement within the parliamentary democratic framework, the ideology keeps the development of contradictions in check, not letting them bear any revolutionary potential. Thus, antagonisms between the people and the power bloc are developed up to a point and then are restrained. The existing sociopolitical framework is not disturbed. Agitational methods are used but they are also those which are approved by the system. These are the democratic mass agitations on the line of the Gandhian satyagraha, Rail and Rasta Roko, hunger strike, and so on. They have all been strictly non-violent democratic methods which do not challenge the system. They only challenge the power bloc. The rationale of the existence of the State, in its particular form, is not questioned. That is the reason why this ideology is termed here a "non-radical", reformist populism. The reason for the non-radical nature of the ideology is that it is articulated by a fraction of the dominant class which has been aspiring for hegemony.

There is a class-alliance between the industrial bourgeoisie and the rich peasantry which dominates the power bloc. Though power is shared by them, there is a competition between them for hegemony. The hegemony of the industrial bourgeoisie not seriously questioned so far, is challenged by the class of the rich peasants, the subordinate partner. It has articulated its aspirations for hegemony through this populist ideology. It has to be borne in mind, that this class does not have sharp differences with the dominant partner. Its nature is more competitive
than antagonistic vis-a-vis the hegemonic class, which it projects as the ruling bloc or State. The ideology of the Shetkari Sanghatana, which serves the interests of the class of the rich peasantry in competition for hegemony, is thus an 'oppositional' rather than a 'radical' or 'revolutionary' ideology.

To understand this ideological struggle between the fractions of the dominant class, it is necessary to see what specific interest these classes have, which is articulated in their respective ideological discourses. Even if one does not buy the 'urban bias' thesis as such, it is true that the industrial bourgeoisie dominates the economic policy making, including the agrarian policy in the state. Thus the economic decisions and policies are generally those which cater to the interests of this class. In order to accomplish this the industrial bourgeoisie make a political arrangement with the rural rich whereby it acquires the popular sanction through electoral process with the help of the rich peasantry. The rich peasantry is given in turn various concessions, including the absence of income-tax, heavy subsidies on inputs, and certain development schemes and projects. In return the industrial bourgeoisie gets the vast power of determining economic policy serving its own interests. The common interests of all these fractions are the oppression of the toiling masses and the maintenance and preservation of the capitalist system. The conflict between the various fractions of the dominant classes hovers around the distribution of surplus. This conflict is harmoniously resolved when there is a continuous expansion of the capitalist economy. The crisis occurs, however, when it experiences stagnation.

The industrial bourgeoisie is interested in increased investment in industry with all merchant capital, usury capital, capital locked in parallel economy etc. being
diverted to industry. It also wants rapid agricultural development so that raw materials and food grains can be available at cheaper prices, which will keep industrial wages low and also provide an expanded internal market for industrial goods. This can effect the transfer of surplus from agriculture to industry. It also finds the public sector useful to nurse the private sector, providing it with infrastructural facilities and inputs at subsidised rates. It is not anti- small scale sector per se but skillfully manages to weave into its framework the ancillary units, thus exploiting cheap labour. It prefers to function in a non-competitive and secure atmosphere. Recognising the chaotic markets as a destructive phenomenon it stresses planning and control.

However, in the absence of the expanding internal markets and given the scarcity of resources, industrial bourgeoisie resorts more and more to cater to a small and selective market for consumer durable. Thus it turns to foreign collaborations and develops a more capital intensive, high-cost economy. It tries to depress the wage-rates of the working class and resorts to mechanisation. In the case of high prices of agricultural raw materials, it resorts to the substitution of the same by synthetic materials. This can have significant political implications and lead to a crisis.

The mercantile bourgeoisie, a section which is the original capitalist in any society, has still some hold over the industry. It can no longer dictate terms though its absolute control over distribution of manufactured goods but can certainly cause problems through control of some key raw material and politically sensitive commodities. Since it has vital links with lumpen bourgeoisie; its nuisance value for the industrial bourgeoisie increases manifold. In addition, in conditions of capital paucity it is seen to look
up capital in vast amounts in basically nonproductive activities. The industrial bourgeoisie is unhappy over its independent control over the distribution of commodities and disproportionate amount of surplus which is amassed by it. Hoarding and black marketing are both economically and politically undesirable to the industrial monopolist. It therefore has become a consistent target of attack from the industrial bourgeoisie, and of the actions of the state machinery.

The rich-capitalist farmer is a partner in the political alliance in the State. It was the industrial bourgeoisie which gave birth to and stimulated the growth of this section. By granting easy credit facilities, tax concessions, subsidised inputs etc. this class was nurtured into a firm ally and supporter of the industrial bourgeoisie. As the rich peasantry forms the power and leadership stratum in the rural areas its support to the industrial bourgeoisie because vital. There are, however, contradictions between the industrial bourgeoisie and this class centering around:

a) Prices of the agricultural produce: food grains and raw materials;

b) Prices of industrial products serving as inputs to agriculture;

c) Flow of surplus between the agrarian and industrial sectors;

d) Expansion of internal markets and mitigation of discontent through minimum wages in the agrarian sector.

It is on these issues and for domination within the power alliance that the rich peasantry competes with the
industrial bourgeoisie. The competition takes place, however, keeping the alliance in tact. It is this competition which has led the rich peasantry to articulate the populist ideology and appeal to the masses; a strategy to enhance its power vis-a-vis the industrial bourgeoisie. It is because of this reason that the populism of this class cannot become revolutionary or radical. In its competition with industrial bourgeoisie, the rich peasantry aligns with the mercantile bourgeoisie. The issues of conflict between the industrial bourgeoisie and the mercantile bourgeoisie have been mentioned earlier. The alliance between the rich peasants and the mercantile bourgeoisie, however, remains tacit. It is significant to note here, that the peasant movements attack the State and the industrial sector, but do not utter even a word, let alone agitate against the merchants or the middlemen who are the direct exploiters of the peasants. The Shetkari Sanghatana also, barring the tobacco - agitation, has not stirred against the mercantile bourgeoisie at all.

In its hegemonic competition, the rich peasantry has sought and received the support of the middle peasant section. There has been a fairly protracted debate on the role of the middle peasantry in a peasant movement. Both Lenin (Lenin: 1969: pp. 78-109) and Mao ze Dong (Mao ze Dong: Peking 1967: Vol.I: pp.15-20) do not ascribe a revolutionary role to the middle peasantry. According to Hamza Alavi, the middle peasants give impetus to peasant rebellions, but when a peasant movement actually advances towards its revolutionary objectives, they tend to move away from their core position in the organization of the movement. Eric Wolf, however feels that it is the middle peasant who is most likely to pursue a revolutionary course of action because of its peculiar position in the peasant society. According to him, the middle peasant is the reservoir of the peasant tradition, institutions and conservatism and at the same time the instrument of
dynamiting the peasant social order. "Exposed to crisis situation in peasant economy, wrought by industrial commercialism, the middle peasant is also subjected to the influences from the developing urban proletariat. Although the most achieving and aspiring type, the middle peasant is worst sufferer of both the encroachment of landlords on his customary rights and also of the unfavourable fluctuations in the market." (Wolf: 1971: pp.291-2) Dhanagare who has examined the role of peasantry in the movements in India, notes that the principal participants in the agrarian movements came from substantial land owners and self-sufficient cultivators, that is, the middle peasants. He says that both rich and middle peasants were actively involved in the Gandhian agrarian movements which were basically reformist and restorative, or at best accumulative, in that they lacked transformative potential. (Dhanagare: 1983: pp.220) Dhanagare has also observed that the contribution of the middle peasantry to the total upsurge in the Tebhaga movement was not outstanding. In Telangana insurrection, the middle peasants did not take the initiative or lead; on the whole their participation in the revolt was far from significant. According to Dhanagare, even empirically, the "middle peasant thesis" is not sustained in the Indian context. (Dhanagare: op. cit.: pp.221)

He maintains that middle peasant stratum, which is regionally specific and heterogeneous in social composition has always been a transitional and fluid social category. Under the pressures of prosperity or pauperization, the middle peasantry had to cope with the in and outflows. (ibid.)

The middle peasantry, hence, does not show revolutionary leanings, at least in the Indian context, and though it has participated in various peasant movements in the pre-independence period, the nature of those movements
was not revolutionary, but reformist. The middle peasant seems to show his resistance to any change which may push him towards pauperization. He thus strives for retention of the status quo and welcomes a change which promises him an upward push in class hierarchy. The involvement of middle peasantry in the Shetkari Sanghatana's movement, therefore is very significant.

It has been suggested that increasing polarization of agrarian relations has tended to eliminate the middle peasant as a very significant social category in India. (Gough: Pacific Affairs: Winter, 1968-9: pp.544) The polarization thesis suggests that the spread of commercial agriculture and the dynamism of capitalist forces in the agricultural sector is creating two classes; capitalist farmers and wage labourers. That small holders and marginal farmers are pushed into the ranks of a rural proletariat as control of land falls increasingly in the hands of capitalist farmers employing growing proportions of wage labourers. The debate on the 'polarisation thesis however still continues. (For details of the 'polarization thesis debate, see, Rudolph & Rudolph: 1987: pp.346-354) The contending view suggests that instead of polarization, there seems to be a growth of small and medium sized family farms. The small and middle sized holders have more than held their own. This is a counter force to polarization. The middle peasantry (farmers holding land between 2.5 to 15 acres, primarily self-cultivated, with the help of family labour) was the principal beneficiary of the first wave of land reforms which abolished intermediaries. Randolph and Rudolph opine that this class of self-employed cultivators is largely the product of post-independence agrarian policies. (ibid.: pp.354) This class also benefited from the Green Revolution by using new techniques and inputs. It constitutes the single largest proportion of approximately 34 per cent in the agricultural sector and has retained its numerical strength over a
period of time. If polarization entails with it agrarian radicalism, the growth of the middle peasant stratum suggests the contrary.

The middle peasant class which has been the beneficiary of the Green Revolution and the favourable terms of trade along with the rich peasantry, has identified readily with the demand for "remunerative prices" put forth by the Shetkari Sanghatana. It eagerly accepts and propagates the concept of agrarian unity while aligning with the rich peasantry in its populist movement. The middle peasantry has lent its numerical strength to the movement. It can also carry with it the class of the small peasants with the help of a right kind of ideological discourse. It is interesting to cite here an observation of Rudolph and Rudolph that small holders may collaborate politically with bullock capitalists (the term they use for middle, self-cultivating peasants. Rudolph & Rudolph define bullock capitalist as "self employed and self-funded producers. Their holdings are large enough to support a pair of bullocks and use the new inputs associated with the green revolution. Their costs of production tend to be more efficient than those of large landowners. At the same time, their assets are not large enough to enable them to engage in capital-intensive use of machinery or to require them to rely wholly or mainly on wage or tenant labour. Their costs and gains are powerfully, but not wholly determined by market forces. We use the term "bullock" more figuratively than literally. Bullock capitalists may use tractors or other lumpy forms of physical capital on their modest-sized holdings typically by renting such items in or out" (Rudolph & Rudolph: op.cit.: pp.340)) if they can be led to believe in the Indian equivalent of the American myth about mobility in industrial society. "The myth held that, with pluck and luck, poor boys can become if not millionaires like Andrew Carnegie, at least successful members of America’s vast middle class, a myth
that mixed enough fact with its fiction to inhibit the growth of class consciousness among America’s poor and antagonistic class relations. The bullock capitalist myth holds that small holders and even some of the landless can cross the subsistence or poverty lines to become independent farmers.” (op. cit.: pp.342)

The role of the middle peasantry may actually be that of the carriers of the myth of the possibility of upward mobility in the agricultural sector through “higher prices” for the poor farmers. The middle peasantry being a non-revolutionary but a non-passive agrarian class is more prone to a populist ideological appeal. The populist ideology provides it with a material cause to identify with and fight for, at the same time, its non-radical stance serves to retain the status quo.

It must be mentioned here, that Dhanagare considers the movement by the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), under the leadership of Mahendra Singh Tikait, a ‘populist’ movement. The BKU movement is similar to that of the Shetkari Sanghatana. To explain the poor and middle farmers getting drawn within the ideological ambit dominated by the rich not belonging to their affiliated ti., Dhanagare says, “The contemporary mobilization of farmers is fast acquiring properties of a populist movement in which there is a growing disjunction between class and ideology on the one hand and between them and the scope of political action they arouse on the other.” (Dhanagare: Seminar: December 1988: pp.31)

The populism of the Shetkari Sanghatana is thus articulated by the rich peasantry for its own interests, political as well as material, wherein the material interests of the middle peasants, are also interwoven. The concept of agrarian sectoral unity, however, also necessitates the
inclusion of the articulation of the poor peasantry's interests or themes which bring it in the fold of the movement. The "remunerative price" demand is beneficial more to the rich peasantry and to some extent the middle peasantry. It actually harms the interests of the poor peasants and the landless farmers. To obscure this conflict of interests and project sectoral unity, the Sanghatana ideology has made use of the "popular traditions" to appeal to the emotions of this section and draw them into the agrarian unity.

According to Laclau, 'popular traditions' constitute the complex of interpellations which express the 'people' vs. power bloc contradictions as distinct from class contradictions. (Laclau: 1979: pp.167) Laclau further explains that the 'popular traditions' when they represent the ideological crystallization of resistance to oppression in general, that is, to the very form of the state, they are longer lasting than class ideologies. Popular traditions do not constitute consistent and organized discourses but merely elements existing in the articulation of class discourses. In a way 'popular traditions' can transcend the class identity which they may have originally represented. That is why, "the most divergent political movements appeal to the same ideological symbols. (ibid.) Popular traditions being the resilience of a unique historical experience, constitute a durable structure of meanings. There is in them dual reference to the people and to classes both. That is the strength of the popular traditions.

Sharad Joshi makes use of such 'popular traditions' in the discourse that he has articulated. The popular traditions are used to evoke a sense of identity among the peasant classes, especially the poor peasants, towards such struggles against injustice as were waged by Shivaji or Jotirao Phule. The struggle he is asked to join is likened
with those struggles. Baliraja, Shivaji or Jotirao Phule are the symbols crystallised from these popular traditions and are projected thus. Joshi has also used the entire idiom of his discourse in tune with this popular tradition. He has used the symbols from the protest traditions in the religious field, such as the warkari (a saint tradition in Maharashtra) sect symbols. The name of the first publication of the Sanghatana was warkari suggesting the above mentioned sect symbol and at same time implying a meaning which suggests 'the one who strikes'. Another weekly publication of the Sanghatana was named Gyanba, again from the same tradition. One rally which the Sanghatana organised was held in Pandharpur (the centre of pilgrimage of the warkari sect) on the auspicious day of the sect and was called "Vithobala Sakade", meaning insistence with Vithoba by putting him in difficulty. It has to be noted, however, that use of the idiom from this sect is not for the religious meaning attached to it, but to exploit the symbolic meanings which are associated with it in the popular (here the poor peasants) mind. In the same fashion, Shivaji, the popular heroic figure in Maharashtra is projected as the king who represented and protected the interests of peasants in contrast with earlier or later kings who were basically the plunderers and looters. Jotirao Phule is also projected as the first thinker who voiced the woes of the farmers. Jotirao’s attacks on casteism are interpreted as his attack on the exploiters of the peasantry. The correctness or otherwise of these interpretations is a debatable question but the way “popular traditions” have been exploited fruitfully and effectively by the Sanghatana’s ideology needs to be mentioned.

It is significant to note here, that the same symbols of Shivaji or Jotirao Phule are used by organisations and parties like the Shiv Sena or the Congress or the BJP, though they ascribe different interpretations to the same
for their respective clientele. For example, the Shiv Sena projects Shivaji as the symbol of the Marathi "asmita" (identity with pride), the BJP uses him as a Hindu King; (Go-Brahman Pratipalaka - meaning the king who protects and Brahmins) while the Congress projects him as the symbol of Marathi "asmita" and also as the representative of the Bahujan Samaj; and his rule as the rule of the Bahujan Samaj (the non-Brahmin castes in Maharashtra).

In the use of popular traditions the Sanghatana has evoked "peasant consciousness", the feeling of agrarian unity vis-a-vis the other sectors. In the use of popular traditions there is also a latent emotional appeal to the agricultural poor. This is not to suggest that the emotional appeal is not there for the upper classes. But they find something concrete and material in the ideology to identify with, while lacking the material incentive, the poorer classes have only the emotional appeal to hold on to. This emotional content is also enhanced when, while describing the peasant life or problems, the stereotype used is that of a poor peasant. His lack of resources and basic amenities, his poverty, his toiling and hardships are all described in graphic details as that of all peasant classes including the rich farmers. This is one way to evoke "peasant consciousness" which can transcend the peasant stratification and thereby reinforce the 'populist' appeal of the ideology.

The reinterpretation of history, culture, religion, literature etc. for use of a populist movement exhibits one more aspect. It is a conscious effort to exert the influence of the 'peasant' 'populist' formulation in all spheres of thinking and to capture ideological spaces within the general intellectual firmament. So, the analysis, not only of the peasant question, but also of history culture and related subjects is attempted. An effort is made to propound a
general theory of development.

This interpretation of history, culture etc. is however, more or less simplistic and mechanistic. Since the exploitation of peasantry is proposed as the sole driving force in historical progression, the interpretation also becomes unidimensional and linear which covers up the complexities involved in these processes.

The formulation regarding communalism, too is similar. Sharad Joshi takes a very secular stand and condemns the communal politics. The reason behind this 'secular' stand however is the fear that communal forces will divide his ranks and weaken the peasant movement which propagates the unity of all classes. Even when the difficult task of inter-class-unity is achieved, caste and religion can still prove to be dangerous forces scattering this precarious unity. This realisation has provoked Joshi's anti-communal anti-caste writings. It must be noted that these writings date from 1984 and not before. Joshi had in fact no qualms in collaborating with the Shiv Sena and the BJP earlier.

The Shetkari Sanghatana's concern with the women's question is also a part and parcel of the same logic. A populist movement and ideology needs to protect the unity of the people's bloc. Any contradictions within that bloc have to be managed in such a way that they do not become antagonistic and do not lead to any real conflict. The interests, then, of any subgroup and their emergent ideological articulations have to be coopted and subsumed, so that, while some play can be allowed to the articulation of the specific grievances and aspirations, the overall framework - ideological and organizational remains in tact.

The increasing participation of women in rallies and agitations had made the potential of women's power in
peasant movement clear to Sharad Joshi. In the wake of the emerging mobilisation of women in urban as well as in rural areas, a formulation of women's question which will fit the overall populist ideology was seen as necessary to tap women's power and neutralise its possible antagonism to get it coopted in the peasant struggle.

The women's question, during the mid to late 80s was no longer confined to urban upper middle-class individuals but was finding expressions even in rural areas. Women's committees sprang up in places like Shahada; the Stree Mukti Sanghatana, having participation of activists of the Lal Nishan Party organized a Stree Mukti Yatra in January 1985 and many voluntary groups took up women's issues. With this background of mobilisation of women it can be imagined that the Shetkari sanghatana anticipated penetration by other organizations, within its area of influence, championing the women's cause, and took steps to preempt any such moves and possible division within its ranks. It is also important to note that when a large women's rally was organized at Chandwad, women activists from diverse political and non-political groups, as well as feminist formations, were specially invited to attend the rally and also participate in discussions. The obvious aim was to win over their support.

In his efforts to capture ideological spaces within the general intellectual firmament, Sharad Joshi attempted to have dialogues with intellectuals, journalists, trade unions, development activists and groups (non-traditional Marxists, Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini, Sarvodayis etc.) and even political formations like the Shiv Sena. Close ties were established with trade unionists like Shankar Guha Niyogi and Datta Samant and Swami Agnivesh. The purpose of this effort could have been merely to communicate the ideology and position of the Shetkari Sanghatana, or to win sympathizers and/or allies. The general history of these
dialogues, however, suggests that it was essentially an effort to capture ideological spaces. This is a necessary activity in a struggle for hegemony.

This is the nature of the populism of the Shetkari Sanghatana. There is one more interesting feature to the Sanghatana's ideology and that is, its at least initial insistence on keeping away from political parties. Dhanagare calls it "apoliticist populism" (Dhanagare: 1988). Sharad Joshi categorically said that the movement of the Sanghatana must be totally distinct from the political parties. If it gets caught in the quagmire of party politics, in the very first elections, there will be division among farmers and the organization will get destroyed. So the idea should be put forth purely as an economic demand. (Joshi: December 1982: pp.35) This position of December 1982, changed in February 1985. In 1985 he justified the Sanghatana's involvement in the elections on the ground that the Sanghatana should make an effective use of elections which is a vital instrument in a democracy. He maintains that the Sanghatana does aspire to electoral power but should utilise these occasions to pressurise the political parties as well as the government. (Joshi December 1985: pp.68 -172)

This tactical position of the Shetkari Sanghatana is also a part of its 'populist' ideology. The earlier apoliticist stance was aimed at broadening its support base which would transcend not only class, but also the party affiliations. The Sanghatana with its 'populist' ideology in organizing the peasant masses was not really challenging party-based politics. It was rather challenging the ruling bloc. The non-party posture helped the Sanghatana to organizing the oppositional elites across the party barriers and also to
muster the support of the masses who were disillusioned with the political parties. The non-party stance of the Sanghatana was not and could remain serious because the antagonism between the state and the Sanghatana is not of a radical nature. The Sanghatana does not aim to challenge the basic principles underlying the political system.
CHAPTER IV

ORGANISATION

Organizing Peasants:

It is believed that organizing the peasantry is a difficult task. Hobsbawm talks about the general passivity and subalternity of the peasants, the relative isolation of local communities which makes their organisation difficult. (Hobsbawm: 1973: pp.3) Hence, any study of a wide spread peasant movement, with a certain amount of continuity, needs to pay particular attention to the method of organization, employed by the movement.

For any movement, organizational structure becomes necessary to coordinate and regularize certain activities and programmes. However, a structure at times proves to be an obstacle as the formality and rigidity which come with a structure can mar the spontaneity of action which is of vital importance to any movement. The Shetkari Sanghatana seems to have faced this dilemma in its initial years. The leaders, keen to preserve the vitality and vibrancy of the movement did not want to adopt a formal organizational structure. Some coordination and regularity of activities was, however, essential, particularly at a time when the movement was rapidly spreading and expanding. That is why a very loose and informal organizational structure was evolved in the beginning and only later on, due to the compulsions of the movement, a formal structure was adopted. This formal structure too was not of a permanent character but changed from time to time. Another reason why a formal
structure was not adopted in the beginning was the fear of
the leadership that such a structure would be easily
captured by the dominant political leaders in respective
areas, in order to subvert the movement. (Joshi Mhatre:
1982: pp.141.) This was especially true in a period when
members of different political parties and groups had joined
the movement. There was, then, no restriction about
participation by members of any political parties or of
other organizations. The leadership was, however, aware of
the danger of ruling as well as opposition parties' efforts
to gradually swallow the organization by capturing the
important posts and utilize the movement for their own
objectives. Such subversive take over could be prevented
only by avoiding a formal structure and keeping the
movement free to adapt to new situations as they developed.
Thus, the leadership's conscious decision to protect the
movement from the political games of various parties kept
the Sanghatana flexible and informal in the beginning.

Evolution of Organisation:

With the increased strength and success of the
movement the danger of such subversion diminished. The idea
of a formal structure was mentioned more frequently in the
debates of the Sanghatana's fora.

At the Sanghatana convention in January 1982, it was
suggested that some structure to facilitate communication,
propaganda, training of activists, fund collection and legal
and medical help be set up. A decision to organize the
Sanghatana units at the village level was also taken at this
Convention. (Bhoonisevak: 18th and 25th January 1982, and
Bhoonisevak: 20th September 1982) The village level
organization was to be set up by giving membership to those
who would pay a total amount of Rs.6/-. The village having a minimum 50 such members would be considered as a village unit of the Sanghatana. But apart from village units, the Sanghatana even then did not have a full-fledged formal structure. Joshi avoided the decision on formal structure with a constitution etc. by saying, "The one who faces a lathi is our President; an Executive Committee is formed where people come together as per necessity; and the one who helps monetarily to take a wounded agitator to hospital is our treasurer. We don't have lists of members. If there is a list, the police will find it easy to arrest the workers." (Bhoomisevak: 16th and 25th January 1982) This speech makes it clear that Joshi wanted to keep the organization very flexible.

A membership drive was launched in 1982 to organize local village level units. However, the Sanghatana did not have full-time activists to carry out various functions. Suggestions were, hence, made to the forum of the Sanghatana forum Shetkari Sanghatak (the fortnightly publication started in April 1983) to recruit full-timers to undertake the tasks of recruitment of members, propaganda and maintenance of communication between the leaders and the village units. This proposal was implemented at the second convention of the Sanghatana held at Parbhani in February 1984. This convention adopted a resolution to appoint full-timers who would devote at least a year for the organization. They were to undergo training and were to be paid Rs.300/- per month as honorarium. According to this resolution organizational units were to be formed at the district level named 'Agitation Committees'. The Committee was to take responsibility of fund-raising, training, propaganda, organizing agitations and provision of legal aid to the activists. The full-timers in the district were to be given their honorarium by the respective district 'Agitation Committee'. It was also expected to organize a group of
agitators at Taluka levels or at market towns. By another resolution a public trust with the name "Krishi Yogakshema Samshodhan Nyas" was instituted. The funds to be collected by the Sanghatana were to be deposited with the trust. In the same Convention it was resolved that each worker of the Sanghatana would wear its badge all the time at public places.

After the Parbhani Convention (1984), full-timers were appointed and district Committees were formed. No full-fledged organizational structure was, however, created. One reason behind this resistance to formal structure even at this stage, was the debate over participation by the Shetkari Sanghatana in the elections of cooperative institutions. There were groups arguing from both sides. Those who insisted on the Sanghatana's participation in the elections argued that it would strengthen the Sanghatana as an organization. It was also argued that the Sanghatana would be able to wipe out corruption from the locally important economic and political institutions. Those who opposed the Sanghatana's involvement in electoral politics feared that such involvement would divert the focus of its activities. The Sanghatana leader took the decision of not setting up a Sanghatana panel but stated that there was no objection to members contesting elections in their personal capacity. The elections to the Cooperative institutions and later on the Parliamentary and the Assembly elections proved to be sensitive issues for the Sanghatana ranks. Those who had entered the Sanghatana for political motives insisted on participation in elections on behalf of the Sanghatana. They were basically from the opposition parties or the rebels from the Congress (I). Those who were still in the Congress (I) did not want the Sanghatana to fight elections. There was an obvious rift on this issue in the Sanghatana but the leaders were looking forward to it as it gave them a chance to get rid of the unwanted elements.
from the organization. It facilitated the process of weeding out. (Sharad Joshi, interview, 15/1/87)

The elections to the cooperative institutions, however, were important for the *Sanghatana* and it decided to participate in them in 1985. The control of cooperative institution was vital as it gave the *Sanghatana* financial and organizational strength. That was also a way to make inroads into the rural power-base of the ruling party.

**Emerging Structure:**

In May 1984, the organizational structure of the *Sanghatana* acquired a concrete form to some extent. In a meeting of activists at Nasik, on 27th May 1984, an Executive body consisting of a Central Committee of 16 members and 19 district contact workers was established. (*Shetkari Sanghatak* special issue, March 1989) This structure was revised again on 26th March 1985, in a meeting of the Executive and taluka contact workers held at Manmad. In the reorganization of the structure, each members of the Executive Committee was required to take responsibility of some specific work. A list of about 30 activities was prepared and the work was divided among the Executive Committee members. A decision was also taken to emphasize organizational activities at the village and weekly marketplace level. Three more posts of vice-presidents were created in addition to the earlier post of the President of the organization. Some twenty two contact workers were appointed for the twenty two districts in Maharashtra.

The thirty subjects identified in the list of activities, basically came under three main headings of
propaganda, agitation and agricultural prices. Under the heading of propaganda, sub-headings like organization, training, publication, fortnightly contact, administration, culture, students, women, adivasis, dalits, agricultural labourers, youth, other organizations, law, medicine, other states etc. were prominent. Different workers were supposed to work for propaganda in their respective fields. This was an effort to make the Executive body more broad-based with separate fronts to look after the mobilization of different sections of the society. The Executive body also decided to organize a women’s convention.

In July 1985, in a three day meeting of the Executive body at Khuldabad (Aurangabad district) discussions were held with the activists of the leftist groups working among tribals, dalits, landless labourers etc. in an effort to have a dialogue with them and if possible find common grounds to come together for action. In May 1986 the Executive Committee which met at Chakan reviewed the activities and the implementation of decisions. Sharad Joshi and many other members expressed their dissatisfaction about the working of the Executive Committee. Some changes for the revitalization of activities were suggested. There were also suggestions to reorganize the structure of the organization once again. The fact of under representation of women in the Executive Committee was brought to the notice of the body. In the final decision changes in the composition of the Executive Committee were postponed and it was decided to organize special programmes for women workers in order to increase women’s participation in the formal bodies. Sharad Joshi also made a suggestion that out of 212 market committees in Maharashtra, at least one representative of each market Committee should attend the meeting of the Executive. He insisted that this representative should be ‘elected’ by the Sanghatana badge-holders members at the market place and not ‘appointed’ as was done till then. "Electing
representatives will end the "highbrow Club" nature of the Executive". (Sharad Joshi in Executive Committee meeting, Chakan, 15/5/86). He also supported Bhaskarao Borsoke's suggestion that the Executive Committee be retained as it was and a 'High Command' consisting of fewer members be created.

**Structure in 1987:**

The Executive body in 1987-88 was headed by a High Command or a High Powered Committee, consisting of 8 members including Sharad Joshi, President of the organization Anil Gote, the chief of Women's Front Vimalakaku Patil and five other senior leaders. The High Command was followed by a committee Regional Chiefs. The regions were East Vidarbha, Central Vidarbha, Western Vidarbha, North Maharashtra, Central Maharashtra, South Maharashtra, East Marathwada, South Marathwada and North Marathwada. A separate body of Regional Chiefs in the Women's Front was also created. It consisted of five Chiefs from West Vidarbha, North, South and East Marathwada and North Maharashtra. Besides these two bodies of the Regional Chiefs, there was a Study Committee consisting of 16 members, and a body of District Chiefs consisting of 25 members.

This Executive Committee was obviously devised with a view to provide maximum representation to the activists from the different parts of Maharashtra as well as to achieve maximum functional division. The hierarchy suggested by the organizational structure is actually not operational. As many activists have stressed, there is a democratic functioning within the organization. (interviews Mohan Gunjal, Vinay Hardikar, Narendra Ahire etc.) However, this democracy is confined basically to discussions. The researcher has
personally observed at various meetings and conventions of the Shetkari Sanghatana that democratic discussion had a full scope in any meeting and the members and activists felt free to express their opinions on various issues. However, when Sharad Joshi concluded the discussions he put forth his own opinions which were accepted as the final word. Joshi’s own contention, however, is that first he puts his thoughts before members and lets them speak. He asks them questions and finally after getting suggestions from them tries to synthesise all opinions. He claims that he does not impose his own decisions on the organisation. (Sharad Joshi, interview 8/4/83) However, with his undisputed 'number one' status in the organization and a near-total devotion of the followers, he invariably has the final word in decision-making. Major decisions are taken at the level of a core-group in the High Command, but with due consideration of the opinions of activists. Some activists observe that there is not much secrecy in such decision-making (Mohan Gunjal - interview, 6/6/86) The formal decision-making process occurs at all the three levels of district activists, regional chiefs and the High Command. (Vinay Hardikar, interview, 30/4/86)

An example of the decisiveness of Joshi’s opinion in decision-making was furnished by an activist. Before the Lok Sabha Elections of 1984, at a meeting of activists in Pune the Sanghatana discussed participation in the elections. The general opinion of the members was against participation and even against extending support to the opposition parties. Joshi accepted this but declared that he would go on a hunger-strike till the end of the elections. His opinion was that the Sanghatana should give its support to the opposition parties, otherwise it would lose their sympathy. After this, the activists opposed his decision of hunger-strike and consented to this (indirect) participation in elections. (Mohan Gunjal, interview, 6/6/86) Joshi has been aware of his over-powering stature. He did say once that
the identification of Sharad Joshi and the Shetkari Sanghatana can create a problem for the organization. He also said that the incidents in the movement of the Shetkari Sanghatana have made only one man great, and the organization stands on the moral strength of just one man, himself, like Gandhiji's in his movement. This, however, is considered by him as a drawback of a movement. (Sharad Joshi, interview, 8/4/83).

Though women have been given special representation in the Executive body, their participation in the decision-making has been peripheral. (Vidyut Bhagwat, interview, 28/4/90). Earlier, when they did not have this representation, the number of women in official bodies or in the core group was negligible as far as decision-making was considered. Women would attend the meetings and rallies but would not be a part of the main body. Even afterwards with Women's Front coming into existence, the women activists would hardly speak on general issues other than the women's programmes etc. Thus the Sanghatana has generally remained a male-dominated movement and organization.

Leadership and Support-Structure:

There are basically three ranks in the Shetkari Sanghatana's leadership. The first rank is of only one leader - Sharad Joshi. The second ranking leadership is the one which is part of the High Command or the core group and the third rank is that of the activists at the district and taluka levels working either as district or regional chiefs or as members of the Study Committee.
First Rank leadership:

As mentioned earlier, there is an identification between Sharad Joshi and the Shetkari Sanghatana. He is its Supreme Leader who has effectively articulated the ideology which mobilised various strata of peasantry in Maharashtra under its banner. It is he who has masterminded the various agitations launched by the Sanghatana. He is the rallying point in the peasant movement in Maharashtra.

He comes from a non-peasant, Brahmin caste urban, middle class background which makes him a non-organic leader of this peasant movement. His coming back to India from Switzerland leaving a lucrative UN job; to finally organize the peasants for a movement lent him a glamorous image for both his peasant and non-peasant followers and his urban supporters and sympathizers.

The effectiveness of Sharad Joshi's leadership does not lie merely in his style of functioning. He does possess many extra-ordinary leadership traits. He is a good orator; possesses good organizational skills; is accessible to the commonest worker or member of his organization; can systematically plan agitations and has a good political acumen. He makes effective use of the rural idiom and symbols while addressing the rural audiences in his speeches or writings. This establishes an instant rapport between him and them. He is a good listener and has patience even for his adversaries. He encourages his followers and colleagues to participate in the decision-making process, though most of the times he has the final word. He follows a very simple but non-ascetic life-style. The essence of his leadership lies in his effective articulation of the populist ideology. It places Joshi in the enviable position of the leader of the rural masses.
Joshi has been referred to as a charismatic leader by some scholars. (Bhole: 1987: pp. 25-30; and Dhanagare: 1988: pp. 25-30)

Bhole calls Joshi a charismatic leader and considers his movement as a "Messianic" movement. (Bhole: op.cit.) However, the description of 'Messianic' movement does not fit the Shetkari Sanghatana. The characteristic features of a 'messianic' movement described by Stephen Fuchs mainly refer to a kind of religious fervour, cultural revivalism, spiritualism and psychological phenomena like emotional unrest and hysteria etc. (Fuchs: 1979: pp. 28-46, 28) These features are to be found in a basically backward, preindustrial society. Joshi's movement does not operate in such a society. In a way, charismatic leadership is the inseparable part of 'messianic' movement. Joshi's leadership, however, is not charismatic in the classical, Weberian sense of the term.

According to Weber, "the basis of charismatic legitimacy is an emotional trust in an extraordinary, 'magic' personality. Such a trust provides allegiance to a rule-free form of domination which, while conditioned by the achievements of some kind of success, is always originally the source of a subversive and revolutionary 'mission' felt by the charismatic community as a true vocation and geared to non-utilitarian goals." (Merquior: 1980: pp.108)

These features of charismatic leadership also are not present in Joshi's leadership. He does hold a sway over his followers; but his command or authority does not stem from the followers' emotional trust or blind faith. Though at times mixed with emotional rhetoric, Joshi's speeches and writings are basically appealing because of their 'pseudo-logicality' and "pseudo-rational" arguments. At no point has Joshi let mystical aura develop around his personality. He
projects himself as just one of the many, but with may be superior intellect and understanding. He has carefully prevented any religiosity creeping into any of his discourses. In fact, though not initially, lately Joshi has taken a very clear and firm stand against communalism maintaining that revivalism, fundamentalism or communalism are harmful to his kind of "economistic" movements.

Sharad Joshi’s life style is simple but not ascetic. He does emulate Gandhian means of mass-agitation as well as his personal style of functioning to some extent. For example, at least three to four times so far he has gone on hunger-strike either to create a moral pressure on his followers or to express his empathy with them. (Interview: Mohan Gunjal: 6.6.1986) Joshi, for example, went on a hunger strike at Ambethan from 12th November to 21st November 1989. The purpose of the hunger strike was to build up the morale of the activists of the Shetkari Sanghatana to combat communalism. (Shetkari Sanghatak 4.12.89) However, no attempts at mystification of his authority are made. Generally a scientific and pragmatic approach is encouraged by him.

Because of his accessibility, he is seen by his followers as a man of flesh and blood and not as some kind of a mystic with magical qualities. The followers also do not constitute a charismatic community. They are organised on "economic" demands of which they are generally aware. Joshi does not give any millenarian dream or hope to his followers. His movement operates not in a preindustrial, pre-modern socioeconomic or political stage but in a society at a certain higher degree of industrialisation and modernisation. As the movement also has a degree of institutionalisation from within, its leadership is not a rule-free kind of leadership. Joshi’s leadership is a very modern and sophisticated one and the ideology he advocates
is also very sophisticated and modern in its contents. It is not revivalistic; not magical; not against modernisation or industry per se.

Joshi expresses contempt for the urban intellectuals (Joshi: 1982(b): pp. 15-23; Joshi: 1985: pp. 19-26, 27-39.) but at the same time, he has a continuous communication with them. The apparent sophistication of his arguments have earned for Joshi a sizable support even among the urban middle classes. Joshi has a fine understanding of the modern media and has used them effectively for his ends. In his innovativeness regarding the techniques of agitations and sometimes the personal style of functioning, he comes to follow Gandhian steps quite consciously. Gandhi was a charismatic leader of a charismatic community; but then, Gandhi belonged to an entirely different era and society. Sharad Joshi has a tremendous hold over the masses he leads but does not have the charisma of Gandhi and his movement is also sans the spiritualism of the Gandhian movement.

Second Rank Leadership:

The Second rank leadership consists of the leaders forming the High Command, the core-group of decision-makers. This High-Powered Committee in 1987 consisted of Vijay Jawandhia, Madhavrao Khanderao More, Bhaskarrao Boraoke, Shirangrao More, Ramchandrabapu Patil, Anil Gote and Vimalkaku Patil. In the early phase of the movement, till about 1983-84 the core-group (though not formally so constituted) consisted of Sharad Joshi, Madhavrao Khanderao More, and Pralhad Karad Patil who were soon joined by Bhaskarrao Boraoke, Vijay Jawandhia and Ramchandrabapu Patil. Pralhad Karad Patil of the initial group was alienated
after 1983-84. He was an ex-Janata and Congress (S) politician and was not considered a part of the active force. (Sharad Joshi, interview, 8/8/83). Pralhad Karad Patil became anti-Sanghatana when the Sanghatana put up a panel against him in the elections to the Board of Directors of the Niphad Sugar Cooperative Factory in 1984. Though Madhavrao Khanderao More is still in the High Power Committee his influence in the organization has not remained what it was in the early phase. More has a Congress background. Both More and Karad Patil have peasant backgrounds. Among the others, Bhaskarrao Boraokke comes from Rashtra Seva Dal (a volunteer organization of the Socialist Party) and has a peasant background. Vijay Jawandhia, also a farmer had a background of working with Kapus Utpadak Parishad, an organization run by the Jan Sangh. Ramchandra Bapu Patil also comes from peasant background. Shrirangrao More was not initially in the core group; nor was Anil Gote. Shrirangrao More published the weekly Bhoonisevak from Ambejogai (Beed district) propagating the Sanghatana ideology from June 1981. Anil Gote who rose to the second ranking leadership very fast due to his efficiency and organizational skill, has a BJP background. He was a journalist with Loksatta, the Marathi daily of the Express group. He also has agricultural background. (Gote has lately, in 1990, left the Shetkari Sanghatana due to some differences with Sharad Joshi). Vimalkaku Patil is the chief of the Women’s Front, and in that capacity is a member of the High Command. As mentioned earlier, however, women are not a part of the decision-making core-group.

Apart from these leaders who are officially members of the High Command, there are a few others who have been close to the decision-making inner circle, though not formally a part of the highest body. At times they do form a part of the core group. (Mohan Gunjal, interview, 6/6/86) Among them are Sureshchandra Mhatre who looks after the
office work and publishes the Sanghatana fortnightly; Narendra Ahire, a one time rising second ranking leader from Nasik; and Vinay Hardikar (no more active in the Sanghatana), a journalist turned Sanghatana full-timer and close confidante of Sharad Joshi. These activists formally worked at the third rank but had one foot in the second rank. Ahire's rise to the second rank was stalled because of the problems he had to face as the Chairman of the Girna Sugar Cooperative Factory which distracted him from the Sanghatana's work.

The Third Rank:

The third rank consists of activists working at the district and taluka levels. They are the real strength of the Sanghatana. They are predominantly of the younger age group, say 20 to 40's. Barring a few coming from farmer background, most of them are non-farmers, which is a characteristic feature of the organization. A majority of them are well educated. Among the non-farmers in this group, can be found traders, professionals e.g. lawyers and doctors and teachers from schools or colleges as also activists from other political or social organizations such as the Rashtra Seva Dal (RSS), Satyashodhak Communist Party, CPI (ML) Yuvak Kranti Dal and Chhatra Yuva Sangharsha Vahini. The frustrated and demoralised activists from various organizations in the early eighties looked at the Shetkari Sanghatana as the only organization scoring spectacular successes and gaining support of the rural masses among whom they had tried to work earlier. Feeling that they had finally discovered a way of securing concrete gains for the masses they joined the Sanghatana. It is because of the devoted activists of this rank that the Sanghatana has been able to create a strong organizational network and base in
After an unsuccessful initial effort to collect data about the caste background of the second and third rank leaders and district level activists, the researcher gave it up since the organization is spread in so many districts and tehsils and there was a resistance on the part of the activists to talk about their caste background. Nevertheless interaction with the activists and on the spot observation of various programmes and meetings revealed that the Sanghatana has made a determined effort to include or attract non-Maratha peasant caste (Dhangar, Mali, Vanjari etc.) leaders as well as leaders without any base in the local politics. The Maratha leaders from the ruling or opposition parties joined the Sanghatana activities or cadre mainly due to intra-party factionism.

A large number of the third rank activists working as either regional chiefs or in the Study Committee were found to be non-Marathas. A number of them are highly qualified Brahmins. This is a very uncommon feature of a peasant movement. It was a Brahmin-run weekly, Manoos which gave a wide publicity to the movement of the Shetkari Sanghatana in the urban areas of Maharashtra, winning for it the support of middle class youths. Thus, the caste composition of this group may be found to be of a mixed variety. Along with the peasant castes and Brahmins there are Marathi-speaking Marwaris and Gujaratis hailing from small towns. Petty traders are an important segment of the district and taluka level cadre.

A striking feature about the caste composition of the Sanghatana is that a dalit activist is hardly, if ever, encountered. There is none in the top body; and only a few in the third rank. Though the Sanghatana has a strong base in some districts in Marathwada, it has not been able to muster in the dalits who are a political force in that
region. A reason for this could be that the ideology of the Sanghatana does not appeal to the landless labourers (who hail from the dalit castes in large numbers), in spite of the fact that the Sanghatana has tried to include a demand for wages in its charter. The Sanghatana made a determined effort to win over dalit activists by forging an alliance with Prakash Ambedkar, the leader of the Republican Party of India. The Sanghatana supported Ambedkar in the Lok Sabha by-election from Nanded. The Sanghatana workers campaigned for Ambedkar along with the RPI activists. (Shetkari Sanghatak: special issue: March 1989, p. 27). It may be noted that the Shetkari Sanghatana made special efforts to hold Ambedkar Jayanti and Shivaji Jayanti celebrations together in a similar bid to forge close ties with the dalits.

Funds:

Finance is an important factor in the operations of any organisation. Availability of funds facilitates the organization in its various activities. For a movement like the Shetkari Sanghatana which intends to increase the field of its operations and which undertakes various agitational activities continuously, funds are vital. Funds are required for organizing rallies, conventions, training camps etc. Funds are also necessary for the propaganda machinery, for maintaining full-timers, availing them of such means of transport as motorcycles for touring in the rural areas, etc. The legal battles which the Sanghatana has to fight also need a lot of money. A convention like the one held in Parbhani in 1984 is said to be a very expensive affair requiring approximately Rupees four to five lakhs. The pandal itself costs Rs. 40 to 50 thousand. (Shankar Wagh interview, 18/2/84) Besides that trucks are hired to carry people both ways from the place of a convention.
A part of this money is raised by charging a fee to the participants. If 15 thousand persons pay this, there is a collection of about Rs. 1.5 lakhs. Besides the participation fees there are donations, membership fees and the money raised through the sales of the Sanghatana publications e.g. books, cassettes of leaders' speeches, etc. A major amount comes from the sugar cooperatives' members' contribution of a fixed sum per tonne of sugar-cane crushed. The Parbhani Convention received in this way 25 paise per tonne from the Dabhadi and Sakri Sugar Cooperative factories (Nasik district). (Shankar Wagh, interview, 18/2/84)

To regularise the management of funds, the Sanghatana established a trust named Krishi Yogakshema Samshodhana Nyas at the Parbhani Convention.

The donations from Sugar factories seem to be a major contribution to the Sanghatana funds. At the Rahuri Conference of sugar-cane producers, Sharad Pawar, then out of power, donated Rs. 75,000/- to the Sanghatana from Bhavani Cooperative Sugar factory of Baramati. (Loksatta. 7/10/85) The sugar cooperatives of Dabhadi, Sakri or Baramati were not controlled by panels of the Sanghatana in their boards of directors. It can be easily guessed that the cooperatives controlled by the Sanghatana panels or sympathisers must be giving financial help to the Sanghatana in perhaps even more significant and regular manner.

The activists also use innovative methods to collect funds at the local levels. For example, at the Executive body's meeting at Chakan in May 1986, an activist narrated an interesting experience. In the 'anti-corruption' campaign, the bribe money that was recovered from the officials amounted to approximately Rupees two lakhs. This was returned to the respective farmers, but from that money, an
amount of about Rs. 5000 was donated to the Sanghatana.

At the Chakan meeting itself, there were many suggestions about fund-collection. It was said that the Sanghatana required a fund of at least Rupees two crores. The discussion about the means to collect this sum did not conclude with any definite decision at that time. So, one does not have a total picture of funds and their collection though one gets some clue to the strategy adopted to raise the required funds.

Publications:

Publication being an important means of propaganda and communication for a movement, the Sanghatana has given it special attention from the very beginning. It had opened its first office on 9th August 1979 and it started its first weekly publication Warkari on 3rd November 1979. This weekly published for about one and half years. (Shetkari Sanghataka, 17th February 1984) propagated the demand for remunerative prices and explained the ideology behind it to the farmers. It was an official organ of the Sanghatana and was edited and published by Sharad Joshi himself. The executive editor of Warkari was Babulal Pardeshi, a staunch activist of the Sanghatana. The paper was published from Chakan (Pune district). In its issues the methods of calculating the cost of production of onion and sugar-cane were explained. During the onion and sugar-cane agitation, this weekly also served as a means of propaganda and communication.

After the Warkari ceased publication, Bhoomisevak was started from Ambejogai in Beed district from June 1981. It was edited by Shrirangrao More. It served as a mouth piece
of the Sanghatana for some time. However, there was a need of an official organ which would communicate decisions taken at the Central office in Pune to farmers and also serve as a feed-back to the movement. So, a new official fortnightly Shetkari Sanghatak was launched from Pune on 6th April 1983. It was edited by Sureshchandra Mhatre and was published very regularly. It served as a forum of organizational debates and discussions, and as a link between the Central Office and farmers. It published reports of the Sanghatana activities at various places and also featured Sharad Joshi’s writings regularly. The publication of Shetkari Sanghatak was suspended in 1987 to start a new periodical which would be more attractive to readers and hence commercially viable.

Hence, Weekly Gyanba was launched on 6th April 1987 from Nasik. Though it was considered to be a commercial venture and priced accordingly, the emphasis of Gyanba was on news of the Shetkari Sanghatana’s movement and related issues of politics, economics etc. This experiment of commercial production, however did not work. The main aim of contacting the activists and the masses and spreading the ideological message was affected because of its price. The Sanghatana, hence, reverted to its earlier publication Shetkari Sanghatak in 1989.

Apart from the periodicals, the Sanghatana has also published a number of books in Marathi, Hindi and English. There are about 20 such books which comprise of the writings of Sharad Joshi or his colleagues, regarding ideology, methods of agitation, women’s question, Mahatma Phule’s thoughts, Panchayat Raj, Shivaji and so on. The basic thrust of the books is to proclaim the ideology of the Shetkari Sanghatana. The entire world-view of the Sanghatana is articulated through these books and booklets. As a large number of the Shetkari Sanghatana activists and followers are educated young men and women, the printed word becomes
the most effective means of propaganda and communication for them.

**Full-time workers:**

At the Parbhani Convention a decision was taken to appoint full-time workers to work for the organization all the time. The suggestion to that effect had appeared in the *Shetkari Sanghatak* in November 1983. There was a discussion on this issue and the general consensus was that full-time activists devoted to the work of the Sanghatana were necessary. The Parbhani Convention decided to appoint the activists, train them and then pay them Rs.300/- per month as honorarium. This amount was to be paid by the district agitational unit where the full-timers would work. The district Agitation Committees were also to provide for the full-timers' travel expenses.

In June 1986, there were some 15 full-timers working at district levels who were paid Rs.400/- per month (Sharad Joshi, interview, 16/5/86, B.L. Tamaskar, interview, 15/5/86). There are no hard and fast rules about the recruitment or appointment of the full-timers. There is no probation period for a full-timer, though he has to undergo ideological and organizational training at the training camps regularly conducted by the Sanghatana. (Mohan Gunjal, 6/6/86) The training camps are attended by a limited number and serve the purpose of exhaustive introduction and/or reinforcement of ideological indoctrination. A training in agitational and organizational methods and skills is also imparted at such training camps. As the trainees are selected from different areas, their living together at the camp brings them closer. With an exchange of information and ideas among trainees, a spirit of unity and belonging is also fostered. Training
camps also serve as reorientation programmes for the existing cadre.

Organizational Work:

An organization like the Shetkari Sanghatana does not anticipate or expect spontaneous mass-actions. It plans its agitations carefully. The success of such agitations requires an assured mass-base and mass-support. This necessitates painstaking ground work. People have to be continuously kept informed and ready for action. If there is a gap in propaganda or in organizational work, the support base erodes. As Sharad Joshi once observed, the people in Chakan area had gathered around him during onion agitation but when he stopped moving around in that area, participation of people there in agitations decreased perceptibly. (Sharad Joshi, interview, 18/5/86) So, organizational work implies consistent efforts to create and retain a wider support structure.

Organizational work includes propaganda, fund collection, recruitment of new activists and sympathiser's and membership drive. It includes all such programmes which muster popular support and bring people in the organisational network.

The Sanghatana has created various fronts to reach out to the various sections of the society in order to strengthen the organizational network. So there are fronts working with students, women, dalits, adivasis and landless labourers. Full-time activists are associated with the work of each front.
The organizational activities of propaganda, membership drive and fund-collection are not mutually exclusive. They go hand in hand. Generally, the activists and leaders approach the people in smaller meetings at villages or at weekly market-places. The market places are preferred because farmers from at least 15 villages around the area can be contacted at a time. At such meetings people are told about the issues involved in the movement. The problems of farmers are discussed. The ideology of the Sanghatana is explained to them in speeches as well as through the circulation of published material. The more articulate men and women from the audience are selected for further contact. They are asked to join the Sanghatana and to attend training camps. Members are recruited, small membership fees are collected and they are given the Sanghatana badges. The Sanghatana slogans are written on the walls in villages. This is the initial organizational work. However to strengthen the base of the Sanghatana in an area, the activists have to work consistently.

Speeches by themselves do not bring farmers to the organization. To muster popular support and sympathy some action programmes have to be undertaken. Hence, along with the issue of agricultural prices, local issues like water-tax, drinking water facility, recovery of compensation for the lands acquired by the Government for dam, debt-relief, corruption of local officials, demand for work under the Employment Guarantee Scheme or drought relief etc. are also undertaken. The activists organise and mobilise the local people for some action to resolve such problems. These actions include gherao of officials of the level of Mamlatdar or District officer or EGS officials, court cases, or some other direct action. For example at Rahati, near Parbhani in Marathwada, people faced an acute scarcity of drinking water. The demands were first raised through proper channels. The officials did not act. The people then under
the leadership of the activists of the Sanghatana cut off the pipes carrying water to the city. Their demand was then conceded, though the activists had to face prosecution. (B.L. Tamaskar, interview, 15/5/86) In another example in Parbhani district, the Sanghatana activists approached the court to obtain money due to them as compensation for lands taken over by the Government for the purpose of a dam. They obtained from the court an order to confiscate and auction the property of the Collectorate. This created a pressure because of which the farmers got their compensation. (B.L. Tamaskar, interview, 15/5/86). Success in such programmes also creates popular trust in the activities of the Sanghatana and brings the masses into its organizational network. Such programmes are also organized at the market places. Apart from the facility of simultaneous contact with a number of villages, there are other reasons for selecting markets for meetings and programmes. Important government functionaries like Talathi, Engineer etc. are at market places. Also the offices of cooperative societies and revenue officers are situated at market places and can become easy targets in the events of spontaneous actions. There are few police-stations at markets and therefore the activists can move around freely. On the contrary at district level, the police can easily thwart or foil a march or a gherao. The activists do not trouble petty traders in small towns. In fact, it was claimed that these traders help the activists in organizing the meetings by giving small financial help or facilities like loudspeakers etc. (B.L. Tamaskar, interview, 15/5/86)

A mention has to made here of an important front which the Sanghatana has. It is the Lawyers’ Front. The Sanghatana has mustered the support of lawyers at various places in districts as well as taluka. These lawyers help the Sanghatana activists to fight cases launched against them during agitations or even during peace-times.
The doctors’ front is similar to the lawyers’ front and helps in times of agitations tending to activists or agitators injured in police cane-charge or firing. Doctors at local levels also help the local level activists in their various programmes.

Some resourceful activists also utilise traditionally appealing forms of communication like singing Bhajans or narrating Kirtans (religious story-telling accompanied by songs), changing their contents to propagate the Sanghatana’s ideology. Such programmes are very popular with the masses of farmers. Babulal Pardeshi’s Kirtans and Bhajans have been a regular feature even in such programmes as conventions.

Sometimes, holding rallies or conventions becomes the starting point of organizational work in an area. These provide a vital opportunity for leaders to get in touch with masses and vice versa. Rallies are the occasions to being large number of people together to expose them to ideological indoctrination. They also furnish an opportunity for recruitment of ordinary members as well as activists. Many people who are curious about the leaders or the ideology attend such rallies and subsequently join the movement. Many activists and members confirmed this in their interviews. Conventions are sometimes deliberately organised in an area where there is no substantial support to the movement. The Parbhani Convention of February 1984, can be cited as an example. Till then the Shetkari Sanghatana did not have much of a hold in the Marathwada region. Initial organizational ground work was hence done among the students of the Agricultural University of Parbhani. The subsequent support and active participation by them opened the gates and enabled the movement to spread in Marathwada. The Parbhani Convention helped to create a strong Sanghatana network in the Marathwada region, especially in
Apart from the local level meetings, rallies conventions, and programmes at local levels, the Sanghatana has organised propaganda long-marches covering a vast area at a stretch. Farmers had taken *dindis* (long marches) from Marathwada and had walked long distances to Pandharpur to attend the *Sakade* programme in November 1983. (*Shetkari Sanghatak* 21/11/83). In November 1984 the Sanghatana organised a long march starting from Bardoli in Gujarat. The march covered almost all the areas of Marathwada and Vidarbha. This was not a march on foot but a march in vehicles like jeeps, trucks, tractors, cars and motorcycles. A propaganda tour in Western Maharashtra was organised in September 1984. A similar propaganda march was organised in November-December 1987. Such marches, besides propaganda also serve as a show of strength and help further mobilization.

The reason behind such continuous organizational activity is that it fosters the unification of the support base, otherwise there is fragmentation by the sheer fact of inertia. (Sharad Joshi, interview, 30/11/1982)

**Inter-state Coordination**

Apart from the in Maharashtra, the *Shetkari Sanghatak* has made determined attempts and efforts to establish contacts with peasant organizations in other States in the country and to have coordinated actions at times. This effort on the part of the *Sanghatana* is basically derived from the understanding that for a peasant movement to succeed, an all-India organization and unity of peasant movements is essential. As the main instrument of the
Sanghatana's agitation is withholding the crops from the market, a coordinated action in different states simultaneously can help the agitation to succeed. This is true about cotton, wheat, and especially jowar.

The efforts to initiate inter-state coordination were started in October 1982 when at the rally held at Wardha (in Vidarbha) representatives of the 'apolitical' peasant organizations from other states were specially invited. Representatives from Haryana, Bihar, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat attended this rally. Representatives of the peasant organisation in Tamil Nadu did not attend. In December 1982 a meeting of the Inter-State Coordination Committee was organised at Bawana near Delhi where a decision to hold such meetings once in every 3 months and spread this activity in other states was taken. The representatives also started attending each other's programmes. Regular meetings increased this participation further.

In response to the milk agitation in Maharashtra, milk and vegetables were not brought in the market for one day at Surat in Gujarat. Similar solidarity was expressed in some parts of Punjab and Haryana. (Vijay Jawandhia, interview, 8/6/86) This response created an awareness of the possibility of a simultaneous coordinated action. Sharad Joshi and Jawandhia extensively toured Punjab, Bihar, Haryana and Gujarat to strengthen the cooperation and coordination among the peasant organizations.

In March 1984, at the picketing of Rajbhavan in Chandigarh, organised by the Bharatiya Kisan Union of Punjab, 1500 farmers from Maharashtra joined the action under the leadership of Sharad Joshi. The BKU agitation of Kanak Band (meaning withholding wheat from markets) was successfully carried out under Sharad Joshi's leadership. This was the
first major instance of a concrete inter-State cooperation. Later in July 1984, the Punjab farmers launched a Satyagraha under Sharad Joshi's leadership to protest against Government's repression. When Joshi and other Satyagrahis were arrested in Punjab, a response to that was given in Maharashtra. There were demonstrations and marches to tehsil offices at different places all over Maharashtra and thousands of people including women courted arrest. (Shetkari Sanghatak, special issue, March 1989, p. 13)

In 1986, the representatives from Karnataka and Tamil Nadu also agreed to join the Inter-State Coordination Committee. Orissa saw the birth of a peasant organization which joined the Coordination Committee.

Despite consistent efforts by the leaders of the Shetkari Sanghatana, the work of the Inter-State Coordination Committee has not brought about spectacular results. A reason for this is the difference of approaches to the peasant question adopted by different leaders. Though most of the demands of farmers' movements in different states were the same, their emphasis was different. While the Shetkari Sanghatana was demanding 'remunerative prices', Karnataka Rayathu Sanghatana was demanding 'parity prices' with industrial goods and the BKU in Punjab was insisting on reduction in the prices of inputs. Besides this, the outlook of leaders towards elections and politics also differed. While the BKU was vehement about retaining 'apolitical' or 'non-party' nature of the organization, peasant organization in Tamil Nadu under the leadership of Narayanswami Naidu had already become a political party, and peasant organization in Karnataka was thinking on similar lines. The Shetkari Sanghatana had started playing an active role in elections.
The clash of personalities was one more reason for the failure of Inter-State Coordination Committee. However, in spite of the setbacks to these efforts, Sharad Joshi and his colleagues have not given up on this front and it remains an important aspect of their organizational work.

**Organisation of the Sanghatana**

The structure of the organisation of the Shetkari Sanghatana seems to be an ideal vehicle for its peasant-populist ideology and movement. The populist ideology is the ideology of an amorphous mass though it is articulated in the interest of a class. A movement with such an ideology cannot function with a mass democratic organizational structure like that of the Indian National Congress in the pre-independence period. In such an organisation different groups or factions can voice their opinions and participate in the decision making process.

The populist movement can also not function with a disciplined cadre and mandate based structure like that of a communist party. Such an organizational structure reposes power in posts rather than in persons thus curtailing the populist potentials of any leader. Such an organisation, on the one hand derives its legitimacy from the mandate of the rank and file, and on the other from the organizational entity itself. In normal circumstances "supreme leaders" cannot arise in such organizations.

A populist movement cannot also have a fascist organizational structure. This is characterised by a fanatical, indoctrinated following, rigid structures and lines of command, inflexible codes of duties and obligations. Such an organisation, though capable of disciplined, dedicated and
sacrificial actions cannot accommodate - let alone initiate or promote - spontaneous actions of amorphous masses.

In the absence of such structures there is a danger of mistaking the Shetkari Sanghatana for an anarchist movement. It is not so. The organisation has certain definite lines of command though the authority is concentrated in the hands of one person and legitimacy is derived from him. Except for Joshi the organizational structure of the Sanghatana is meaningless. Joshi has never held the highest position of the organisation officially and yet he has constantly been an extra-constitutional centre of authority within the movement. The structures which have been created facilitate the day to day activities and functioning of the organisation, and in that respect are relevant. Thus the looseness of structure with its functional relevance helps the organisation to launch spontaneous mass-struggles and at the same time facilitate direct contact between the "supreme leader" and the masses which is of vital importance.

The conscious efforts to encourage the emergence of non-Maratha, non-peasant leadership at the second and the third rank may be precisely for this purpose. Such persons cannot rise and challenge the supreme leader by building up their own independent clientele among the peasants. Their importance to the peasant masses stems from the sanction they enjoy from the supreme leader.
CHAPTER V

REVIEW OF AGITATIONS

The term social movement generally implies a consistent political action by a social group to achieve certain goals. A "political action" is an action which attempts to alter the balance of power and resource allocation in the society. The form of political action seen in a movement is non-institutional. It is a conscious, collective attempt to either bring about large scale change in social order or to resist such change. A singular, isolated political action cannot be considered a movement. Regularity, frequency and consistency in a chain of political actions characterise a movement. Agitation is an intense but finite political action by a collectivity to obtain a gain or a set of demands. Compared to a movement, an agitation is of a shorter duration. Its character is temporary and episodic. It may be a part of a movement. A movement may consist of a chain of agitations stretched over a period of time.

A proper idea of the movement of the Shetkari Sanghatana, can be facilitated by a review of important agitations undertaken by it. The major demand of the Shetkari Sanghatana is for 'remunerative prices' for agricultural produce. The Sanghatana resorted to various agitations demanding remunerative prices for different agricultural products at different times. A cursory look at the history of these agitations reveals that the important agitations centered around the issue of remunerative prices for cash-crops like onions, sugar-cane, tobacco and cotton.
The issue of prices of food-grains has not been tackled by the Sanghatana through agitations.

The interesting aspects of an agitation are the method of its planning, the manner of mass mobilization, the techniques and means of protest, the method of intensification and the mode of withdrawal of the agitation. Also interesting and significant is the role of the leadership and the cadre in an agitation. The techniques of mobilization and the role of the leadership have been discussed earlier. The interaction or exchanges between the leadership of the movement and other political or non-political groups during and after an agitation also needs to be observed, as it gives an idea of the role of the agitation and the movement in the broader political field.

Only important agitations are reviewed here, though there will be mention of other political actions such as rallies, conferences, propaganda marches and training camps as well.

The Onion Agitation: 1980

This was the first major agitation of the Shetkari Sanghatana which attracted nation-wide attention, in spite of the fact that its geographical spread was not very wide. The background of the agitation was prepared by Sharad Joshi and his colleagues when as far back as March 1978 they cautioned the Government that they would resort to an agitation, if onion in Chakan (Pune District) market-yard was not purchased by NAFED (National Agricultural Federation) at the minimum price of Rs. 45 per quintal. Onion was purchased at that time by NAFED at the said prices of Rs.45 and Rs.50 per quintal and hence no agitation was necessary. In Novem-
ber 1979, the Shetkari Sanghatana, which was established under this name only on 9th August 1979 (Markari) demanded prices which the government accepted. But the Sanghatana had in the meanwhile started the work of mobilizing the farmers and making them aware of the issue of prices. On 24th January 1980, the Sanghatana organized a march of farmers from Vandre to Chakan, a distance of 64 kilometers to demand a proper road on that route. About 10,000 farmers walked up to Chakan and declared that they would not pay taxes if the road was not built. (Markari 8/8/80) These farmers proved to be the backbone of the onion agitation launched in March 1980. In February 1980, the prices of onion in Chakan market yard started to fall due to the seasonal arrival of onion and a ban on the export of onions. To protest against the falling prices and the governmental apathy, the Sanghatana resorted to road-blockades. The state high-way at Chakan was blockaded on 1st of March, when more than 300 farmers were arrested. Sharad Joshi decided to start a fast unto death if the Government did not decide to purchase onion by 5th of March. On 5th March, the Government agreed to purchase onion at Rs.50 to Rs.70 per quintal but did not implement the decision. So Joshi started his fast from 8th March 1980. On 10th March farmers blockaded the Pune-Nasik high-way for 6 days. On 15th of March, the Government declared in the Lok Sabha that NAFED had been asked to purchase onion at Rs.45 to Rs.70 per quintal. As the demand was conceded by the Government Joshi gave up his fast. But NAFED had promised to purchase onion till 30th June, it stopped the purchase on 23rd April without any prior notice. So Joshi again started a fast unto death from 1st of May 1980. The farmers protested and offered satyagraha. Joshi was arrested on 3rd May 1980 on charge of an attempt to commit suicide. The government started purchase through NAFED again from 8th May. The method of purchase was, however, unsatisfactory and hence the farmers resorted to road-
blockades once again from 25th May. Some 308 farmers were arrested during this agitation. (*Shetkari Sanghatana*, Special Issue, March 1989)

When farmers in Chakan were agitating, farmers at Pimpalgao Baswant in Niphad Taluka (Nasik District) also had resorted to road-blockades. They brought bullock-carts and trailers on to the Bombay-Agra National High-way and blockaded it on 19th March 1980. This agitation was led by Madhavrao More. In order to break this road block the government used State Reserve Police (SRP) who cane-charged and fired on the mob, killing two farmers. Madhavrao More was also injured along with many other. It must be mentioned that there was no formal *Shetkari Sanghatana* in Pimpalgao Baswant, and this agitation was quite spontaneous. Coordination between farmers of Nasik and Chakan was established later. (*ibid.*)

After the Chakan and Pimpalgao agitation farmers from different parts of Maharashtra started contacting the *Shetkari Sanghatana* for guidance and help in redressal of their various grievances. The issue of sugar-cane prices was taken up by the *Sanghatana* after this.

**The Sugar-cane Agitation: 1980**

The sugar-cane agitation was not isolated but was linked to the issue of onion prices. This agitation was centred in Nasik district though later on it spread to other districts. Sharad Joshi along with Madhavrao More, Prahlad Karad Patil and other activists toured Nasik district extensively to propagate the idea of 'remunerative prices' for sugar-cane and onion. With their calculations of cost of production, they demanded Rs.300 per tonne for sugar-
cane and Rs.100 per quintal for onion. It was decided that farmers will not sell sugar-cane to sugar factories unless they are given the said price. Madhavrao Boraste, who at that time was the Chairman of the Federation of Sugar Cooperative Factories, himself proposed that farmers would not give sugar-cane to factories in that season till they were paid Rs.300 per tonne. (Parulkar: 1981: pp.71-72) At that time, farmers were getting only Rs. 240/- to 275/- per tonne for sugar-cane. The farmers in this agitation were merely expected to sit pretty and refuse to give sugar-cane to the factories. However, some factories provoked the farmers by deciding to start crushing operations in the face of farmers' opposition. At Shrigonda (Nagar District) farmers marched to the factory, and were fired at by the police resulting in the death of one farmer on 27th October 1980. The government, in a move to pressurise farmers cut off the electricity connections to stop water-supply. The desperate farmers then came on the streets. On 10th November 1980, farmers in Dhule, Nasik and Ahmednagar districts blocked the roads. On the very first day, two persons were killed in police firing, while 22 were injured. The police cane-charged 1,500 agitating farmers squatting on the railway tracks at Kherwadi station, 30 Kms from Nasik. The agitators responded by stoning the police and setting fire to the station. Another version of the report of the same incident challenged the allegation that the agitators had set fire to the station. (Parulkar: 1981: pp.124-125) The police opened fire which injured many. Sharad Joshi was arrested along with many others.

On 11th November 1980, Joshi was released on a personal bond. The farmers converged on Lasalgaon and effectively crippled the movement of vehicular traffic. Women in large numbers, some with children in their arms, participated in the action. Within a few hours, the rail and road blockade was so effectively set up that the State
Reserve Police Force was called out. The agitators were once again care-charged. 168 agitators were arrested at Lasalgao. Others fled only to reassemble at spots where the police had yet to arrive. The entire railway network in Nasik belt was by now in chaos. Four hundred goods trains were stranded and trucks had stopped plying on the highways.

On 13th November 1980, the Shetkari Sanghatana suspended the agitation for two days and allowed the sugar factories to commence cane crushing operations. On 14th November 1980, the movement entered a new phase when the Sanghatana announced that all the elected legislators would be gheraoed if they did not resign in support of the farmers' demands. Sharad Joshi declared that if they stepped down, the farmers would extend to them unconditional support.

After a 36 hour break, the agitation was resumed on 15th November 1980. The blockade of road and railways continued resulting in a serious shortage of petrol in the area. Former Union Minister George Fernandes was arrested while making an unsuccessful attempt to stop work at the Nasik District Collectorate. (Parulkar: 1981: pp.170-171)

On 16th November 1980, Joshi was again arrested and remanded to judicial custody till 24th November. He went on an indefinite fast in jail. (Parulkar: op. cit.: pp.185)

Meanwhile the road transport continued to remain paralysed. Train services, however, were partially restored.

On 17th November 1980 farmers at Mangrul Phata, about 60 Kms from Nasik, squatted on the Bombay-Agra National Highway blocking traffic. Some 300 agitators, demanding the release of Joshi stormed the Tehsil office at Satana, near
Nasik. In an early morning swoop, the police nabbed eight important leaders of the Shetkari Sanghatana. They were charged with the murder of a policemen at Kherwadi, on 10th November. More agitators were arrested later in the day. On 18th Nov- the farmers kept up their agitation. The entire village of Nivane (Nasik district.) decided to court arrest. In Dhule, several agitators were injured in a police lathi-charge. (Background Papers: June 1982)

While the Congress(I) government in Maharashtra flexed its muscle to crush the agitation, a group of Congress(I) MPs from the state met the Union Agriculture Minister, Rao Birendra Singh, seeking concessions for agitating farmers. The group included Vasantdada Patil, Y.J. Mohite, Premala Chavan, and Vijay Naval Patil. According to Mohite, the Union Minister agreed to a rise in the support prices for sugar-cane and cotton. But on the same day, in the Rajya Sabha, Rao Birendra Singh described the agitation as politically motivated and ill-advised. He clearly indicated that the Government was in no mood for a compromise. (Background Papers: June 1982)

On 19th November 1980, the farmers' agitation intensified. About 1000 people were arrested in Nasik district. In Vidarbha, farmers clashed with the police at several places. The strains in the Congress(I) also started to surface. A section of the Nasik district Congress (I) demanded the replacement of the Maharashtra Education Minister, Baliram Hiray, who was in charge of the affairs of Nasik District for the party. A Congress (I) MP, Uttamrao Patil, came out openly in support of the agitation much to the chagrin of Chief Minister Antulay. (ibid.)

On 20th November 1980, the agitation infected the cotton growers of neighbouring state of Gujarat. Violent agitations took place at several places in Mehesana.
district, with farmers demanding cheaper fertilizers and financial support. Two persons were killed in police firing while 113 were injured. (Shetkari Sanghatak: March 1989: pp.4)

In Vidarbha, the police clashed with demonstrators at least at three places, Akola, Amaravati and Yavatmal. More than 2550 farmers were arrested following these clashes. Originally a call for a one-day bandh was given by the Kapus Utpadak Shetkari Parishad of Vidarbha but it was extended to two days. (Background Papers: op. cit.)

The sugar-cane agitation was withdrawn on 28th November 1980, after the release of all leader and farmers from jail. Sharad Joshi gave up his fast on 24th Nov. 80. On 27th November, the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, A. R. Antulay announced that the Government would pay Rs. 300/- per tonne for sugar-cane with Rs. 200/- as advance, and Rs.55/-to Rs.70 per quintal for onion. He also announced an increase of Rs. 90/- to Rs. 135/- per quintal in cotton prices. The announcement was considered a victory by the Sanghatana and it was celebrated on 14th December 1980 in a rally at Pimpalgao Baswant in Nasik, which was attended by farmers from Western Maharashtra, Vidarbha and Marathwada. (Shetkari Sanghatak: March 1989)

The Chief Minister’s announcements, however, had come after the talks he held with the Sanghatana leaders.

In the meanwhile the six-party left and democratic front of the opposition decided to organize a ‘long march’ a ‘Dindi’ which would march through the traditional Congress(I) stronghold of Vidarbha and Marathwada. It started from Jalgaon on 7th December 1980 and reached Nagpur on 26th December 1980. The long march was in support of the farmers’ demand for remunerative prices. The long marchers staged a massive demonstration on the last day of the
session of the State Assembly in Nagpur, despite prohibitory orders mass arrests of protesters. Many leaders and thousands of marchers were arrested later in the evening including the former Chief Minister of Maharashtra Sharad Pawar, CPI Secretary General, C. Rajeshwara Rao, the former Union Minister George Fernandes and M.C. Yadav.

The Chief Minister agreed to hold talks with Joshi and his colleagues but made it clear that the talks were being held at the instance of Sharad Joshi and not because of any initiative on his part. In view of the talks Joshi suspended his call of further agitation which was to start on 14th December (Background Papers: op.cit.)

However on 20th January 1981, the Shetkari Sanghatana rejected the plea of the Chief Minister Antulay not to resume the agitation since “the centre could be expected to take a sympathetic view of the agriculturists’ demand for remunerative prices for farm produce.” The Sanghatana called for the resumption of the agitation on January 27. It called for the gherao of central and state government offices, expect those operating essential services, and also demanded that all elected representatives should hand over their resignations to it. But on 24th January 1981, both the leaders of Sanghatana and the Chief Minister appeared hopeful of reaching a settlement on the demands if farmers. Joshi described the meeting as a step forward in the parleys with the state Government. The state Government had already agreed to take long term measurers in consultation with the Sanghatana for ensuring a better deal for the farmers.

On 26th January 1981, the Sanghatana leaders accepted a settlement with the Government with marginal rise in purchase price of onions and rise in purchase price of sugar-cane nearing the price which was demanded.(ibid.)
The Tobacco Agitation: 1981

The tobacco growing farmers from Nipani (Belgao District) in Karnataka were exploited by the traders and middlemen for years together. There was arbitrariness in fixing the prices. There was also a malpractice of deduction from the payment on various grounds. The prices were never paid in time to the farmers. The women beedi workers from tobacco factories had already started agitating against these traders who also owned these factories. The farmers also prepared to protest in the same manner. They had resorted to agitation in 1978 wherein the government mediated but later on deserted the farmers. After watching the onion and sugar-cane agitations in Maharashtra, the tobacco farmers at Nipani invited the leaders of the Sanghatana to guide them. (Shetkari Sanghatak: March 1989: pp.4-5)

The Shetkari Sanghatana held a rally of tobacco growers on 24th February 1981 at Nipani which was attended by more than 20 thousand farmers. The cost of production of tobacco was calculated and a demand of Rs. 10/- to Rs. 15/- per kilo of tobacco was made. The Government was given the deadline of 14th March to think, negotiate and declare its decision. The Government ignored it and the demands of the farmers. (ibid.)

On 14th March 1981, 50,000 farmers with their families came and squatted on the Pune- Bengaluru National Highway, under Sharad Josh's leadership. The road-blockade brought all traffic to a stand still. The road-blockade continued for 23 days. The farmers put up tents at the site of the agitation which became a mini-town and was named 'Andolan Nagar' or 'Agitation Town'. The agitating farmers showed tremendous perseverance during the agitation. They kept up their morale by singing Bhajans (religious songs) and
listening to speeches and Kirtans. On 2nd April 1981 farmers took out a peaceful march through the city of Nipani and demonstrated their strength. The people of Nipani cooperated with the agitating farmers. (Sakal: 7/4/81)

In the early hours of 6th April 1981 the Karnataka Government cracked down upon the farmers and arrested about 2000 agitators. Thousands of protesters awaited arrests on the road when the Government resorted to repression. It tear-gassed and cane-charged the farmers to disperse them. When the farmers did not budge, the police fired on the mob killing 13 people and injuring hundreds. They destroyed the tents, bullock-carts and other belongings of the farmers. (Sakal: 7/4/81 & 8/4/81)

Though the government crushed the peaceful satyagraha of the farmers, it was forced to look into their problems. On 20th April 1981, the Karnataka Government announced the establishment of a Cooperative Federation for the purchase, sale and processing of tobacco and thus released the farmers from the clutches of the traders and middlemen. (Kesari: 22/4/81) The leaders were detained in jail for a long time where they conducted training sessions for the satyagrahis.

The groundwork for this agitation was done by Prof. Subhash Joshi, Prof. Ramesh Shipurkar, Datta Pangam and Gopinath Bhai Dharia. Subhash Joshi was the leader of the women beedi workers' struggle. Gopinath Bhai Dharia was himself a trader but sided with farmers in the agitation and worked hard to make it a success. (Shetkari Sanghatan: 6/4/1983: pp. 5-8)

After the tobacco agitation, the Sanghatana once again turned its attention to propaganda and mobilization. A mammoth rally was organized at Pimpalgao Baswant (Nasik
District) on 20th September 1981. This rally was attended by representatives from other states also. A decision was taken at this rally to file a suit against the Government in Supreme Court on the charges of exploitation of farmers. It was also decided to launch a Rail and Road-block agitation for one day on 10th November 1981 (the first anniversary of the farmers killed at Kherwadi), to attract the attention of the Government to the demands of farmers.

One-day Agitation: 10th November 1981.

Sharad Joshi, Prahlad Karad Patil and Madhavrao Khanderao More were arrested on 9th November 1981 at Dhule while on a tour of the district. The farmers, however, were ready all over Maharashtra to launch the agitation. In the early hours of 10th November 1981 the SRP troops beat up farmers gathered near the satyagraha places. Many were arrested. In the morning on 10th November 1981 farmers blockaded roads at many places in Maharashtra and police adopted repressive measures everywhere. At Tehera (Nasik district), Kajgao (Jalgao district) and Pangao (Beed district) police opened fire killing four persons. Many farmers were injured. The Government later filed various cases against the Sanghatana activists in order to harass them. (Shetkari Sanghatak: March 1989)

The Shetkari Sanghatana organized its first state level convention at Satana (Nasik district) on 1.2.3 January 1982. Some 30,000 farmers from all over Maharashtra attended this convention. Farmers' representatives from Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Haryana were also present. Farmers' problems, political situation, farmers' unity, the method of calculating cost of production of farm produce, farmer consumer relations etc.
were the topics deliberated. Resolutions concerned organizational structure of the Shetkari Sanghatana, agitational programmes to be undertaken in 1982 and the role of the Shetkari Sanghatana in elections. The open session of the convention was attended by more than one lakh farmers. (Bhoomisevak: 18 & 25/1/1982) Madhavrao More was the president of this convention and the Sanghatana activists in Baglan and Niphad talukas had worked for its success. This was a major show of strength by the Shetkari Sanghatana. The traders in Satana had cooperated in the organization of the convention enthusiastically (Shetkari Sanghatana: Nanded Convention Special Issue: 10,11,12/3/1989: pp.8)

The only major agitation the Sanghatana undertook in 1982 was the Milk Agitation. This agitation, however, was unsuccessful.

**Milk Agitation: June 1982**

The Sanghatana had decided to take up the issue of milk prices in 1981 itself. It had worked out the cost of production of milk and negotiated with the Government of Maharashtra on 29th July 1981. The Government assured the Sanghatana that it would appoint a committee to study the prices of milk. However, the Government delayed the implementation of this assurance. The Shetkari Sanghatana organized a farmers' rally on 22nd April 1982 in Dhule, where the issue of milk prices along with prices of other farm products was discussed. The Sanghatana decided to launch Swadeshi and freedom from indebtedness' movements. Farmers were alerted to be ready to launch milk agitation at a notice of 48 hours.
The Governmental Committee to study milk prices announced that milk prices would not be increased. Shivajirao Nilangekar Patil, chairman of the committee, said that the milk prices had already been hiked in February and August 1981 and were already higher than in any other state. He also contended that an agitation was not necessary as the committee had already started functioning. (Pudhari, 27/6/82)

The Shetkari Sanghatana declared that it would start an agitation for milk prices from 28th June 1982 in eight states including Maharashtra. It asked the milk-producers not to provide milk to any milk cooperative society or private consumers. The milk producers were asked not to sell milk to private traders even if they offered a higher price. The milk-carrying vehicles were not to be forced to stop but were to be requested to stop. Farmers were asked to consume milk at home and distribute it free to neighbours and children of farm labourers. The Sanghatana also appealed to the office-bearers and transport workers of cooperative milk societies to stop working. The Sanghatana was demanding Rs.4/- per litre for cow's milk with 3.5 per cent fat content, and Rs.5/- per litre for buffalo milk with 6 percent fat content. It claimed that even if the Sanghatana demand was accepted, the consumers would not have to pay more than Rs.5-50 per litre. It accused the Government of exploiting both the producers and the consumers. (Sakal: 26/6/1982)

The government reiterated its earlier position on the issue. Annasaheb Shinde, ex-Central Minister and Chairman of the Maharashtra Institute of Animal Husbandry supported the Sanghatana’s demand and charged that the government was not giving sufficient attention to the problems of milk-producers. (Pudhari: 27/6/1982)
The Government expressed its confidence that the milk agitation would not have any impact on the milk distribution and supply in Maharashtra. It took every step to ensure smooth supply to cities like Bombay and Pune. (Pudhari: 27/6/1982) Though the Sanghatana leaders asserted that milk agitation was not anti-consumers, public sympathy was not with this agitation. The Peasants and Workers Party (PWP) and Kolhapur District Congress (S) had supported the agitation.

The response of milk-producers in Maharashtra was also not uniform. The agitation partially succeeded in Nasik, Pune, Dhule, Jalgao and Sangli districts. Response in Kolhapur district was marginal. On the first day of the agitation 125 out of 750 milk societies participated in the agitation. The number dwindled to 100 and 60 respectively on the next two days. The agitation thus fizzled out.

The leaders and activists of the Sanghatana were arrested at different places in view of the agitation. The Sanghatana blamed the government for forcibly procuring and distributing milk to suppress the agitation. (Sakal: 1/7/1982). Ultimately, on the 4th day of the agitation, the Sanghatana withdrew it (2nd July 1982). The Sanghatana also accepted the responsibility for the failure. It was claimed that it could do so because Sharad Joshi or the Sanghatana did not have any personal stakes in the issue and so, could afford to be honest. (Bhoomi Sevak: 12/7/1982)

The second stage of the milk agitation started with the Sanghatana decision to protest against the duplicity of the Government. It had, the Sanghatana charged, gone back on its assurance of 2nd May and refused to increase milk prices.

The Sanghatana decided to protest in a novel way. A march of cattle to the District Collector's office was
organized in Dhule city on 18th May 83. The government banned this march. The leaders of the Sanghatana were prohibited from entering the city and the city was cordoned by the police. (Sakal: 16/5/1983) Even then, on 18th May, farmers started flocking to Dhule in trucks, tractors and bullock-carts. The police tried to send them back. The farmers persisted and the police cane-charged the farmers on the outskirts of the city and beat them up ruthlessly. Despite the police cordon, some 150 farmers entered Dhule city with their bullock-carts The police cane-charged the farmers and beat up the cattle as well. Sharad Joshi was arrested on the previous day. On 18th May, he was given remanded to custody and taken out of Dhule. In view of police atrocities Joshi asked the farmers not to try to enter Dhule and to withdraw the agitation. The agitation served the purpose of attracting public attention to the farmers' demands. It also exposed the anti-peasant nature of the Government. (Sakal: 19/5/1983; Maharashtra Times: 19/5/1983)

Another interesting agitational programme organized by the Sanghatana in 1983 was a rally of farmers at Pandharpur on 16th November 1983, which was termed Vithobala Sakade. Sakade in Marathi literally means trouble, inconvenience or distress. In the current context it is a form of a fervent plea. The devotee by insisting on something causes the God Vithoba some trouble or inconvenience so that the latter looks into the problems of devotee. The Shetkari Sanghatana used this aspect of the tradition of the Warkari sect for its agitation. The farmers in the dry land farming area in Maharashtra are devotees of the Pandharpur deity Vithoba. Their devotion was channelised to sharpen the focus of the demand for remunerative prices. The farmers were asked to appeal to Vithoba about the trouble they were put in because of 'unremunerative price' policy of the Government.
The most striking feature of the rally was this emotional appeal. The rally was otherwise peaceful. An earlier order of the government banning the entry of the leaders of the Sanghatana into Pandharpur was withdrawn two days before the programme. The rally, it must be noted, had nothing to do with the Pandharpur deity. The rally was organized on the outskirts of the town and the pilgrims who had gathered in the town on account of the auspicious day were in no way disturbed. The major demand made at the rally was "scrap the Agricultural Prices Commission." (Personal account of the researcher who attended the rally)

The Shetkari Sanghatana, by clever use of the popular tradition, attracted immense public attention. The initial prohibitory order helped to create more publicity for the programme. The ban evoked a condemnation of the government by a section of the press and some respected personalities in Maharashtrian Society. (Sakal: 7/11/1983 & editorial 8/11/1983) The Phandharpur rally announced that the second convention of the Shetkari Sanghatana would be held at Parbhani and the year 1984 would be the year of independence of farmers.

The Second Convention was held at Parbhani on 17th and 18th February 1984. The convention discussed a variety of issues including socioeconomic situation in the country and peasant agitations in other states. The convention declared a 7 point programme for the coming period. It asked the farmers

1) To grow food grains only for the consumption of the village and not to take them to the market for sale in any case;

2) To use the land under food grains to cultivate oilseeds or lentils or to grow trees;
3) Not to sell any foodgrains in the market from 1984 rabi season.

4) Not to pay back any debt till the agitation was successful.

5) To write the messages and slogans of the Sanghatana on all the walls of villages.

6) To prevent all political party leaders and debt-collecting officers from entering villages. (Gaobandi programme)

7) To stop buying tractors, power-tillers, engines, electric motors and the polyester cloth throughout the year 1984.

(Resolutions of the Parbhani Convention, a handout)

The Sanghatana expressed its support to farmers' agitations going on in other states. The demand for the dissolution of the APC was reiterated. Decisions were taken to set up struggle committees in every district and to participate in the picketing programme at the Raj Bhavan in Chandigarh in Punjab. (Personal account of the researcher who attended the Convention as an observer.

According to these decisions at the Parbhani Convention, the Gaobandi programmes were started in different places. On 12th March 1984, about 1500 farmers from Maharashtra went to Chandigarh to join the picketing programme at Raj Bhavan as a gesture of peasant solidarity. This picketing went on peacefully for 6 days under the leadership of Sharad Joshi. (Shetkari Sanghatak: March 1989)
In July 1984 the Bharatiya Kisan Union, under the leadership of Sharad Joshi protested against the atrocities by the Government against its activists. They were all arrested on 20th July 1984. This evoked a response in Maharashtra and the Sanghatana activists took out marches to tehsil offices and courted arrest.

When the Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi was assassinated on 31st October, 1984 the Sanghatana had completed its propaganda round from Gujarat to Maharashtra which ended in a rally. Under the changed circumstances, it was felt by the leadership, that the atmosphere in the country was no more conducive to the farmers’ agitations. So, the decision was taken to concentrate on the ongoing programmes rather than attempt any new agitational activities.

When the Lok Sabha elections were announced in December 1984, the Sanghatana executive body in its Pune meeting decided to participate in election propaganda to sharpen the Sanghatana’s ideological thrust. The Congress(I) was named the enemy number one, and the Sanghatana decided to support the opposition candidates in elections in order to maintain the precarious political balance. (Shetkari Sanghatak: 30/11/1984). During the pre-election period, the Sanghatana created a stir, especially in Marathwada and Vidarbha regions by successfully implementing the programme of Gaobandi, wherein the activists forced candidates and campaigners to answer farmers’ questions regarding the policy of the respective party about the question of remunerative prices. (Times of India: 11/12/1984; Sakal: 13/12/1984; Maharashtra Times: 22,23/12/1984) Though the Sanghatana could not affect the victory of the Congress(I) leaders, it did narrow the margin of their victory. The Sanghatana was also successful in forcing most of the political parties to include the issue of remunerative
prices' to farm produce in their manifesto. The Janata Party, the BJP, the Congress(S) and even the Congress(I) leaders started fully supporting the demand for remunerative prices.

The Sanghatana Executive Committee which met in Pune on 3rd January 1985, expressed its satisfaction over the poll strategy adopted by the Sanghatana. It was said that the 'bogey' raised about national security, sentimental pressure, Hindu reaction and the support of the urban elite to the ruling party had resulted in the debacle of the opposition parties in the Lok Sabha elections in Maharashtra. It claimed that many candidates contested only on the strength of the Sanghatana and its strategy (of supporting candidates belonging to different opposition parties unilaterally) contained "Rajiv Wave" in the state as the ruling party candidates could win only with reduced margins. (Free Press Journal: 4/1/1985).

The Shetkari Sanghatana's new stand regarding elections gave it a new status in the state politics. It increasingly started playing the role of a pressure group and a balancing force in the party politics of Maharashtra.

The third Shetkari Sanghatana Convention held at Dhule on 21st & 22nd January 1985, was attended by the leaders of almost all the opposition parties in Maharashtra. They included N. D. Patil of the PWP, Padma Singh Patil of the Congress(S), P. K. Patil of the Janata, Pramod Mahajan of the BJP, Sharad Patil of Satyashodhak Communist Party, Madhavrao Gaikwad of the CPI, Ramchandra Ghangare of the CPM, Bhauro Patil of the Bharatiya Congress, Manohar Joshi of the Shiv Sena, and Ashok Jagtap of the Bahujan Samaj Party. Also present were the CPM activists Lahanu Kom and Kumar Shiralkar and the activist of Bandhua Mukti Morcha, Swami Agnivesh. The Convention resolved to support the opposition parties if they formed a front to contest the Assembly
elections, to organize a one-day-rather one-hour 'Road blocking' agitation on the 3rd February, 1985 to press for the demands of remunerative. (Shetkari Sanghatak: 1/2/1985, 8/2/1985) prices for the farm produce and the dissolution of the Agricultural Prices Commission. The leaders of all the opposition parties supported the demands of the Sanghatana.

A comment was made on the Sanghatana’s stand on elections that the leaders of the Sanghatana who were allied to the opposition were anyway going to work to ensure their own rural vote banks go against the ruling party. It was also observed that some ruling party leaders view the Sanghatana as a kind of ‘apolitical’ body through which they could air the grievances of the peasantry without inviting the wrath of the party’s High Command. The farmers’ organization was seen to be used by ruling party leaders to pursue their factional rivalries. (Economic and Political Weekly: 26/1/1985: pp.38)

The electoral stand of the Sanghatana had created a problem for the Congress (I) sympathisers and activists working within the Sanghatana. Some of them left the Sanghatana on this issue. (mentioned at Executive Committee Meeting at Chakan, 15th May 1986)

The hour long Rasta-Roko (road-blockade) agitation took place at various places in Maharashtra on 3rd February, 1985 and leaders of the opposition parties joined it. Around 50,000 farmers participated in the state-wide agitation, in which 2000 farmers were arrested in Dhule district. The leader of the Progressive Democratic Front (PDF) of the opposition, Sharad Pawar, announced that if the Front formed a Government in Maharashtra after the Assembly elections the agricultural price policy would be determined on Sharad Joshi’s advice. (Maharashtra Times: 4/2/1985)
The Shetkari Sanghatana actively participated in the election campaign of the PDF candidates in Maharashtra. At the same time it pressed forward its own demands. Interestingly the generally anti-Shetkari Sanghatana press of Bombay had turned sympathetic to the Sanghatana during the campaign period. (favourably news reports and write-ups in Maharashtra Times: 5/2/1985, 14/2/1985; editorial: 14/11/85) The farmers' demands had become totally politicised. Not only did the opposition support the Sanghatana demands but the ruling Congress (I) also resorted to a pro-peasant rhetoric. Though on 6th February 1985 the Union Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Buta Singh, emphatically rejected the demand for the dissolution of the APC in his Pune press conference (Sakal 7/2/85), Rajiv Gandhi himself in his subsequent tour of Maharashtra declared his support to the demand for remunerative prices for agricultural produce (Maharashtra Times: 21/2/85) and announced the dissolution of the APC and formation of a new body under the name of Agricultural Costs and Prices Commission (ACPC). (Sakal 21/2/85) However, while making such declarations and supporting the demand of the farmers for remunerative prices, Rajiv Gandhi did not make any mention of the Shetkari Sanghatana or the PDF. Sharad Joshi criticised Rajiv Gandhi's decision of dissolution of the APC and setting up of the ACPC as a political stunt, though he welcomed the step towards some change. (Sakal: 24/2/85) The PDF could not form a government after the elections but the strength of the opposition in the house increased. The most important gain of the Shetkari Sanghatana was that the demand it was voicing so far, was now adopted by almost all the political parties, including the ruling Congress (I). The demand thus got a kind of legitimacy.

From 1985 onwards the Shetkari Sanghatana concentrated on the issue of cotton prices, the scheme of monopoly procurement of cotton and the textile policy of Rajiv
Gandhi’s government. (Shetkari Sanghatak: March 1989) The issue of sugar-cane prices and the prices of jowar were considered but no major agitation was undertaken. The main thrust of the Sanghatana was on cotton and it resorted to different techniques to pressurise the Government to change its policy on this issue. In this very period, the Sanghatana tried to reach out to other political and social groups to either get their support and sympathy or to make a common front with them. In this attempt it increasingly came into the mainstream of politics and interacted with other political parties and groups. The initial ‘apolitical’ stance was now totally given up, though the Sanghatana did not become a political party as such. The meeting of the Executive Committee at Khultabad on 2, 3 and 4th July 1985 discussed the possible impact of Rajiv Gandhi’s new textile policy of 6th June 1985 which welcomed imports of synthetic fibers at substantially reduced customs duties. It was decided to oppose this policy. On 22nd July 1985 in a Women’s Convention held at Dabhadi (Nasik District) the decision to boycott and burn in bonfires synthetic clothes was announced. A conference to discuss problems relating to sugar-cane prices was planned for 6th October 1985 at Rahuri. Jowar Purchasing Centres run by the Government, all over Maharashtra, were also demanded.

The Cotton Agitation: 1985 to 1987

The cotton agitation started on 2nd October 1985 with a bonfire of synthetic fibers, Rajivastras as these were termed by the Shetkari Sanghatana, at Wardha. (Shetkari Sanghatak: 18/10/1985; Maharashtra Times: 3/10/1985) The agitation had a context of a slump in the cotton market and Government of Maharashtra’s uncertain stand regarding the continuation of the Monopoly Procurement Scheme for cotton.
The Central Government's new textile policy was considered to be instrumental in the fall of cotton prices. The policy was seen as detrimental to the interests of cotton-growers as well as to the interests of the workers in textile mills. To express opposition to this policy, the pre-independence period movement of Swadeshi along with bonfire of synthetic clothes was revived. Bonfires of Rajivastras were organized all over Maharashtra. On 8th October 1985, at the Sahari Conference of sugar-cane growers, Charan Singh, the ex-Prime Minister lit the bonfire of Rajivastras in presence of the Shetkari Sanghatana leaders and opposition party leaders of Maharashtra including Sharad Pawar. On 7th October 1985, the 80th anniversary of the first bonfire of imported cloth lit by Lokmanya Tilak at Pune was commemorated by a bonfire of Rajivastras in a joint programme of the Shetkari Sanghatana and the Patit Pavan Sanghatana (a rightist Hindu organization of Pune). (Shetkari Sanghatak: 18/10/1985) The Shetkari Sanghatana during this phase tried to join forces with organizations like the Shiv Sena and the Kamgar Aghadi of Dr. Datta Samant. On 31st October 85 Joshi had shared platform with the BJP at a meeting at Dhule to demand railways between Manmad and Nardhana. The Shiv Sena's Mahad Convention (6/11/85) was attended by Anil Gote, a senior Sanghatana leader to explore the scope for cooperation between the two organizations. A possibility of their joining forces was predicted. Though Thakare (Shiv Sena leader) was hopeful about it, Sharad Joshi was non-committal about meeting Thakare. The main hitch between the two organizations coming closer was the Sanghatana's already finalised joint programme with the Kamgar Aghadi, an adversary of the Shiv Sena, in Bombay. However, a meeting between Bal Thakare and Sharad Joshi did take place on 8th November 1985. (Loksatta: 9/11/85) The two leaders did not join their forces though Thakare assured support to the Shetkari Sanghatana's programme of bonfire of Rajivastras.
On 10th November 1985, the Sanghatana organized its novel agitation of stopping vehicles on highways and offering flowers and leaves to drivers, explaining to them the demands of farmers. It was called Pan-Phool agitation. The response to this agitation was reported to be lukewarm. (Loksatta: 11/11/85)

A mass rally of farmers and factory workers was organized at Shivaji Park in Bombay on 12th December 1985 to mark the Martyrdom-Day of Babu Genu, (a young martyr from the Swadeshi movement in 1930) It was a programme jointly organized by the Shetkari Sanghatana and the Kamgar Aghadi. The Republican Party of India (Ambedkar) supported it. Farmers from far off districts had come to attend this rally in Bombay. They were joined by the workers of the Kamgar Aghadi. A bonfire was lit at the rally by the Martyr Babu Genu’s aged sister-in-law. The Shiv Sena did not join the programme, but Chhagan Bhujbal, the Shiv Sena’s mayor of Bombay attended the meeting. He was not allowed to make a speech by the Kamgar Aghadi supporters and Datta Samant in his speech attacked the Shiv Sena. This incident destroyed the chances of the Sanghatana and the Shiv Sena coming closer. (The rally was attended by the researcher as an observer 12/12/1985) Sharad Joshi later sharpened his criticism of the communal forces including the Shiv Sena, as he realised the danger of communalism to the 'economistic' movement of the Shetkari Sanghatana.

After the programme of December 12, 1985 in Bombay, there was an interruption in the cotton agitation. Mobilizational programmes such as anti-corruption programmes at the Employment Guarantees Scheme (EGS) works, demanding famine works for the affected people, organizing farmers and labourers to demand EGS work etc. were organized by the Sanghatana activists to strengthen the Sanghatana base.
In the Executive Committee meeting at Chakan (Pune District) on 14th and 15th May 1986, a majority of the Sanghatana activists insisted on taking up the issue of cotton-farmers for agitation. (First hand report of Chakan Executive Committee meeting, 14, 15 May 1986) A meeting was held at Nagpur on 3rd, 4th and 5th August 1986, of representatives of farmers' organisations, wherein the problem of cotton was discussed. The Shetkari Sanghatana made its stand about cotton policy clear. It demanded continuation of the Monopoly Procurement Scheme for cotton with remunerative prices but protested against the continuation of the scheme with lower prices to cotton offered by the state government as compared to the prices prevailing in other states. On 2nd October 1986, an All India Cotton Producers' Conference was held at Akola. This was attended by a large number of cotton producers from Maharashtra and by representatives from Gujarat, M.P., Andhra Pradesh and Haryana. It was decided to intensity the stir to resist government's textile policy by organizing bonfires of Rajivastras and boycotting their purchase. The Sanghatana reiterated its intention to resist impending reduction in cotton prices under the Maharashtra Monopoly Procurement Scheme (A Sanghatana handout: 9/1/1987)

On the 10th of November 1986, the Sanghatana called for a Rasta Roko agitation on 23rd November 1986 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. In the meanwhile, the Sanghatana held a historic women's rally at Chandwad (Nasik district) on 9th and 10th November 1986. (ibid.)

On 23rd November 1986, farmers blockaded roads in 7 districts of Vidarbha and 2 districts in Marathwada resulting in a stand-still of all the traffic in those areas. Lakhs of farmers including women
participated in the agitation. Except for a firing incident at Mukhed (Nanded district) which injured 4 persons, the agitation was peaceful. (ibid.)

On 3rd December 1986 an activists' meeting at Amravati decided to start a campaign of Rasta Roko and 'purification' of Rajivastras by affixing the Sanghatana logos on them. This was to be the next phase of the cotton agitation. It was also decided that the Gaobandhi programme should be intensified. However on 6th December 1986, there were large scale arrests of the Sanghatana activists who had come on the roads. Still, thousands of farmers - men and women - were waiting to offer Satyagraha. In Nanded district SRPs resorted to a cane-charge. There was firing at Suregao, near Hingoli in Parbhani district and three farmers were killed. (Shetkari Sanghatak: 6/2/1987) Though leaders were inside jails, the farmers continued their Satyagraha. From jail Sharad Joshi declared on 7th December that 'rail-blockade' would be organised on 12th December. This Rail Roko was a massive success in which about 35,000 farmers participated. Some 8000 Satyagrahis were arrested.

The next stage of the cotton agitation was picketing of shops selling Rajivastra and deterring people from buying synthetic cloth. This programme was decided in the 2nd January 1987 meeting of the activists at Hingoli (Parbhani district) and implemented at Wardha, Nagpur and Amravati on 11th, 12th and 13th January 87. Many farmers participated in picketing. (ibid.)

As the last phase of the cotton agitation, it was decided to go to Bombay in large numbers and start a "sit-in" or "Thiyya" in front of the Chief Minister's residence. More than one lakh farmers started for Bombay from all over Maharashtra. However, many were forced to get down from trains at Nagpur, Wardha, Akola, Bhusawal, Aurangabad, and
Nanded stations. Many were not allowed to board the trains. In spite of this, some 20 to 25 thousand farmers managed to reach Girgaon Chowpatti (beach) in Bombay. The programme of "Thiyya" was postponed by a day. But on 15th February, at night the Chief Minister invited Sharad Joshi for talks. The Sanghatana representatives met the Chief Minister, Shankarrao Chavan. The C.M. conceded most of the demands of farmers and an agreement was signed between the state Government and the Shetkari Sanghatana. It was decided to make a joint representation to the Centre asking for increased exports and other aspects. The Government agreed to include the Sanghatana representatives in the sales machinery of the Monopoly Procurement Scheme. The cotton agitation was withdrawn on 15th February 1987. (Shetkari Sanghatana: 6/2/1987, 20/2/1987)

Sugar-Cane Agitation: 1985

After the first sugar-cane agitation in 1981, the prices of sugar-cane were hiked. However, after 4 years in 1985, the farmers producing sugar-cane found the prices unremunerative as there was no further revision. This, according to the Sanghatana caused the fall in sugar-cane production ultimately resulting in sugar crisis in the markets. The Shetkari Sanghatana decided to hold a conference of sugar-cane producers at Rahuri (dist. Ahmednagar) where leaders of all the political parties, including the ruling Congress (I), were invited. This invitation resulted in a political drama in the ruling party. The former chief minister Vasantdada Patil announced his intention to attend the Rahuri Conference and expressed his support to the sugar-cane farmers. It was an open revolt by Vasantdada against the party High Command since the Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee Chief Prabha Rao...
a political adversary of Vasantdada - had prohibited Congress (I) members to attend the Rahuri Conference. (Times of India: 2/10/85) Though Vasantdada reiterated his intention of attending the conference, eventually he canceled his programme. Vasantdada Patil cited a speech made by Sharad Joshi in Dhule in which he reportedly had asked the farmers to wield guns and not hammers if asked to do famine relief work again the next year as the reason of his absence. (Loksatta: 3/10/85)

The Rahuri Conference was held on 6th October 1985. It was attended by the ex Prime Minister Charan Singh, himself a farmers' leader from UP, Pramod Mahajan of BJP and Sharad Pawar of PDF among others. The Rahuri Conference demanded Rs.330/- per tonne for sugar-cane and asked the Government to change the levy price or to make 35 per cent of it compulsory and further 65 per cent voluntary. It demanded a control over the corruption in sugar-factories. (Shetkari Sanghatak: 18/10/1985)

The Conference decided to block the commencement of operations by the sugar factories till 6th November 1985, and if the demands were not granted till then, to stop sugar transport out of the sugar factories. 10th November was to also be the day of the "Pan-phool agitation" described earlier.

Sharad Pawar supported the demands and the agitation. He also announced a donation of Rs.75000 on behalf of Bhavani Cooperative Sugar factory near Baramati to the Shetkari Sanghatana. (Loksatta: 7/10/85) Interestingly, two more sugar barons from Ahmednagar district supported to this movement. Shankarrao Kolhe declared his support. (Marathwada: 29/10/85) while Shankarrao Kale announced financial help to the Shetkari Sanghatana of 50 paise per tonne of sugar-cane crushed in 1983-84. (Shramik Vichar: 239
12/10/85) Shankarrao Chavan, a Union Minister at that time was critical of the Shetkari Sanghatana. He alleged that it was being helped by the dissatisfied leaders of Congress (I) itself. (Sakal: 4/10/85). The Bombay press was critical of the Rahuri Conference and the demands voiced therein. (Maharashtra Times wrote an editorial criticising sugar-cane growers’ demands on 9/10/85; Loksatta wrote two critical editorials on 4/10/85 and 8/10/85. Both these papers were also critical about the cotton agitation, see Maharashtra Times: 10/10/85, 11/10/85.)

The agitation of delaying the cane-crushing season however could not become successful except in a few sugar factories. Some factories started their season well in advance. (Sakal: 29/10/85) But the Central Government declared that the statutory minimum price of sugar-cane payable by sugar factories would be fixed at Rs.16.50 per quintal linked to a basic recovery of 8.5 per cent. It marked an increase of Rs.2.50 per quintal over the price fixed for the previous year. The price of levy sugar was also increased. It also changed the ratio of levy sugar to free-sale sugar from 65:35 to 55:45. (Times of India: 15/11/1985)

In view of the Central Government’s policy decision, the Shetkari Sanghatana withdrew its ‘sugar withholding’ agitation which was to start from 15th November 1985.


Apart from sugar-cane, the Sanghatana tried to deal with the problem of jowar prices. To draw attention to the issue, it asked jowar growers to send by post ten grammes of jowar each to the Prime Minister. It called upon the farmers to do this between Divali and Sankranti i.e.
approximately November 1985 to January 1986. (Shetkari Sanghatak: 15/11/1985) A jowar Conference was held on 21st and 22nd September 1986 at Ambajogai in Beed district of Marathwada. This was attended by farmers from Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. The venue of the Conference was appropriately the dry-farming area of Marathwada. The Conference discussed the issues of irrigation, the cost of production of jowar and the alternative uses of jowar. The cost of production of jowar was calculated at Rs.250/- per quintal. It was averred that the problem of the jowar grower is basically one of lack of irrigation facilities, which does not allow these farmers to grow any other crop. A "national emergency" about water was, hence, demanded. It was resolved that farmers should go to the cities in times of famine instead of working at stone-breaking at famine relief works. No concrete agitational programme was, however, announced. (Shetkari Sanghatak: 17/10/1986, 31/10/1986)

The next jowar Conference was held on 20th October 1987 at Latur, also a district town of Marathwada region. This Conference was held in the context of a crisis faced by jowar producers in Marathwada. An untimely rain had turned the hybrid jowar black. The Government then refused to purchase this jowar. V.P.Singh attended this Conference. Sharad Joshi warned the Government that if it did not purchase the jowar, it would have to face an agitation. The Government did purchase the jowar but at a price lower than the one declared. The Shetkari Sanghatana issued to the sellers a receipt which noted the assured price and the actual price, as well as the difference caused by the change. The difference was recorded as the money owed to the farmer by the Government. (Shetkari Sanghatak: Nanded Convention Special Issue: March 1988: pp.30-31.)

Once again, there was no concrete agitational programme on the agenda. The Shetkari Sanghatana continued
to organize farmers of non-irrigated areas for struggles over prices of cash crops, the issue of prices of foodgrains such as jowar or rice was only aired through meetings and conventions.

Women’s Conference: Chandwad: November 1986

The Women’s Conference at Chandwad was the culmination of a year-long effort by Sharad Joshi to give a boost to the women’s front in the Sanghatana, in order to increase women’s participation in the movement. The first women’s rally was organized in July 1985 at Dabhadi (Nasik district). After that there was a series of women’s camps at Hali Handarguli (Latur district), Selu (Parbhani district), Vaijapur (Aurangabad district), Washim (Akola district), Katol (Nagpur district) and Kopargao (Ahmednagar district). These camps helped in mobilizing women from different parts. The discussions in these camps were instrumental in shaping the tone of the Conference at Chandwad. The importance of the role of women in farming was emphasized and their problems underlined. (Shetkari Sanghatak: 28/11/1986)

The Conference was attended by about 20,000 women and three times that number of men. The open session of the Conference was attended by more than one lakh people, predominantly women. The Conference was also attended by women activists from other parties and autonomous groups of feminists.

On the first day of the Conference, various topics concerning women and their problems, e.g., atrocities and discrimination against women, equal wages for women etc. were discussed. Women were concerned about dowry, wife beating, rape and discrimination at work place. The Con-
ference adopted a Declaration of Peasant Women which was like a charter of their rights. The important decision taken at the Conference was to put up a 100 per cent Mahila Aghadi (Women's Front) panel for the Zilla Parishad elections which were imminent at that time. The Sanghatana was to throw its full weight behind the women candidates of the Front. Another resolution called for a gherao of the Prime Minister’s residence if he did not take action against those guilty of raping women during the riots which followed Indira Gandhi’s assassination in 1984. (Shetkari Sanghatak: 21/11/1986)

The overwhelming success of the Women’s Conference was attributed to the Sanghatana’s mobilizational skill and strength. It brought the Sanghatana a new respectability. A totally new and untapped clientele of rural women folk was rallied under the leadership of the Shetkari Sanghatana. Through the Samagra Mahila Aghadi, which was established subsequently with the help and cooperation of other political parties and autonomous women’s groups, the Shetkari Sanghatana ventured into politics with a new force. The concept of all women’s panel forced other political parties, especially the ruling party to give more representation and participation to women in their fora.

Some other programmes organized by the Sanghatana were:

Satana Rally of 5th September 1987:

This was a rally admittedly to show the strength of farmers to Mr. V.P. Singh who had resigned from the Central Cabinet and to encourage him to struggle for the farmers’ cause. (Shetkari Sanghatak: Nanded Convention Special Issue: March 89: pp.29)
Apart from V.P. Singh, Sanjay Singh and Arif Mohammed Khan were also invited. An appeal was made to V.P. Singh was to understand farmers’ problems and work for their solution. He was assured of farmers’ support in his task. Sharad Joshi also appealed to him to create a national alternative to the present political system. He declared that farmers would go to Delhi and *gherao* the rulers to wake them up from their slumber. V.P. Singh assured the farmers of his cooperation in their struggle.

**Vidarbha Propaganda March, November - December 1987**

This march was undertaken to campaign for the debt-relief rally to be organized in Delhi in March 1988. The march started on 20th November 85 from Sindkhed Raja and moving through all the districts of Vidarbha culminated in a rally at Nagpur on 12th December 1987. *(ibid.)* It also was a step in the preparations for the next, impending phase of the cotton agitation.

**Nagpur Rally 12th December 1987**

The rally was attended by more than one lakh farmers. It made two major demands, viz. Rs.200/- bonus per quintal of cotton to growers; and no postponement of the *Zilla Parishad* and *Panchayat Samiti* elections. The Government was warned that the *Sanghatana* will resort to Railway and road-blocks if their demands were not accepted. All the leaders of opposition parties were invited for the rally. Among them, V.P. Singh, Ajit Singh, Atal Behari Vajpayee and Chandrashekhar attended the rally and declared their support to the farmers. Sharad Joshi announced a programme of holding a
debt-relief rally in Delhi in March 1988. (This rally was eventually postponed.) (\textit{ibid.})

At the end of this review, some important features of the agitations waged by the \textit{Shetkari Sanghatana} may be highlighted.

The \textit{Sanghatana} resorted to agitations only on the issue of remunerative prices for cash-crops. It did not struggle for remunerative prices for food grains such as rice or jowar or bajra. Sharad Joshi answers this objection or criticism in terms of tactical logic of agitations. According to him, it is not the techniques of agitations such as rail or road blockades which ensures the success of an agitation. The main strategy is to control the market and thereby ensure prices for the produce. If this control is not there, the Government can easily crush the agitation with its coercive power. (Joshi/Mhatre: November 1982: pp. 154) The logic of selecting cash-crops for agitation is in this argument. The onion agitation could become successful because about 60 to 70 per cent of the total onion production in the country is from Maharashtra; and about 50 percent of this is grown in the five talukas of Pune and Nasik districts. If the organization of peasants could control the market there, it could carry out a successful agitation. The same logic is applied to sugar-cane and cotton. The issues of jowar or rice were not tackled because area of cultivation of these foodgrains is distributed widely in many states and so the peasants' organization cannot exercise any control over the markets. (\textit{op.cit.} pp.158) Another reason cited is that, the total production of the cash-crops goes to the markets while only 30 per cent of the foodgrains are sold in the market. Naturally the main weapon of the agitation, namely, withholding the stocks, can not be used in the case of foodgrains. (\textit{ibid.}) This explanation supports the argument
made earlier that this movement is in the interests of the rich farmers and middle peasants who alone have marketable surplus and not the poor farmers who cultivate foodgrains for subsistence.

The Shetkari Sanghatana successfully used non-violent techniques of agitations such as Rail-Rasta Reko, Satyagrahas, marches, hunger-strike by leader, Gaokandi or the prohibition to political leaders in villages and mass rallies and conventions to press for its demands. Most of the agitations were well-planned and were carried out peacefully. However, these techniques were the secondary instruments of agitation, the first being withholding of the produce from the markets.

It is interesting to note that the Sanghatana uses military parlance about its agitations. The use of words like strategy, tactics, logistics, topography, war, army, general, weapons, soldier-farmer is quite common in the speeches of its leaders. The logic of the agitational planning is given by Sharad Joshi in the following words. “We give more thought to the logistics and strategy than any other peasant organization. When there is injustice, others react immediately. We don’t. That is the characteristic feature of our movement. We wage an agitation when the time is opportune. We use guerrilla tactics with skill. By that we mean we take into account our strength and then properly select the time, place and issue for the agitation.” (Sharad Joshi, interview, 15/1/87)

Sharad Joshi maintains that it is crucial to judge the moment to call off an agitation. According to him, an agitation is not an end in itself but a means. If in a particular situation, negotiations prove to be more effective, the agitation should be suspended. It is the leaders who have to decide the cost to be paid for the
demands that are raised. That is why, he explains that when there was increasing repression on 10th November 1981, with prohibitory orders and firing a decision was taken to withdraw the agitation. This consideration seems to have operated in most of the agitations. Joshi has thus refined the techniques of agitations which is one of the reasons of success. Here, by success is meant successful mobilization to attain the goals. This does not mean that there were no failures. But even failures were used to enhance a "professional" and "hard-headed" image of the Sanghatana leadership, by stating that they were graceful enough to accept the defeat and withdraw in time instead of pulling on with the agitation." This was stated at the time of the milk agitation. (Bhoomisevak: op.cit.)

Another feature of the agitations was that they were carried out mostly in the northern districts of Maharashtra like Nasik, Dhule, Ahmednagar, and regions of Vidarbha and Marathwada. Some agitations also took place in Pune district but virtually no agitation took place in Konkan and South Maharashtra districts of Satara, Sangli, Kolhapur and Solapur. This was all the more striking in the case of sugar-cane because the districts in Southern Maharashtra are known for their production of sugar-cane and their sugar factories. A reason for this according to a senior leader of the Shetkari Sanghatana is that the recovery of sugar from cane in these areas being higher, the farmers get a higher price, whereas with a lower recovery in Ahmednagar and Marathwada, the farmers find the prices inadequate. He maintained that this difference was not due to the methods of production but due to the difference in the quality of soil itself. (Interview, Bhaskarrao Boraoke, 9/1/87)

Another reason for this situation could be political. Traditionally, the Congress does not exert as much influence in the Northern districts as in Western Maharashtra Western
which is a stronghold of the ruling Congress (I). It has hence, kept away from the Sanghatana. The political complexion of Khandesh and Nasik and Ahmednagar, however, is different. According to Jayant Lele, “In Khandesh districts (including Nasik) non-Maratha counter-elites have acquired certain anti-establishment and yet pragmatic consciousness of interests. They have rendered Congress politics much more unstable, allowing some, but not complete, eventual dominance by Indira Gandhi.” (Lele: 1982: pp. XVIII) In Ahmednagar, the Congress is disorganized and its factionalism facilitated the Sanghatana to secure a foothold in that district. Ahmednagar was also considered a stronghold of the Communists earlier. It was only after the cooperative movement and impact of elections that some Communist leaders like Annasaheb Shinde entered the Congress. Thus, this region is not a traditional Congress stronghold and the Sanghatana could entrench itself there. (Interview Bhaskar Rao Boraoke, 9/1/87)

The strength of an agitation in a particular area is also determined by the production of the particular crop in that area. The cotton agitation was not very strong in Dhule district or in Chakan near Pune, as cotton is not produced there in large quantities. The agitation, however, was stronger in Jalgao district of Khandesh and in Vidarbha because of their higher share in cotton production.

The reactions of other political parties to the agitations were peculiar to their own political positions. Most of the opposition parties were quick to declare their support to the demands of the Shetkari Sanghatana. Some leaders even tried to join the agitation in a bid to take over the leadership or to demonstrate their intimacy with the peasant cause. (Parulkar: 1981: pp.170-171) When that could not succeed, they organized parallel programmes to show how they championed the cause of the peasants. The
long march of the six-party opposition PDF could be cited as an example here. Later on the BJP also tried to organize peasant marches in a similar fashion. The PWP leadership, however, was quite indignant at the increasing strength of the Shetkari Sanghatana. In its Party conference at Alibag on 22nd January 1983, the PWP leaders bitterly criticised "Sharad Joshi's agitation as an obstacle in the struggle against capitalism." Another point of objection was that the issue of the remunerative prices to agricultural produce was originally raised by the PWP and Joshi had appropriated it. (Maharashtra Times: 23/1/83) The PWP’s anger was mainly due to the fact that the Shetkari Sanghatana had ousted it from its traditional strongholds in Maharashtra.

The ruling party - the Congress (I) - was baffled in the beginning. This party which considers itself a representatives of the interests of peasantry was at a loss to understand the phenomenon of the Shetkari Sanghatana. Therefore, the initial reactions of the Congress (I) leaders were of scepticism, hostility and suspicion. They tried to play on the caste factor saying that Sharad Joshi was a Brahmin who could not understand and represent the farmers, and that he was misleading them. (Parulkar: op.cit.: pp.9-11)

The Congress (I) government, in reality a representative of the industrial bourgeoisie, initially tried to suppress the agitations. It failed to realise that this policy of repression actually fanned the flames of the agitation further and caused the farmers to participate in the movement in even larger numbers. The Shetkari Sanghatana successfully used this governmental policy to expose the ant-peasant bias and character of the Government and the ruling party.

When the ruling party leaders assessed the strength of the movement, they started supporting the demands of the farmers, coopting those demands in their own parlance. This
pro-peasant rhetoric, however was not only adopted by the ruling Congress(I) but also by the entire opposition. In February 1983, the deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Ramrao Adik declared that it was the moral responsibility of the Government to give remunerative prices to the farmers. 
(Sakal: 10/2/1983) The pro-peasant lobby within the Congress(I) at the national level became active. The then speaker of Lok Sabha, Balram Jakhar in a peasant rally organized by the Bharat Krishak Samaj at Jalgao demanded the dissolution of the APC and its reorganization with more representation to farmers. (Sakal: 14/3/83). Some State level Congress(I) leaders tried to use this movement for their own goals, usually to browbeat their adversaries in the State or the party High-Command in Delhi. Also, the threat to their power-base brought about a change in their approach to the movement. Efforts were made to bring about formal and informal dialogue between the Government and the Sanghatana which would soften the edge of the movement. The leaders and ministers usurped the idiom of the Shetkari Sanghatana. Thus, after 1983, the Maharashtra Government hardly ever used repressive measures against the Sanghatana agitators. The incident of firing at Suregao (in 1986) was an exception. Most of the agitations of the Sanghatana culminated in a dialogue with the Government resulting in some agreement or understanding. The cotton agitation in 1986 ended without even reaching its peak. This was the indication of the fractions of the ruling bloc finally coming to an understanding. A policy of appeasing the farmers by conceding to their demands was obviously adopted to keep the power-base in tact.

The Shetkari Sanghatana, thus, through its agitations not only put forth the demands of the rich and middle farmers forcefully, but in the process also created for itself a role of political mediator in the politics of Maharashtra.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

The movement of the Shetkari Sanghatana emerged in the context of the agricultural crisis of the mid to late 1970s. The increase in production and the falling prices of the agricultural produce resulted in the discontent of the peasantry. The rich peasants' class which was the main beneficiary of the tax concessions, agricultural subsidies and the green revolution strategy, was disturbed by the decline in their profits due to the falling prices. Another cause of anxiety of this class was its declining position vis-a-vis the industrial bourgeoisie, its partner in the coalition of power. It needed to reassert its political strength and improve its position in the power bloc.

The movement of the Shetkari Sanghatana is to be seen as a modern movement of the peasantry in a developing country.

(1) It was a movement of basically self-cultivating farmers. Rentiers or absentee landlords had no role in it.

(2) It was a movement of peasants who were producing for the market. It came up in conditions where agriculture was monetised, commercialised and capitalised. The form of surplus was profit and not rent. Commodity production was more or less generalised and certainly dominant.

(3) It was a movement in a situation where land ownership, however disparate, was widely distributed. Oligopolies in agriculture did not exist and capitalist or petty capitalist agriculturists dominated the scene in numbers as well as in economic importance.

(4) It was a movement in a situation where a large
proportion of the population is dependent on agriculture.

(5) It was also a movement which had access to seasoned political leadership and to the parliamentary democratic process.

The demand was for remunerative prices of cash crops. The basic technique of exercising pressure was withholding the produce from the market, backed by mass mobilisation. The forms of agitation were essentially constitutional. The masses were large and had a political weight in electoral terms. It should also be noted that a mass movement was necessary, negotiations were not enough.

The uneven development in agriculture, the increasing indebtedness of the farmers, scarcity of water resources, and famines combined to increase the severity of the agricultural crisis in late '70s. No political party had taken up the issues relating to the peasantry as a whole, and hence, the Shetkari Sanghatana got the chance to do so. A sophisticated leadership with fresh ideas and insights articulated the problems of peasants in a language which was, at once, familiar and new to them. A peasant movement concentrating on the issue of remunerative prices for farm produce started with the onion agitation in 1980. Its early successes gave it a further boost and the 'new ideology' spread in the countryside like a wild fire. This 'new ideology' is a populist ideology which undermines the agrarian class differentiation, asserting the basic unity of all peasants. It locates the significant line of contradiction between the industrial and the agricultural sector and insists that the root-cause of rural poverty is the exploitation of agriculture by industry by means of the unequal terms of trade between them. The terms of trade operate through the mechanism of determination of prices. Unremunerative prices, meaning prices which do not cover even the cost of production of the produce, are thus paid to the farmers leading to their impoverishment. Therefore, if
The farmers are paid remunerative prices, the problem of rural poverty, in fact, the poverty of the entire nation, will be solved. In a way the ideology is presented as an alternative developmental strategy.

The demand for remunerative prices, however, in reality is a demand of the rich, surplus producing farmers to some extent of the middle farmers who also cultivate h-crops. The majority of the poor or small farmers are just not benefited by higher prices, but are adversely affected by them as they have to purchase food grains from markets at higher prices. The class of agricultural workers is similarly hit by the higher prices. As the wages the labourers do not increase in proportion to the increase in the prices of the agricultural produce, the real one of the labourers declines making their living condition even worse.

The Shetkari Sanghatana's ideology, however, overlooks this problem and hammers at the unity of all the farmers, irrespective of the classes to which they may belong. The ideology has transformed the 'price' demand into a 'non-class' demand and has successfully articulated the grievances of the various classes of farmers excluding the landless labourers. An attempt to encompass their demand of wage-increase has also been made. The projection of a unitary agrarian sector, pitted against the non-agrarian sector, is emphasised constantly. The enemy is located in the State, though the overthrow of the State is not the aim of the movement. It only wants to bring about some modifications in the system without effecting any structural changes. The ideology and the movement in that sense are non-radical or reformist.

It is a non-radical populist ideology also because it is articulated not by the dominated but by a fraction of
the ruling class in its efforts to challenge the hegemony of
the dominant fraction viz., the industrial bourgeoisie. The
hegemony is challenged on ideological grounds; and a total
alternative ideological framework is proposed to replace it.
An attempt is made to comment on every possible
sociopolitical phenomenon, history, culture etc. and to cover
various emerging issues. The ideology has successfully made
use of the language and symbols of the popular tradition of
Maharashtra’s peasantry namely the Warkari Sect. The
leadership has cleverly used the warkari idiom and the
discourse to their own ideological ends by bending the
interpretation to carry the message of the movement.

This ideology of the Shetkari Sanghatana could unite
the rich, the middle and the poor peasant in one struggle.
Though the movement clearly articulates the interests of
the rich farmers, the middle farmers who have joined the
market economy also find material gains in it. The poor
peasants get attracted to the movement by the emotional
charge of the ideology which invokes ‘peasant unity’
articulated in the peasant idiom. They are attracted by the
myth that the higher prices will help them alleviate their
poverty.

A non-revolutionary populist ideology, it should be
remembered, is not contributing any new thought to the masses
it addresses. No new social practices are inaugurated, no
ideas are drastically changed. In fact, existing ideas and
prejudices are verbalised in a more effective manner. Any
possibility of a problem or shortcoming within the group is
ruled out and the cause of all ills is located outside the
group. Evil is split off from the group and projected onto
the real or imaginary enemy. There is a pandering to the
masses and their existing beliefs. Such an ideology then
operates at the level of the lowest common denominator.
The only exception in the case of the Shetkari Sanghatana

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has been the "campaign" against casteism and communalism. On these issues, however, there has been no mass mobilisation or action. The "campaign" basically consists of Sharad Joshi's speeches and writings.

The Shetkari Sanghatana has launched agitations only for the remunerative prices of cash-crops. In spite of a lot of rhetoric about the prices of food grains, no agitation was resorted to for crops like jowar or rice which are mainly produced by the poor farmer. The Sanghatana took up the issue of remunerative prices in case of onion, sugar-cane, tobacco, milk and cotton. Most of these agitations were directed against the State. Only the tobacco agitation challenged the big traders. In other agitations the support of the traders' class to the agitations has been quite visible. Some traders have been staunch Sanghatana activists or sympathisers. The traders have openly helped the Sanghatana in its programmes like conventions and rallies (acknowledged in the Sanghatana reports: Shetkari Sanghatak: Special Issue, March 1989) This support can also be estimated by the number of advertisements inserted by traders in semi-urban townships, particularly by those dealing in modern inputs like fertilizers, chemicals, seeds, machinery etc. in the souvenirs of the Sanghatana as well as in the special issues of small-town newspapers on the occasions of the Sanghatana rallies or conventions. It is, hence, significant to note the Sanghatana's silence about the role of the trading class in the exploitation of farmers. The sympathy of the traders for the Shetkari Sanghatana reflects, in a way, a significant contradiction within the Indian ruling class, i.e. the industrial bourgeoisie versus the mercantile and the agrarian bourgeoisie.

The change that has come in the issues of the peasant movements is very significant. The earlier movements centred on the issues of rent, land redistribution or
agricultural wages; whereas, the new movement is based on
the issue of agricultural prices. The demand for
remunerative prices is the demand of the farmers involved
in the capitalist production and linked to the world
capitalist system. (McAlpin, 1982, pp. 890-91) There is a chance
to believe that the leaders of the movement were aware of
the prices of commodities in the world market when they
launched their agitation. Perhaps, from the world market
prices they guessed the possibility of their demands being
granted. During the onion agitation a persistent complaint
was that the prices of onions were falling due to the ban
on the onion exports. As similar awareness regarding the
imports and exports of other agricultural commodities was
also shown. A resentment was expressed at the imports of
sugar, cotton yarn and synthetic fibers as they adversely
affected the prices of sugar-cane and cotton.

The policies of the British monetised agriculture in
India, in one stroke. Commercialisation of agriculture was
also forced in a similar manner. The policies were not
consciously reformist or thoroughgoing, nevertheless they
laid the foundation of capitalisation of agriculture. In
some instances, cultivating farmers were encouraged to take
up agricultural activities in backward areas. Production was
linked to markets, internal and external. Policies
implemented after independence accelerated the trend
towards the use of industrial logic in the farms of the rich
peasantry. Terms of trade, hence became a crucial issue
for the surplus producing peasantry.

The awareness of world market situations, and
articulation of the demands in the parlance of the terms of
trade debate, clearly indicates that this fraction of the
ruling class was not merely asking for a greater share of
surplus or in power but was agitating for its structural
relocation within the national and international markets.
However, the link between the position of prices in the
The world market of a particular commodity and the timing of the Shetkari Sanghatana agitations needs to be studied and explored further. This is not attempted in the present study.

The Shetkari Sanghatana scored a major point by the novelty of its agitational techniques. The rail and road blockades, the cattle march, the appeal to god Vithoba, Gobardan and later debt-relief are all the examples of such techniques. The character of these mass-agitations remained basically non-violent, modeled on the Gandhian satyagraha. The success of the agitations increased the confidence of peasants in the Shetkari Sanghatana. The use of repression by the Government against the agitations which resulted in the deaths of satyagrahis actually gave a moral edge to the Sanghatana vis-a-vis the government.

The use of repression by the Government during the early phase of the movement (up to 1983), may be explained as a confused reaction of the ruling party towards the farmers' mobilization. The ruling party considered itself a farmers' representative and could not comprehend the phenomenon of the Shetkari Sanghatana. However, the rich peasant leaders within the Congress soon realized the significance of the demand for remunerative prices and supported it. The leaders of the opposition parties had done so even earlier.

Another explanation of the use of repression by the government in the earlier phase of the movement could be found in the polices of the central leadership. The central leadership of the Congress at that time was confident of its strength and showed intolerance towards any section which represented interests opposed to those of the industrial bourgeoisie. The firmness towards the peasant movements was an effort to snub the agrarian bourgeoisie.
The imposition of non-farmer, non-Maratha leaders as Chief Ministers was also a part of this policy. A.R. Antulay who was the then Chief Minister of Maharashtra was such 'appointed' leader in whose term the peasant movement had to face maximum repression.

However, it must be understood that repression is used by the government not only to suppress an agitation but also to side-track the issues. If leaders are arrested or if the crowds are cane-charged or fired upon, the immediate demands of the agitation get diverted to the redressal of those injuries or injustices and the main issues get side-tracked. It then becomes easier for the Government to negotiate with the agitators. It can easily give in to the non-issue demands such as appointment of an enquiry committee and prevaricate on the main demands. The leaders of the agitation in that case feel satisfied that the Government had to bend down, though their main demands are overlooked.

The ability of the Shetkari Sanghatana to mobilize large sections of peasantry made it imperative for other political parties, including the ruling party, to support the demands of the farmers and to incorporate them in their agenda. In turn the Sanghatana also had to incorporate certain programmes of the leftist parties to which it had earlier shown scant regard. Demands to attract the poor peasants, such as demands for famine relief works or those under the Employment Guarantee Scheme; or the implementation of minimum wages in some areas; or local issues such as drinking water, road building etc. or the corruption of local and EGS officials etc; had to be incorporated to sustain and increase the mass-base of the organization. It can be noted, however, that such programmes were taken up basically in the dry-land farming areas of Marathwada, Ahmednagar district and Dhule district. Such
programmes were initiated and implemented mainly by the activists who had some leftist background.

In the post 1987 period, the Sanghatana launched the 'debt-relief' agitation in which the emphasis was on the legal battle backed by mass mobilisation. Since all the political parties had accepted the demand in principle, the question was only of the modalities of implementation. In 1989, when the V. P. Singh government came to power, this demand was accepted not only for Maharashtra but in many other states in India. In Maharashtra, the government waived the debts up to Rs. 10,000.

Another major achievement of the Sanghatana was the establishment of the All Women's Front incorporating women activists from different opposition parties and autonomous women's groups. The unity of this front, however, was short-lived.

The Sanghatana also tried to play a major role in the Assembly elections of 1989 and about 6 candidates of the Shetkari Sanghatana got elected on the tickets of Progressive Democratic Front of the opposition parties. This was of course a small number compared to the expectations of the Sanghatana leadership. It highlights the limitations of the movement to mobilize votes in elections.

Most of the demands of the farmers have been sanctioned by the government of V.P. Singh. In spite of it, poverty in the rural areas does not seem to be affected. The 'percolation' thesis of Sharad Joshi does not seem to be proving true, since, despite the increase in the agricultural prices, the wages of agricultural labourers have not increased much. The problems of the dry-land farmers continue to defy solution.
A comparison used to be made of the 'militant economism' of the trade union movement of Datta Samant and the 'econonistic movement of the farmers led by Sharad Joshi. The two movements are similar in that they both emphasize the economic demands of their clientele. Another major similarity is that both these movements tried to and succeeded in pushing back the leftist movements or organizations in their respective sectors. The trade union movement of Datta Samant was supported by the ruling party initially. The Shetkari Sanghatana's movement, though it faced repression in the beginning, was later marginalised by the ruling party by coopting its main demands. Perhaps it was convenient for the ruling party to wipe out the left with the help of these 'econonistic' movements. Samant's movement with a 'militant workerist economism' tried to sidetrack the issue of the revolutionary transformation of the society and stridently insisted on immediate gains. It was an effort of ideological decapitation of the revolutionary class. (Pendse: EPW: 18th & 25th April 1981) We find Sharad Joshi's movement with its 'populist' ideology doing the same in the countryside. The anti-leftist stand of Sharad Joshi's ideology is quite obvious. But whereas Samant was not aware of the anti-revolutionary character of his own movement, Joshi has been quite conscious about this position.

Though Joshi and Samant joined hands in opposing the Textile policy of Rajiv Gandhi's government in 1985, the inherent contradictions in the demands of the two movements were quite obvious. The Government perhaps used the peasant movement of the Shetkari Sanghatana to beat the trade union movement of Samant. It may not be a coincidence that the rise and the success of the peasant movement and the defeat of the trade union movement of Samant occurred simultaneously. It is interesting to note that both these movements created illusions about their revolutionary aspirations and potentials in the minds of many non-
traditional left groups and individuals and for a period attracted their support, and even some following.

Sharad Joshi's leadership, in the strict sense of the term, cannot be called a 'charismatic' leadership. It can, however, be argued that his indisputable position within the organization has stemmed from the total trust of the peasant masses which he enjoys. His ability to address the masses over the heads of his colleagues in the organization, has prevented any splits within the organization, and even when some of his colleagues left the organization they were not able to take any sizable section of the following along with them.

The relationship of a populist leader with the masses is extremely contradictory. He is dependent on them for survival as a force and yet not respectful towards them. He has no belief in the creative energies of the masses. They become, consciously or unconsciously, instruments to actualise his will and wisdom. The need for a "supreme leader" is thus in-built in such a movement. The attitude of the leader is condescending which is nothing but a tolerant or indulgent contempt. Personality cults are, hence, inevitable. These should, however, be clearly distinguished from charismatic pretensions.

Sharad Joshi seems to have used the personal influence in his forays in the field of real politic. He did play the political games of supporting some leaders or political parties and later withdrawing such support. The example of Sharad Pawar can be cited in this case. His changing relationships with various ruling party leaders like Vasantdada Patil or Shankarrao Chavan also are quite interesting. But whereas these relations had at least some bearing on the peasant issues, these leaders being in the ruling party or holding the responsible offices in the
Governinent, the relations with some opposition parties and their leaders indicate an amount of personal ambition. Joshi exhibited a kind of unscrupulousness in his dealings with the BJP or the Shiv Sena. When he found it expedient he joined hands with them, and when he found them dispensable, he criticised them for their communal politics. The same personal ambition and politics seem to have governed Sharad Joshi's relations and dealings with Mahendra Singh Tikait and other leaders of the peasant organizations in other states.

A major limitation of the present work is that it has not carried out comparative study of the peasant movements going on in other states. Such a comparison would have facilitated a more in-depth analysis of the peasant movement in India in general and helped the theorization of the same. However, with the help of the available data certain generalisations may be made.

There was a kind of an upsurge of peasant movements in various states in India in the late '70s and early '80s. Their agitational pattern and the character of their demands were similar. They were all non-violent satyagraha type of agitations demanding an increase in prices of produce and/or decrease in the prices of necessary inputs. It was the simultaneity of these movements, which created a political pressure, giving boost to the rich peasant class in the country.

It is possible to argue that the nature of all these movements was corrective. The arrogant dominance of the industrial bourgeoisie was creating an economic and political imbalance in the country. A social movement or upheaval was necessary to rectify this potentially dangerous state of affairs. The equations of the ruling bloc had to be reasserted for the sake of the very survival of class rule. These movements served this very purpose.
The unity of the agrarian classes, which lent a numerical strength to these movements was considered by some as having a transformative potential in them. However, after a decade of these movements, the predominantly reformative character of the movements has become clear. One may argue that the transformative potential was there because of the poor peasant strata's involvement in the movements. But the populist ideology behind the movements and the leadership which articulated this ideology took care not to let this potential realise itself. Conscious efforts were made to limit the transformative urges of even those sections which have the transformative potential.

With this limitation becoming clear, it can be said, that the farmers' movement today has reached its zenith. It has accomplished the limited historical task that fell to it. Henceforth it can either mark time in an institutionalized, non-spectacular groove or actually decline, becoming a mere adjunct of the other restorative and balancing mechanisms at work in the society.
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8. Lokmat, Aurangabad.
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## APPENDIX - I

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