



# A GUIDE TO NONVIOLENT ACTIVISM

BY EKTA PARISHAD, INDIA





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We would like to extend our gratitude to the community leaders and activists of Ekta Parishad for sharing their rich experiences of grassroots work. These stories of perseverance have helped compile this manual.

**A Guide to Nonviolent Activism**  
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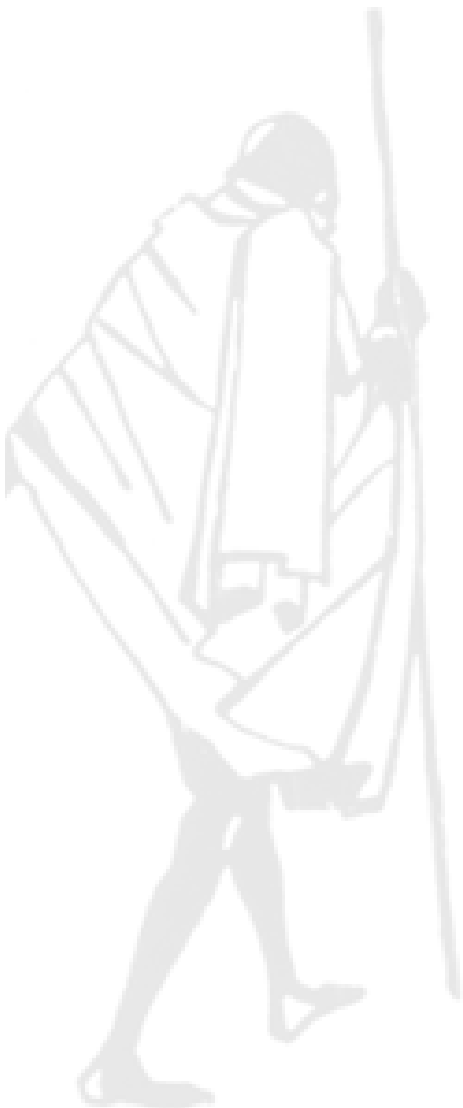
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## LET US WALK TOGETHER

I am quite hopeful that this handbook depicting the nonviolent approaches to activism will certainly be helpful and of multiple uses to social workers.

Not only in India but throughout the world, when standing in favor of the downtrodden and the marginalized is considered synonymous to struggle against injustice and violence, the challenges before the social activists devoted to nonviolent thought and action are twofold. First, they have to devote themselves completely to nonviolence by thoughts and actions. Second, they have to motivate the marginalized sections—for whom it is their right to peaceful fight for justice, dignity, and identity. In short, it is a long journey of collective nonviolent responses starting from self-discipline based on nonviolence.

Nonviolence for me is not an experiment but a discipline that enables us to move from personal to collective behavior and actions. In the true sense, this discipline travels the distance between failures and successes in a controlled way. This is why purity of means gets the highest priority in all preparations for nonviolent struggles or the Satyagrah. In fact, Satyagrah should be viewed differently from the established contexts of success and failure. So, Satyagrah is not same as struggle. A struggle is always judged on the parameters of victory or defeat. But the Satyagrah is a tireless journey towards the constant refinement of the 'Means of Truth'. Success is just another leg or stage here. A Satyagrahi is a disciplined traveler on this lifelong journey.

Three decades ago, Ekta Parishad had chosen the path of 'Satyagrah'. The efforts of Ekta Parishad have shown that there can't be a success bigger than establishing an in-depth discipline of nonviolence among thousands of people in the rural India. Further to it, successes in ground level movements have set stellar examples that have helped strengthen the faith of millions in nonviolent campaigns. Milestones of successes have taken Ekta Parishad to such a stage that global foot marches like 'Jai Jagat' could be organized. Established as a ground level organization at Sanchi in 1989, it has grown into an international organization, which is just another stage for its unrelentingly hardworking nonviolent volunteers.

I consider Ekta Parishad not just an organization but a 'school of nonviolent thoughts and actions'. It is an institution where learning and practicing nonviolence is a continuous process. Let us join together in this journey through this manual.

Ramesh Sharma  
(National Coordinator- Ekta Parishad)



## THE PROCESS OF MANUAL DEVELOPMENT

In April 2019, a four-day deliberation meeting was organized in the Center for Experiencing Socio Cultural Interaction (CESCI), Madurai, Tamil Nadu. In this meeting, more than forty nonviolent activists, artists, development professionals, and long-time activists and leaders of Ekta Parishad discussed and debated about the components of a Manual for a Nonviolent Activist. The thoughts and ideas derived from this meeting set the foundation for preparing this extremely important document.

This was followed by repeated consultations and in-person meetings between Ekta Parishad's National Convener Ramesh Sharma and Ankush and Isha from Adivasi Lives Matter.

The Information presented in the manual is based on Ekta Parishad's own experiences, supplemented by examples that have been researched online.



## FOREWORD BY: RAJAGOPAL PV

I am happy that our friends followed a consultative process to complete this manual. I strongly feel that this is an effective tool for training young people and will help deepen their understanding about the art and science of nonviolence.

We live in a world where scientists have invented the most sophisticated weapons capable of destroying the planet and the entire human life. We laud ourselves for such advancements, and yet we need to be aware that we have ways of perpetrating violence that enables us to destroy what humankind has built for thousands of years in the course of one second.

The challenge that many of us face is the belief that building a nonviolent and peaceful society is to create a tool powerful enough to tackle the threats presented by these destructive forces. In order to counter and contain these destructive planetary forces, nonviolence should be inculcated as a priority in the minds of all individuals the world over.

The planetary destruction is also related to how people are using violence in their relationship with nature. This situation can be corrected only through developing a deeper understanding of violence and nonviolence in our daily lives. Humankind needs to move to a higher level of consciousness to deal with these multiple forms of violence that affect both people and nature directly as well as indirectly.

In order to contain violence, it is crucial to train a larger number of young people in the art and science of using nonviolent methods effectively. This manual is meant to help with empowering young people, particularly those at the grassroots level or in conflict situations. This may help uncover different aspects of nonviolence and explore the ideas related to the application of nonviolence in areas where conflict persists and in the day-to-day life as well. Young people may find the theory of nonviolence quite fascinating. But, it is important for them to build their beliefs on actions and experiences so that there is a greater confidence in the new way ahead.

I am happy that this manual is ready. Let me now invite trainers to use and test it in their training programs and reach out to as many young people as possible to expand the circle of nonviolent actors for change. I request both experienced and new trainers to remember that experiential learning of nonviolence is preferable so as to help the youth develop belief in this important approach to solve problems and make it a goal of their lives proving that nonviolence really works, even in difficult situations and that it is more powerful than violence.



In the last 40 years, my colleagues and I have been systematically using nonviolence to organize people in India on various issues that affect their lives. We have of course experienced the outcomes in small groups as well as large mobilizations involving thousands of people. We have experienced its power in one day, and also seen the momentum building up in a span of weeks and months. This demanded from us a high level of commitment and some courage to suffer. However, to our satisfaction, we never faced any violent resistance from the state. On the contrary, in the majority of the cases, we were able to bring the so-called opposition on our side through dialogue.

Learning from every action has been important to advance the cause of nonviolence. We have been open to learning and received really interesting and important inputs from the people; this helped improve our approach to nonviolence. Very often we were deeply surprised to notice how the poor people have adopted a nonviolent lifestyle in relation to their fellow human beings and also with their environment.

Finally, let me congratulate Ekta Parishad's Ramesh Sharma and the wonderful team of Ankush and Isha (Adivasi Lives Matter) who took the responsibility to develop this manual based on concrete experiences, for the use of trainers, and in order to advance the work in the field of nonviolent training and action, which alone can create a peaceful world in the long run.

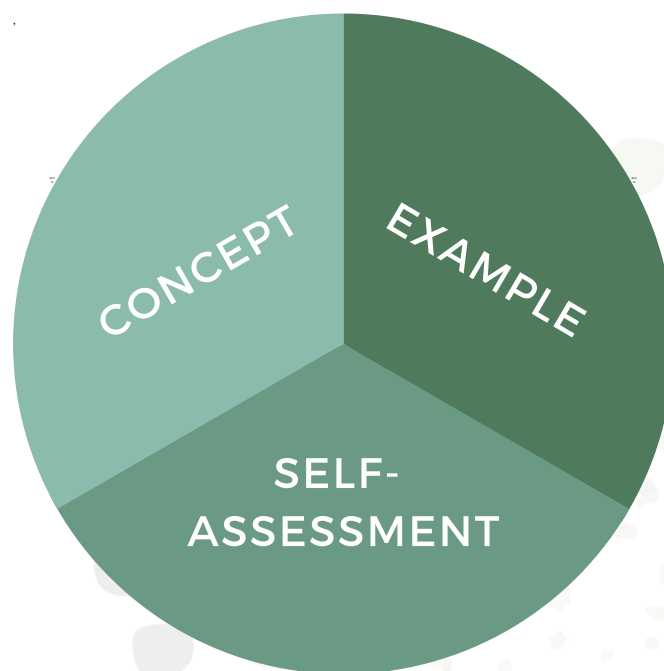
I am sure it will not be out of place if I use this opportunity to appeal to all the peace-lovers to use and promote this manual in a way that you feel useful. I feel this is also an appropriate moment for me to appeal to those friends who are spending their time and resources to promote conflict and violence, to understand that these are temporary. Kindly reflect for a moment and if possible, correct your path in the larger interests of humanity. We hope that all people will begin to invest in building a peaceful world for the coming generations.

Rajagopal PV  
(Founder of Ekta Parishad)



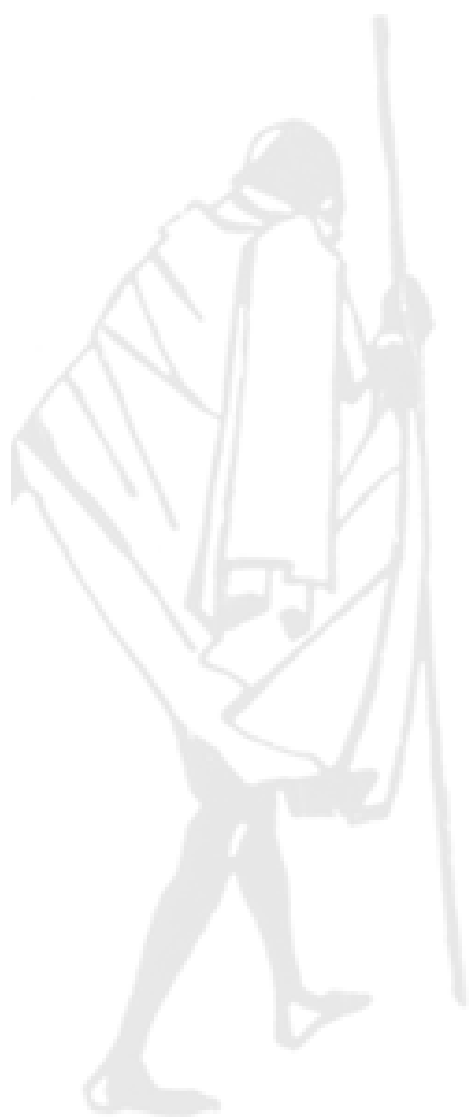
# SUMMARY

This manual is intended as a source of reference for practitioners of nonviolent activism. A few resources on it are available online too. This manual builds upon the experiences of one of the largest nonviolent people's movements led by Ekta Parishad in India over the past three decades. While a lot of examples discussed in this manual are from India, the principles of being a nonviolent activist remain similar across countries. This document will touch upon these concepts and share anecdotes from Ekta Parishad's own body of work across India. Also, it features contemporary nonviolent activists from different parts of the world. This manual encourages an activist to undertake the journey of self-reflection as an individual and also delineates the way forward for organizations. It could be used as a ready-made reference by nonviolent activists across the world as they embark on their transformative journey. (The simple format of the manual allows the reader to find and read various contents easily). Each chapter outlines the key concepts that an individual must address on the journey to become a nonviolent activist, followed by examples from India and different parts of the world. At the end of each chapter, questions for readers are also given so that they can contemplate upon what they have learnt and answer them. These exercises can be undertaken individually or by a group. Each chapter has simple infographics and illustrations that further strengthen the point being discussed.



Ekta  
Parishad

Justice



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# **VIOLENCE AS A LARGER STRUCTURAL ISSUE**



# VIOLENCE AS A LARGER STRUCTURAL ISSUE

When we speak of violence, most of us think of Direct or Visible violence. It is understandable to do so, since we see examples of brutalities and violent abuses on a day-to-day basis. Be it the direct violence inflicted by a lone person or institutionalized visible violence by the state, Direct/Visible violence is usually the most easily noticed form of violence. The images that come to our mind when we talk about 'violence' may range from abusive domestic behavior to wars being fought across frontiers. So, it is natural for anyone to think that this is all that is there when we speak about violence. There are organizations worldwide that address one or the other form of direct violence and work with those who have suffered.

But, when we are talking of nonviolent activism, we are not just trying to address this Direct or Visible violence. While it is equally important, nonviolent activism is the need of the hour as it typically addresses the root cause of direct/visible violence, that is institutional inequalities that create a discrepancy in availability of opportunities.

For this, we need to understand the larger sociopolitical framework in which it operates.

In the Indian context, the majority of the people have always relied on nature-based livelihoods. Their identity, dignity, and livelihood have been heavily dependent on natural resources. These communities had developed highly evolved structures of participatory and community-based governance of these natural resources. Over time, occupation, accumulation, centralization, and corporatization of these resources took place. Consequently, these age-old community-centered resource governance systems broke down completely. Due to this, conflicts started emerging in a new format. While the government and corporates were riding on the narrative of development, the larger concern was that resources and opportunities were being taken away from the hands of people. Eventually, this resulted in a huge mismatch in terms of resources and opportunities to use those resources.

*The widening gap between the "haves" and "have-nots" gave birth to the increased violence. It is this violence that became the larger organizational focus of Ekta Parishad.*



## EXAMPLE

*When the villagers from one or more villages are forcefully evicted from their homes to start a mining project without being given neither adequate compensation nor rehabilitation—while on the other hand the company is poised to make millions of dollars of profit, it creates inequality of opportunity and resources. In such a situation, if the villagers stand up against the atrocities of this company, the local government may object to villagers seeking their rights. If the villagers continue to resist the company from taking their lands, the government may employ local police or armed forces to take this land away. If things don't work nonviolently, the government might use force in the forms of lathi charge or even firing at the villagers in some cases. In case, some villagers get injured or lose their lives in this conflict, then the rest of them may decide to avenge the death of their community members. Now the villagers who were once protesting nonviolently turn violent towards the government and the state administration. To a layman, these villagers might appear as those who are violating the law and order by destroying state property, while some may observe and consider their actions as the obstruction in the way of development for 'everyone's' benefit. But, if you try to understand the root cause of this conflict, it is the imbalance between those who own the resources and who have more opportunities to use these resources. This basic inequality is what creates situation of conflict and leads to violence.*



*Adivasi (indigenous) communities in Odisha protesting against the police brutality that resulted in the death of 12 people while objecting to Tata Steel Plant in 2006.  
Source:- [newsclick.in](http://newsclick.in)*

The conflict between the disparity in the access to resources and opportunities to utilize those resources has left the marginalized communities becoming rootless over time. This rootlessness is a big concern, especially for Ekta Parishad. This 'rootlessness' is not just financial but also means being uprooted culturally from the social milieu. For example, when the Baiga Adivasis (an indigenous community) are

displaced from the Kanha National Park in Madhya Pradesh on the pretext of tiger conservation, they not only lose their livelihood but also their cultural identity. Rootlessness is a big political question that the society presented to Ekta Parishad. It is this rootlessness that helped constitute the different blocks of Ekta Parishad.

When Ekta Parishad started thinking on these issues, it was not established as an organization, but as an umbrella institute—where small or big organizations, members, and collectives could come together to become a part of the larger framework. The basic evolution of Ekta Parishad is based on the concept of a family—a family where gender-based biases are absent, hierarchy is not doled over, and ideologies are so simple that a child or an older person can understand everything equally well. When Ekta Parishad chose to work on nonviolent activism, one way was the grassroots mobilization of marginalized communities, while another was the building of grassroots organizations. Lastly, the aim was to engage with the state to ensure policy-level changes so that the inequalities of resources could get addressed on a long-term basis.

During a conversation when Dr. Hardy Merriman (President - International Center on Nonviolent Conflict) asked Ramesh Sharma (Ekta Parishad's National Convener) that how he defines his institution, Ramesh said, "Ekta Parishad is a school of thought, not just an organization. If you look at it through the lens of an organization's typical format, you would not be able to understand what it is doing.

You have to look at it as the people's' movement because a lot of activities have evolved in the form of collective efforts by a family. There are various well-grounded ideologies which propel the organization. Ekta Parishad's transformation over the past 20 years has been remarkable, with some changes in the organization's behavior and ideology. Consequently, it is not bound by a constant formal structure, rather it is evolving continuously. In my opinion, Ekta Parishad provides a basic framework to develop your own method of intervention as per the existing sociopolitical context."

*"Ekta Parishad believes that it is extremely important for organizations that are addressing issues of structural violence to have the freedom to design their own interventions. When we consider the linguistic and geopolitical differences of people in a country as diverse as India, we must understand and respect these spaces. This is the reason why addressing structural violence in Assam is very different from tackling it in Kerala. We cannot expect the same approaches in both places."*



Translation: "It is the slogan of every person, Ekta Parishad is ours"

# QUESTIONS

*Do you think your behavior promotes direct violence?*

☐ Strongly Agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly Disagree  
Score   2.5   2   1.5   1   0.5

*Do you think that your behavior promotes indirect violence?*

☐ Strongly Agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly Disagree

*Do you think that you could use your nonviolent language to make people's behavior nonviolent?*

☐ Strongly Agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly Disagree

*Do you believe in inspiring a larger group with your nonviolent behavior?*

☐ Strongly Agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly Disagree

# NONVIOLENCE AS THE WAY OF LIFE



# NONVIOLENCE AS THE WAY OF LIFE

Globally, nonviolence has been observed as primarily a strategic choice. But in the Indian context, the root of nonviolence is believed to be in behavioral transformation. If that does not happen, it may not necessarily translate into organizational behavior. The Sanskrit words *Mansa*, *Vacha*, *Karmana* define consistency in one's thoughts, speech, and deeds. Nonviolence for the Eastern society is a practice in the form of peace-oriented thoughts, words, and deeds. If this transformation takes place in the right direction, only then can we think of an organizational structure.

*Gandhi always advocated that the means are more important than the change itself.*

The means in case of nonviolence have always been personal. Means are not only demonstrations or rallies. The means to nonviolence are purity, stillness, and renunciation; and Ekta Parishad believes that it will come into practice only through behavioral transformation. As stated earlier, Ekta Parishad has been built on the concept of a family. There's a scope for course correction in a family and the corrective measures are not heavily based on punishments. In the same way, punishment mechanism isn't preferred at Ekta Parishad. The reason for this lies in Gandhi's teaching. He used to say that a person should always be ready to recorrect oneself. If there is no space for that, there would be no scope left for personal transformation. Rather than writing off someone who has erred, they should be given ample scope for correcting themselves.

## QUESTIONS

*Do you think that self-discipline is important for nonviolence?*

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree  
Score 2.5 2 1.5 1 0.5

*Do you think that your nonviolent thoughts are a means of change?*

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

*Do you think that your nonviolent language/conversations are a means of change?*

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

*Do you want to inspire others by your own nonviolent actions?*

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

# WHAT DOES NONVIOLENT ACTIVISM LOOK LIKE?



# WHAT DOES NONVIOLENT ACTIVISM LOOK LIKE?

Nonviolent activism in its ideal scenario would transcend the self and translate to collective actions in the society. It is not only restricted to one's actions, but also takes thoughts and actions into its fold and nudges a person to pause and reflect on how nonviolent his or her thoughts and words are in everyday life.

Nonviolent activism is rooted in the ability to introspect. When an activist or any person looks within themselves and begins questioning the norm, that is truly when the journey towards peaceful resistance begins. As sages and meditation experts across the world have already stated, we cannot expect to address any defilement in the outside world without first addressing it within ourselves. For example, a gender rights activist lobbies for equal representation of women at work spaces, but comes home and does nothing and



does nothing to share the load of his partner/spouse in household chores kitchen or child care. The said person may be a wonderful advocate for the cause, but since there has been little internalization and application of the cause in his personal life, that makes his activism an incomplete process. The journey on the path of nonviolent resistance can only begin when a process of introspection begins.

*One of the first steps that nonviolent activists could undertake is to introspect and look at the sources of violence in their own lives.*

## QUESTIONS

*You are sensitive towards others and their issue.*

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree  
Score 2.5 2 1.5 1 0.5

*You would like to be more sensitive towards others and aid them to solve their problems.*

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

*You would like to make the members of your group nonviolent.*

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

*Do you think that a group can be trained to become more sensitive and nonviolent?*

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

# FINDING THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

Every activist experiences the 'moment of truth', the moment in which they realize the existence of a cause which is much greater than their individual existence. It brings along inner introspection and a desire to change the current situation. The key is to find that 'moment of truth' and remember it.

Was there any particular incident that triggered that emotion? Working towards a communal cause also involves a great deal of sacrifices and the strength to execute these sacrifices stems from a preliminary approach to simple living.

A simple lifestyle leads to fewer indecisions and brings clarity of thought. This helps in formulating and strategizing innovative ideas for a nonviolent struggle.

## EXAMPLE



*Gandhi greets supporters in South Africa  
Source: Vice.com*

*On 7th June 1883, Gandhi was traveling to Pretoria, South Africa. A white man disapproved of Gandhi sitting in a first-class compartment even though he had a ticket. Gandhi refused to move to the other compartment and was forcibly thrown out of the train. This small act of civil disobedience made him determined to struggle against the injustice that was being inflicted on thousands of people in South Africa.*

# **NONVIOLENCE AS A WAY OF LIFE v/s A POLITICAL STRATEGY**

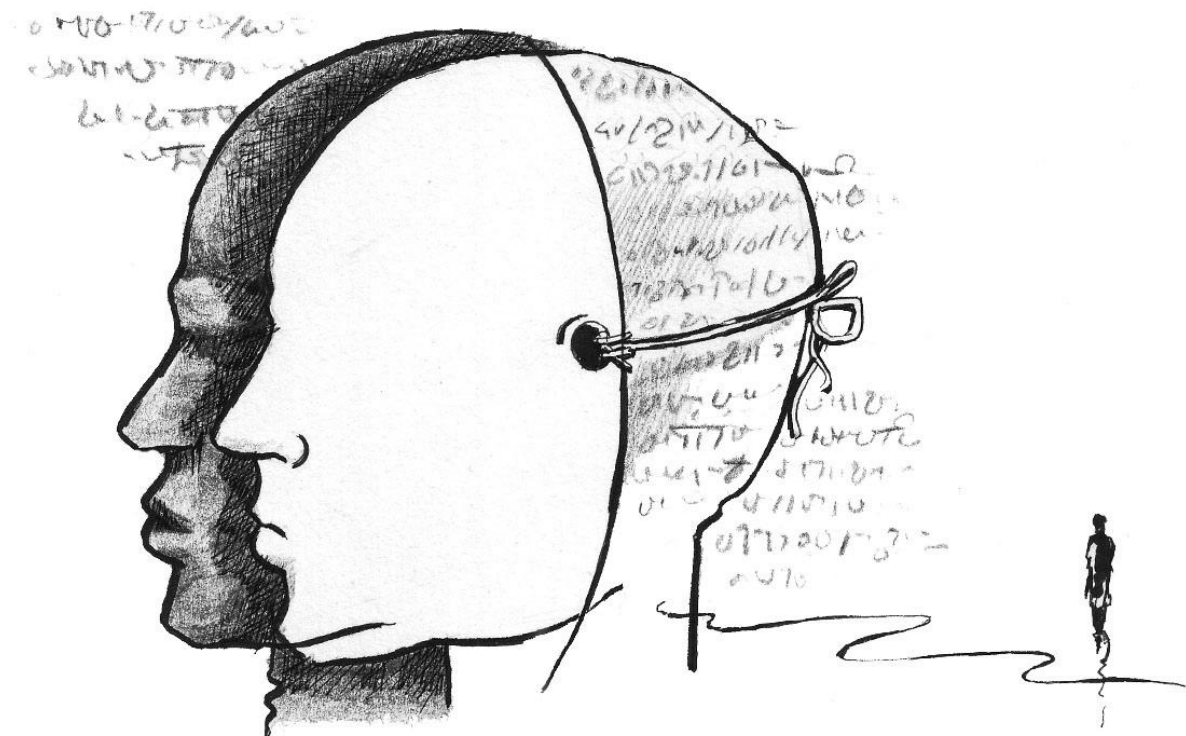
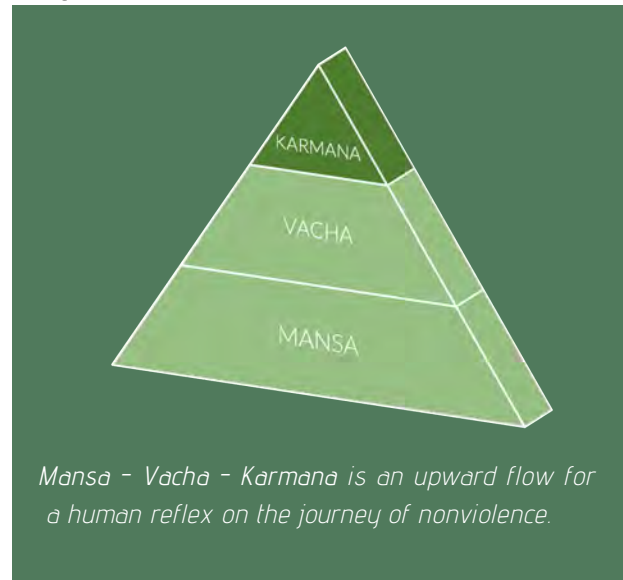


# NONVIOLENCE AS A WAY OF LIFE V/S A POLITICAL STRATEGY

Gandhi always said that whosoever works on the principles of nonviolence is bound to experience a positive change within themselves. The deeper one's understanding of Mansa, Vacha and Karmana and its positive transformation is, the wider will be the influence of one's nonviolent actions. These same principles apply to the formation and proliferation of an organization.

*Nonviolence for us is a practice that begins with purging one's thoughts, followed by speech and finally deeds. If this transformation takes place in the right direction, only then can we think of an organizational structure incorporating nonviolence.*

As discussed earlier, deeds are performed by 'Mansa, Vacha, Karmana', i.e. by mind, speech, and action. Therefore, behavioral transformation is the ultimate objective of nonviolence. It is mostly through the behavioral change that an organization could be expected to metamorphose in the long term.



# EXAMPLES

## ANNA HAZARE- LIVING A NONVIOLENT LIFE

*Born as Kisan Baburao Hazare, Anna Hazare is a well-known social activist in Maharashtra, since the 1990s. He was regularly featured in the local media after he became a leading figure by bringing about social changes in Ralegan Siddhi. Recently, he led India's largest campaigns against corruption in politics, titled 'India Against Corruption', in order to make the government enact the 'Jan Lokpal Bill' (Citizen's Ombudsman Bill). The change began when he took voluntary retirement from the Indian Army in 1978 — where he worked as a driver — and returned to his village. During his career in the army, Hazare was posted at several locations. In his village Ralegan Siddhi, he prefers living in a temple. He himself had taken the initiative to build the temple Yadvababa Mandir, which has been the center of Anna's movement for three decades. Hazare, while speaking to News18, declared: "Mi Fakir Manus — I'm a fakir with no ambitions or expectations. My sole aim in life is to serve the nation selflessly." With barely any personal possessions to his name, Anna Hazare is one of the examples of nonviolent activists who have chosen to live a simple life and serve various social causes.*



## MAHATMA GANDHI AND NONVIOLENT ACTIVISM

*After growing up in India and studying and practicing law in South Africa, Gandhi returned to India and began the process of not only questioning the colonial powers that he once idolized, but also started introspecting which led him to renounce materialistic desires.*

*While renouncing the fruits of capitalism is not a prerequisite for becoming a nonviolent activist, it is evident from Mahatma Gandhi's life that one cannot continue to partake in a system that encourages exploitation while trying to change it.*



# HOW DO I AMPLIFY NONVIOLENT ACTIONS FROM AN INDIVIDUAL TO AN ORGANIZATION?



# HOW DO I AMPLIFY NONVIOLENT ACTIONS FROM AN INDIVIDUAL TO AN ORGANIZATION?

The transformative process of nonviolence begins within the individual and progresses to a larger group of people. It is important to channelize nonviolence within the movement. Commonly, it is seen that among the organizations that address structural violence (poverty, injustice, oppression, corruption, etc.) nonviolent strategies bear more success. That is exactly why nonviolence is an important discipline for organizations and collective movements.

While this progression from an individual to the group can take many routes and forms, Ekta Parishad has over the years developed a system by which a paradigm shift takes place. The models rest on three key elements which are interconnected. Building a democratic culture helps develop leadership. This leadership further builds campaigns that address larger structural and political issues.

## BUILDING DEMOCRACY:

The behavioral transformation that takes place within an individual should naturally progress to a group. When it doesn't, one can observe that it is mostly due to the lack of democratic processes within the organization. In a democratic model, all members involved in activism are at a similar level. If democracy is not set as the founding stone of an organization, one cannot sustain activism in the long term. A decentralized and participatory self-governance system is more sustainable, viable, practical, and democratic than a centralized system.

The meaning of democracy in movements is collective decision-making and efforts to bring those decisions to fruition. The fundamental principle of Ekta Parishad is that decisions must be collective and based on the democratic methods. This does not leave room for personal biases.

*This also highlights another key principle of Ekta Parishad - to never assume anyone as an 'Enemy'. An opponent is never considered an enemy, in fact, they might become your supporters in future.*



IMAGE A

The locus of decision-making processes (regarding campaign, constructive work, and dialogue) in Ekta Parishad operates as a four-tier system.

**(1) Grassroots (District) Actions:** Every decision-making process begins with the participation of village units (members). Grassroots actions depend on the horizontal spread of issues/ focus. These processes of consultative meetings and decisions expand up to the district level and not beyond it. In the Indian context, districts are recognized as the basic functional units for political and administrative decisions. The operational unit for these decisions is the District Committee of Ekta Parishad, nominated by its members who belong to that particular district. For example, if there are a significant number of land disputes which have not been properly addressed by the district administration, members of Ekta Parishad plan mass action or dialogues or file legal petitions, etc., at the district-level.

**(2) State Actions:** Based on the request/ feedback/ suggestions/ advice of the cluster of district units in a particular state, consultative meetings are organized to discuss and take actions at the state-level. In the Indian context, states are the units of political, legal, institutional, and policy-based decisions for the people. The operational unit for these decisions is the State Committee of Ekta Parishad, which consists of two nominated members from each district of that particular state. For example, if the land laws related to the distribution of land to the landless/ homeless are not properly implemented across the various districts in any state, then the State Committee (based on the suggestions of the District Committees) designs State Actions for that particular State.

**(3) National Actions:** The process starts with consultative meetings with the various/ concerned state units of Ekta Parishad,

based on a common/ similar proposal regarding issues which politically connect everyone. The operational unit for these decisions is the National Committee of Ekta Parishad, constituted by the nominated members of all the State Committees of the organization. For example, mining or violation of Forest Laws causes serious crisis for the people in various states across India and need immediate reconsideration. These issues are administered by the Central Government. When the need for intervention arises, the National Committee members design a campaign and an advocacy plan based on the proposals of the State Committees, in order to influence the Government.

**(4) Urgent Action/ Response:** In specific incidences, the National and State Committees together (called the General Assembly of Ekta Parishad) consult and take decisions, and share those further with the district committees. Some of the areas where members of Ekta Parishad's General Assembly take decisions for urgent actions and responses include relief operations during natural calamities, collaborative national actions with like-minded organizations, etc.

The four-tier set-up discussed above shows that nonviolence is in fact the backbone of democracy. When we believe that the role of an organization or movement is to strengthen democracy in the society, democratic practices must begin within the organization. Only then can we safeguard the democratic principles of our society. It is these beliefs that strengthen democracy within the movements as well.

# QUESTIONS

*Do you use democratic methods/behavior during the formation of groups/organizations?*

☐ Strongly Agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly Disagree  
Score   2.5   2   1.5   1   0.5

*Do you develop local leadership for building groups/federations?*

☐ Strongly Agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly Disagree

*Do you think that local/native leadership can make the movement more effective?*

☐ Strongly Agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly Disagree

*Do you abandon those who do not agree with your way of group/federation building?*

☐ Strongly Agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly Disagree



## BUILDING LEADERSHIP:

*Traditionally, the power structures of society have made us believe that urban people are better at solving problems, even when those problems have no role to play in their own lives. But, that's not true. The issues being faced by the rural population can be solved most effectively by the people who are a part of the same or similar social, economic, and political backgrounds, and hence have a deep understanding of issues. Naturally, they can help find comprehensive solutions to rural problems.*

As such, only a few organizations realize the power of the poor which Gandhi often pointed out.

Ekta Parishad has held a strong belief that a bottom-up structure of leadership works best. It is important because the structural changes start at the village-level. Therefore, it is necessary that people at the lowest level of the power structure should be allowed to take positions of leadership. It helps them recognize their own strengths and start their own struggles. In the process of leadership development, many organizations provide training in leadership. At Ekta Parishad, rather than calling it training, it is called conducting camps of realization. Approximately 80-100 rural people are invited to participate in activities meant to make them realize their potential at the personal level.

For example, the three-day leadership realization camps are conducted in a village, and with minimum resources. Villagers themselves nominate the people who would participate in such camps. No blackboard, LCD projector, etc., are used to impart this training. Instead, participants are encouraged to engage in open and healthy conversations. It is not a capacity-building exercise, but a process of collective realization.

## Modus Operandi of Realization Camps

The basic framework for these camps comprises three main steps.

**Day 1, Collective Realization** - Participants talk among each other, discuss reasons for marginalization, poverty, and rootlessness. A very simple and grounded analysis emerges from this exercise. The outcomes of these discussions will vary from state to state. For example, reasons for marginalization, poverty, and rootlessness in the northeastern state of Manipur will be different from those in the central state of Chhattisgarh. Everyone shares thoughts and experiences which explain their reasons of becoming 'have-nots'. While moving from personal to political, reasons that led to deprivation are identified, discussed, and analyzed, and that takes the shape of collective realization.

**Day 2, Collective Expression** - The second day aims at using dialogue as the means of expression and how can it play a larger part in the journey to nonviolence. Participants reflect upon and try to answer questions on the level of dialogues in different personal and political situations. Besides, they also understand who are active and passive supporters and opponents. Ways to convert opponents to passive supporters and later to active supporters are also discussed.

**Day 3, Collective Action** - On the last day, participants explore the possibilities where collective actions can be taken. Further, a futuristic approach is followed and long-term action plans for the coming 6-12 months are visualized and discussed. Actions need not be campaigns at all times.

After 3 days, 50-100 people are enabled to realize their capacities and make their plans.

# QUESTIONS

*Do you believe that the leadership by local/native people is the foundation for bringing a change?*

☐ Strongly Agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly Disagree  
Score   2.5   2   1.5   1   0.5

*Do you believe that people can realize their potential better through group discussions?*

☐ Strongly Agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly Disagree

*Do you believe that personal conversations can strengthen the democratic processes?*

☐ Strongly Agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly Disagree

*Do you believe that democratic processes/behavior is important for any movement?*

☐ Strongly Agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly Disagree

## BUILDING CAMPAIGNS:

It is important to note that the size and level of our campaigns must grow incrementally in terms of impact and the number of participants. Besides, there must be efforts to solve issues of the village in the village itself. Ekta Parishad has always given the priority to local campaigns. Between 1995 and 2005, multiple statewide and districtwide campaigns were undertaken. When the time came to address structural issues, that is when the 2007 campaign was conceived as the national campaign. The 2007 campaign was a foot march by 25,000 people and an alliance of 500 organizations. When the 2012 campaign was being planned, it was thought that there should be a bigger action, and it should grow fourfold. So 100,000 people would walk and 2000 organizations would be associated with the campaign. It is important to follow the ladder approach to increase the magnitude of the campaign in terms of numbers. The journey from 2007 to 2012 was to grow fourfold.

One way to associate with 2000 organizations would've been to reach out to them, and obtain in principle solidarity. Another way was to invite representatives of 2000 organizations and have a discussion with them. Ekta Parishad decided to undertake a completely different approach and decided to start a pan-India journey called the Jan Samvad Yatra. The plan was to visit at least 350 districts from 24 states, over a period of 365 days. Every day, 4-5 organizations would be covered through various communication methods such as field trips, press conferences, meetings, and discussions. The members of Ekta Parishad would listen to the stories of people's struggles, write about them, ask them for support, and then move forward. Another objective was to make them aware of the larger objectives of the Jan Satyagraha campaign. In this

Yatra, a total of 80,000 kilometers were covered in a year. The organizations not only hosted this journey, but also donated more than 5 million (INR). Soil was also collected from all the villages that Ekta Parishad had visited. This initiative helped people connect with the direction of the campaign at the three levels— with the cause itself, ideologically, and emotionally. This connection is evident from the fact that the people donated money, time, and even soil from their villages. All of this helped build the campaign. The success of these efforts brought thousands of organizations and one lakh people together on 2nd October 2012, to march for the Land rights.

*Ladder approach- An important approach in building campaigns, it means that every campaign is a step in the ladder, taking us further than where we were earlier.*

The next steps of the campaign are decided on the basis of the capacity and preparation of the movement from time to time. It should also be noted that the efficacy of a 1-day demonstration is over as these are not enough to break the status quo. Such 1-day demonstrations are in fact supported by the government in terms of security, drinking water, or medical support.

Ekta Parishad has understood the nuances of building a successful campaign by organizing multiple long foot marches over a period of 20 years. One of the positive aspects of a foot march is that it takes minimal resources and can be held over a long distance and a period of time, thus enabling networking with many more organizations. Another important advantage is the flexibility and scope to adapt the march according to the situation in the coming days.

It is prudent to have multiple ground actions in a campaign. If there is only one centralized action, then it alone cannot get diverse attention. In campaigns, it is necessary to respect diversity. Are those people who are not a part of our campaign, reacting/interacting with the campaign? This is significant because they help expand the base of the campaign, Let us look at Anna Hazare's campaign as an example. He decided to fast for the Citizen Ombudsman Bill. He did not tell people to begin a

marcha in respective regions. In fact, there was hardly any logical framework or conscious thinking, but there was space for spontaneous action. Smaller actions in orbits along with a larger action have their own importance.

Last but not the least, make sure that the campaign concludes on a positive note—a good pilot knows takeoff as well as landing. Ensuring a positive end to a campaign is important as the subsequent action picks up where the earlier one ends.

## QUESTIONS

*Do you believe that the Satyagraha/nonviolent movement should be representative?*

☐ Strongly Agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly Disagree  
Score   2.5   2   1.5   1   0.5

*Do you believe that collective work/movements are a continuous process to change systems?*

☐ Strongly Agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly Disagree

*Do you believe that the support of other movements strengthens your movement?*

☐ Strongly Agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly Disagree

*Do you believe that a movement must conclude on a positive note/action/message?*

☐ Strongly Agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly Disagree

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IMAGE A: Members of the Ekta Mahila Manch led the demands for a Universal Forest Right Acts in 2007

# WHAT ARE THE TENETS OF NONVIOLENT STRUGGLE?



# WHAT ARE THE TENETS OF NONVIOLENT STRUGGLE?

Nonviolent struggle is rooted in the constitutional beliefs and the respect towards the state and its laws. Even when one is challenging the implementation of certain laws or policies, at the basic level, it is essential for each citizen to adhere to the common values enshrined in the constitution. The struggle to bring a change in the policy has to align with existing policies and the legal and social framework of the time.

Further, in some specific cases when the laws or policy or intentions of the State are against the constitutional values, Ekta Parishad follows the path of civil disobedience on many occasions. The nonviolent land occupation movement in the 90s is the classic example of disobedience of Forest & Land Laws at that time. Thanks to the mass action (Janadesh) of 2007, this issue was taken to the negotiation table and resulted in the announcement of the Forest Rights Act. Interestingly, land occupation is considered as the prime criterion for

defining the eligibility for land allotment to the rights holders. The nonviolent struggle must manifest in the form of a direct nonviolent action, i.e. the resistance should be backed by noticeable dissent.

The nonviolent direct action ideally becomes a harbinger of transformative energy. The social action takes such a form that thousands, if not millions of people come out in its support. Ekta Parishad's Janadesh, 2007, which has been discussed earlier, is one such example of this transformative energy. Janadesh was a national campaign on land rights that represented people from multiple Indian states. The campaign was launched in 2005 and by 2007 it culminated into a 350-kilometer long foot march by 25,000 people in central India. After the disciplined nonviolent foot march reached Delhi, 25,000 protesters were locked in the ground in the name of law and order. The protesters challenged the government saying that if the government did not partake in a nonviolent dialogue, they would not leave their ground, even if it meant that they had to go without food or water. The national media picked up this message and broadcasted it widely. The moral and ethical pressure on the police administration and the support of media ensured that the government agreed to all the demands of the protesters.



IMAGE A

Indeed, the strength of a nonviolent action enabled the passive supporters to come out and be the vocal advocates. For example, when Ekta Parishad organized the Jan Andolan 2018, a foot march by 25,000 people, 55% of the foot marchers were

women from the 12 states of India. The Ekta Mahila Manch played a leadership role not only in the planning and implementation but also during the negotiations with the government and the political leaders.

## EXAMPLES

1. *An example of this would be the protest at the Fort Lauderdale in Florida, by the anti-gun violence group 'Never Again MSD,' after the gun violence in February 2018 at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. This was followed by thousands of students and teachers walking out of their classrooms on Wednesday, March 14, as part of the #Enough! National School Walkout to raise awareness about the issues of school safety and the impact of gun violence. The nationwide march, organized by the Women's March Youth Empower lasted 17 minutes and represented each of the victims of shooting at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. Students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas were, of course, some of the most prominent participants.*



Source: GQ.com  
IMAGE B

2. *Ekta Parishad's Janadesh, 2007, was a national campaign on land rights that represented people from multiple states in India. Launched in 2005, it culminated into a full-fledged nonviolent action by 2007 when 25,000 marched and covered 350 kms in central India. Most of the foot marchers belonged to the Dalit and Adivasi communities who have been marginalized historically and have had high percentages of landlessness. The struggle not only involved this foot march but also other forms of nonviolent resistance such as sit-in protests, road blockades, and Gheraos (preventing unjust incidents from taking place by encircling people who wield power).*



IMAGE C

# QUESTIONS

*Do you organize your protests according to the constitutional framework of your nation/region?*

☐ Strongly Agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly Disagree  
Score   2.5   2   1.5   1   0.5

*Does your non-violent struggle have a strategy/plan for direct actions? Example: protests, demonstrations, etc.*

☐ Strongly Agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly Disagree

*Does your nonviolent struggle have the strength in terms of numbers to influence the concerned authorities?*

☐ Strongly Agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly Disagree

*Is your struggle inclusive as well as diverse with respect to the demography of the protesters?*

☐ Strongly Agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly Disagree

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IMAGE A: Members of the Ekta Mahila Manch at the forefront of Janandolan, 2018, in Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh

IMAGE B: American Students led political actions at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, Florida

IMAGE C: Participants at the Janadesh protest march in 2007 from Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, to New Delhi

# THE TRIFECTA OF INSTITUTIONALIZED NONVIOLENT ACTIVISM



# THE TRIFECTA OF THE INSTITUTIONALIZED NONVIOLENT ACTIVISM

Ekta Parishad has always emphasized upon Sangharsh (Struggle), Samvaad (Dialogue), and Rachna (Constructive action) as the three critical steps to amplify the impact of nonviolent actions from individuals to organizations.

## 1. SANGHARSH - STRUGGLE

The physical violence that we see in our society is just the tip of the iceberg. In such cases, it becomes crucial to observe the underlying violence that is not apparent, but is the root cause of the structural violence. Often, the visible forms of violence are but a small fraction of the structural violence, which is mostly invisible. There needs to be a deeper deliberation on this during the nonviolent movements.

It is extremely important to sit and engage in a dialogue with the younger people to clarify their understanding of the politics and encourage them to think about ways to make our response/reaction more humane and more democratic in the present times.

Are we engaging with the passive supporters of the cause, or people from the area, or active supporters of the cause, or all of them? These are some of the questions that need to be reflected upon while slowly engaging people in the process of dialogue. This could be a time-taking exercise, but there is no substitute for this.

The journey of a nonviolent struggle should gradually move from an individual to a group. When one internalizes the need for a concerted nonviolent action to address an issue, it is but natural to involve more people with similar ideologies in this process. Therefore, it is a natural progression of nonviolent resistance to undergo amplification. The nature of a nonviolent struggle is such that more people engage with it if it is true in intent and form and addresses issues that have a wider ramification.

*Sangharsh is impactful when there is critical mass of people who undertake this collectively.*

As stated by Erica Chenoweth, a political scientist at the Harvard University, it takes around 3.5% of the total population to participate actively in the protests to ensure serious political change. Chenoweth argues that nonviolent campaigns are more likely to succeed because they can recruit many more participants from a much broader demographic, which can cause severe disruption that paralyzes normal urban life and the functioning of society. In fact, of the 25 largest campaigns that they studied, 20 were nonviolent, and 14 of these were outright successes. Overall, the nonviolent campaigns attracted approximately four times the number of participants (200,000) who get involved in an average violent campaign.

# EXAMPLE

## THE NONVIOLENT STRUGGLE AGAINST INDIA'S NATIONAL THERMAL POWER CORPORATION

*Picture this—a group of 300 women were sitting in protest against the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) in Badka Gaon, Hazaribagh, in the Eastern state of Jharkhand. The NTPC had been trying to obtain the lands of farmers in the area since the last 14 years, and the resistance from the community had always been nonviolent. But on the fateful day of 4th October 2016, the police opened fire and killed four innocent civilians. While the eventual decision did not work out in favor of the community, the act of nonviolently objecting to the atrocities of the government and the police definitely swayed people's opinion in favor of the peaceful protestors.*



*Pictures from Badkaqaon, Jharkhand (1) showing the villagers conducting a meeting, (2) a woman who suffered police atrocity and (3) the mining operations that began without people's consent*

# QUESTIONS

*Do you believe that misgovernance deepens the roots of violence?*

☐ Strongly Agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly Disagree  
Score   2.5   2   1.5   1   0.5

*Do you believe that a disciplined nonviolent struggle is necessary for a lawful system?*

☐ Strongly Agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly Disagree

*Do you believe dialogue with people affected by acute violence is a medium to obtain solutions?*

☐ Strongly Agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly Disagree

*Do you believe that there is a role for unseen supporters in a nonviolent struggle?*

☐ Strongly Agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly Disagree

## 2. SAMVAD - DIALOGUE

The second and probably the most important pillar of nonviolent activism is dialogue. Before 1999, the falsely perceived image of Ekta Parishad was that of an anti-establishment or an anti-state organization. But, in the midst of extremely strong reactions, Ekta Parishad still decided to organize a 3000-km long foot march within a span of 194 days. The activists were harassed, false cases were filed against them, but Ekta Parishad persisted and did not give up on two aspects of their demand. One, that the indigenous communities (Adivasis) must get their lands back from the government and second, the strong belief in the direct nonviolent action. At the same time, the organization was open to dialogue, even though the government thought of Ekta Parishad as being anti state. As the march was still continuing and multiple rounds of dialogue were being held, the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh came on the stage in one of the Ekta Parishad's event, agreed to all demands, and initiated land reforms process which resulted in return of land to the hundreds of thousands of landless poor people.

*When a movement is working against structural violence, it is important to note that an agreement between the protesters and the government does not indicate the end of protests. In fact, an agreement is the next step of the campaign.*

The process of dialogue also assures the opponents that they won't be harmed, either physically or mentally, during this process; and that the dialogue will in fact

reduce violence, not exacerbate it.

During the Janadesh March in 2007, Ekta Parishad clearly told the government that the oppression and violence against Adivasis would only end when the rights to water, forest, and land would be handed over to them; and Forest Rights Act must be implemented immediately to achieve this. As per the conversation between Ekta Parishad and the Government of India, an agreement was reached and the Forest Rights Act was implemented. On-ground analysis suggests that this has helped reduce violence and oppression to some extent.

### DIALOGUE WITH ONESELF

The first and important step in the process of dialogue is to conduct a dialogue with oneself. As we have discussed in the chapters above, the process of nonviolence begins when deliberation is undertaken within one's own mind. Until and unless there is an introspection and a conversation with oneself about the need to walk on the path of non-violent activism, one cannot begin the process towards change. This is the reason why the first step under Samvad is also the most critical step.

Through the examples of multiple Ekta Parishad workers, it has been observed that those activists who undertake this significant first step are not only able to carry out their nonviolent activism for much longer, but are also able to transition the nonviolence into larger groups relatively easily. It must also be noted that dialogue with oneself is a continuous and ongoing process. It is not merely an activity that is to be conducted once a year or once in a few years. The qualities of a good nonviolent activist and leader mean that one is constantly introspective and follows a healthy process of dialogue within one's own mind.



## DIALOGUE WITH LIKE-MINDED INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS

As seen earlier, we understand that the transformative energy of nonviolent social action naturally creates alliances and partnerships with the like-minded people and organizations. It is through this route that our collective power to bargain increases while talking to those who are not aligned with the movement.

Dialogue with activists and other social organizations is a key strength of Ekta Parishad. For example, during the Jan Andolan 2018, national as well as regional organizations stood alongside and demanded land reforms from the ruling government. National organization such as the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), Mazdoor Kisan Sakti Sangathan (MKSS), National Campaign on Dalit and Human Rights (NCDHR), Tarun Bharat Sangh, etc., came together for calling on the governments to introduce land reforms. The 25,000 foot marchers came from 12 states of India who belonged to at least 100 distinct communities. This is the result of an ongoing dialogue.

## DIALOGUE WITH THE POLICYMAKERS/GOVERNMENT/ AUTHORITIES

Dialogue with the government is a parallel process in any nonviolent social action.

*It has always been the belief and experience of Ekta Parishad that the dialogue is a 'win-some lose-some' process. The nature of dialogue is to further the conversation and not necessarily have all the demands met in the first attempt itself.*

Often, chosen representatives act as mediators and conduct simultaneous dialogue in the form of negotiations with the government as well as the protesters. Thus, the result is mostly incremental and not fundamental.

The process has to be repeated several times to reach a definitive solution that is acceptable to the various parties involved.

It is important to identify the members who will not only engage in dialogue, but also understand and imbibe the the ideals of the movement.



IMAGE A

The key characteristics of a good negotiator are empathy, historical understanding of the movement, ability to remain calm in difficult situations, and the ability to garner and maintain the faith of the people in the movement. The leader of the movement may not always be the best negotiator, as she/he may be too emotionally involved in the cause.

It is prudent to engage in a far-reaching dialogue process. With the UN's sustainable development goals, even the most local movements can have a global resonance. Therefore, it makes sense to reach out to like-minded individuals and organizations that can support and strengthen our voices. The International Land Coalition and the United Nations agencies have been a big support for Ekta Parishad's nonviolent social actions.



IMAGE B

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IMAGE A: Dr. Rajendra Singh, also called Water-Man of India, addressing 25,000 foot-marchers, Oct 2018

IMAGE B: Rajgopal PV and Ran Singh of EP with the Union Minister (Government of India)

## EXAMPLE

On 26th April 2019, Waorani men and women (members of an indigenous community in a remote part of the Ecuadorian Amazon) marched triumphantly through the streets of Puyo, Ecuador, to celebrate a new court ruling. It stated that the Ecuadorian government could not, as it had planned, auction off their land for oil exploration without the consent of the Waorani people. The path to the verdict had not been easy. In March, a group of Waorani women shut down a hearing with a song, protesting the conditions under which the case was being tried; they objected to it being held in Puyo, far from the Waorani villages, and in the absence of a court-certified translator. Many of the Waorani representatives wore traditional dresses in court and had red bars painted across their cheekbones and brows. Singing a song about their traditional role as protectors of the forest, they drowned out the judge and lawyers until the judge finally suspended the hearing.



Waorani men and women marched triumphantly on 26th April 2019 through the streets of Puyo, Ecuador, to celebrate a new court ruling that prohibited oil exploration in their land.

Source: Independent Media Institute



IMAGE C

## DIALOGUE WITH THE GENERAL PUBLIC CAN EITHER BE ON-GROUND AND/OR ONLINE

At a time when information is misrepresented and misunderstood so much, it is imperative that a concerted dialogue is undertaken with sections of the general public to make them align with the cause. Social mediums have proved to be extremely powerful tools for not only informing people but also organizing mass social actions. For example, during the Jan Andolan foot march by 25,000 people in October 2018, Ekta Parishad actively engaged with different media organizations and social groups on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, with the help of volunteers of Adivasi Lives Matter and Ansh Happiness Society. In a period of 3 weeks, over 50 social media posts were shared which reached out to more than 500,000 people.

The traditional ways of conveying information and communication, especially in rural India, have always been adopted

for organizing mass actions led by Ekta Parishad.

*Be it local music or street plays or weekly markets, taking the message out to the people who are not directly involved in the movement, is an integral part of building public pressure on the government.*



IMAGE D

IMAGE C: Ekta Parishad's national president Ransinghji leads a foot march for land rights with villagers.

IMAGE D: The Social Media & Communications Volunteers who managed media for "Jan Andolan 2018".

# QUESTIONS

*Do you believe that Dialogue is an effective medium to further the nonviolent struggles?*

☐ Strongly Agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly Disagree  
Score   2.5   2   1.5   1   0.5

*Do you believe that temporary solutions achieved through dialogues are a success of the dialogue process?*

☐ Strongly Agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly Disagree

*Do you believe that dialogue is the only way to obtain solutions during a struggle?*

☐ Strongly Agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly Disagree

*Do you think that a negotiator is crucial to reach the logical end of a dialogue process?*

☐ Strongly Agree   ☐ Agree   ☐ Neutral   ☐ Disagree   ☐ Strongly Disagree

### 3. RACHNA - CONSTRUCTIVE ACTIONS

Aimed at creating a mechanism for collective ownership, this step is further divided into three levels.

#### MEMBERSHIP

People are asked to become members not because we want money, but to create a process of collective ownership. Each member gives Rs. 10. This equal contribution and thought creates a sense of collective ownership which allows each person to look at himself/herself as an equal in the organization. One village unit comprises at least 20 families. These units decide the development plans for the community.

#### COLLECTIVE CONTRIBUTION

*Other than taking the membership, people also donate voluntarily to Gram Kosh or the village fund. This is a collective resource-building process which brings everyone together.*

This is also a great step towards self-sufficiency and self-reliance. A financial resource is built collectively to ensure that, as far as possible, the needs of the village and the villagers are met without having to seek help from external sources. At present, Ekta Parishad has mobilized about 11,000 village funds and grain banks across India.

#### COLLECTIVE REALIZATION/SHRAMDAAN

We must collectively do something that serves the needs of society and adds value to people's lives.

But, that does not mean people are asked to build roads or erect electricity poles. That is the role of a welfare state. However, at the community-level, we can make similar efforts to make ponds, irrigation channels, brick kilns, plant trees, and do collective farming. All these initiatives help conserve cultural aspects of the community, and are meant to substitute the responsibilities of the state.

In this entire scenario of Rachna (creation), one looks beyond self-regard. Such initiatives interconnect many villages. For example, planting trees and making water canals. Similarly, tree plantation also benefits the people of more than one village.

So, it can be concluded that constructive action is an important pillar of Ekta Parishad's model of nonviolent activism. Let's understand the reasons why constructive action is so important.

- To provide basic utilities to the people in order to strengthen their personal lives as well as those of their communities.
- To generate gainful employment among the community members, thereby contributing positively to their personal resources.
- To demonstrate to the community as well as to the government that nonviolent activism is indeed an extremely powerful force for collaborative action.

# EXAMPLE

In Shyampura village of Shivpuri district in Madhya Pradesh, a community of 200 indigenous people (Seharia Adivasis) participated in Shramdaan (voluntary action) for 30 days and reconstructed the two small dams to ensure that they can cultivate crops even after the monsoons are over. The local government realized what was missing and also appreciated their efforts. That is not all, the government was also more receptive when the community then brought up the topic of their land rights. Similarly, in the north-eastern state of Assam (Tinsukia) as well as the East Indian state of Odisha (Kalahandi), indigenous communities are engaging in natural organic farming and learning to build better value chains for their farm produce.



*Villagers from Shyampura village of Shivpuri district, Madhya Pradesh, during the Shramdaan (voluntary action) to revive the shared source of water for the village.*

## QUESTIONS

*Do you believe that a membership-based collective model is important for collective responsibility?*

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree  
Score 2.5 2 1.5 1 0.5

*Do you believe that the donation/contribution of one's own time and money is a fundamental requirement for a collective?*

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

*Do you believe that it is important for everyone to come together and perform constructive action for the formation of a collective?*

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

*Do you believe that it is more effective to depend on one's own means/resources as compared to external resources?*

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

# THE WAY FORWARD



# THE WAY FORWARD

An important purpose of this manual is to enable the intended readers to undergo self-assessment and introspection. It is meant to help the reader understand the authenticity and depth of one's own nonviolent activism.

At the end of each chapter, there are questions that readers must answer to understand their level of clarity on the concepts and subsequent actions. Please note that the questions would be able to serve as a self-assessment tool only when the reader answers them honestly.

*Finally, please congratulate yourself even if you have a low score. Let this lower score encourage you to further your commitment to progress on the path of nonviolent activism. Also, let a higher score reaffirm your commitment towards nonviolent activism and make you more accountable to its practice.*

Kindly note that this self-assessment sheet is merely indicative of your understanding of the concepts and practice of nonviolent activism. Please take this as a guide and not as a definite assessment of your progress on the path of nonviolent activism. It is advisable that the reader answers these questionnaires once every six months or not less than once a year, so as to monitor their own development towards becoming a nonviolent activist.

## WHY 'SELF-ASSESSMENT' IS NEEDED?

Once Mahatma Gandhi said that 'self assessment' is a prerequisite for 'self-correction' and self-correction is the lifelong journey of a 'Satyagrahi' (an activist who fights for the 'truth and justice'). Self-assessment is a way to mirror yourself and reflect on who you are. Self-correction is the advancement of self-assessment—a journey towards 'Being the Change'.

On this long journey, thousands of members, and well-wishers of Ekta Parishad are constantly trying to build a world free from hunger, injustices, and fear. They are promoting a school of nonviolent 'thoughts and actions' which have already changed the lives of thousands of people across the world. Besides, the organization also emphasizes that people who are passionate about social causes, have a strong faith in humanity, and respect nature should take self-assessment and self-correction as the benchmarks to keep improving themselves and make this world a better, a more humane place.

## NONVIOLENCE: SCORE YOURSELF

Dimension	Score Range			
	7-5-10	5-6-7-4	3-5-5-5	<3-5

### MANSA (Non-Violence by Thoughts)

Non-Violence as a way of Life				
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What does Non-Violent Activism look like?				
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### VACHA (Non-Violence by Words)

Struggle: Sangharsh				
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Dialogue: Samvad				
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Construction: Rachana				
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### KARMANA (Non-Violence by Deeds)

Non-Violence as a way of Life V/s A Political Strategy				
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Building Democracy				
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Building Leadership				
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Building Campaign				
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What are the Tenets of Non-Violent Struggle?				
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{UNIT SCORE = 0.5}

## NONVIOLENCE: ASSESS YOURSELF

Score Range	What You Are	What Need to Be
75-100	Matured Thinking and Act	Inspire and Motivate Others for the Organizations
56-74	Advanced Thinking and Act	Enhance Group Practices of Nonviolent Action
35-55	Progressive Thinking and Act	Improve Practices of Nonviolence for Own
<35	Average Thinking and Act	Enhanced Answerability to Self

