

1960s, when India, to enhance economic development, started to cut trees to export the wood and earn foreign exchange. As a consequence, the hill soil washed away, causing landslides, floods and silting in the rivers below the hills. Crops and houses too were destroyed, and women had to slog even more for their fuel, fodder and water. All in all, it was the women who were the main victims of India's deforestation policies.

Against these harmful deforestation policies a movement called Chipko was born. "Chipko" in Hindi means to cling, reflecting the protesters' main technique of throwing their arms around the tree trunks marked to be cut, and refusing to move. In a remote hill town a contractor had been given the right by the state to fell 3000 trees for a sporting goods store. The area was already becoming barren. The women of the village decided to fight against this. When the woodcutters were scheduled to arrive, the men were lured away from the village leaving the women at home, busy with household work. As soon as the woodcutters appeared, the alarm was sounded and the village's female leader, a widow in her 50s, collected 27 women and rushed to the forest. The women pleaded with the woodcutter calling the forest their "maternal home" and explaining the consequences of felling trees. The woodcutters shouted at and abused the women and threatened them with guns. The women in turn threatened to hug the marked trees and die with them. It worked! The frightened labourers left and the contractor backed off. In 1974, women in a nearby area used the same tree-hugging technique in order to protest against the clearing of their forestlands.

Similarly, in your community you may come across several issues that require to be addressed. For example, the anganwadi is not functioning well; children and women are not receiving their entitlement of supplementary food; the midday meal provided is not adequate or cooked properly. It could be that widow pension is not being received in spite of all the required formalities being completed by the widows of the village. So, to bring change in such situations, some collective action is required.

However, activism or protest is not the first step in any process towards change. First, one needs to understand the situation and find out if things can be changed through simply drawing the attention of the authorities *through* letters, appeals or direct dialogue.

For instance, you can meet someone of importance concerning the issue, like the Sarpanch, the ANM, the schoolteacher, the Talati and discuss the matter in order to resolve it.

Activism may not always be the best method of changing the world but it can be quite useful under the right circumstances. It gives voice to a cause.

Activism is particularly useful/effective when you have many people who are affected with the same issues and the situation needs to be changed. If you