Tosa Maidan is a high plateau (a 'marg' as in 'Gulmarg') and a splendid meadow in Budgam district of Jammu and Kashmir. It falls in the Sukhnag range of Pir Panchal range of the Himalayan Mountains and lies at an altitude of 10,500 feet above mean sea level. It is located about 51 kilometres away from the soul of the valley - Lalchowk, Jammu & Kashmir. Background Tosa Maidan has served as grazing land for the villagers' livestock over centuries. However, in the year 1964, it was leased to troops of the Indian Army as a firing range for conducting artillery training. The military exercise came at a huge human and environmental cost. The firing range became a death trap for the cattle grazing communities such as Gujjars and Bakkarwals, Chopans and other rural folks whose livelihoods are dependent on the rich ecology.

Obviously, it worried the local residents and they approached the State government for relief. Every time they did, the government would turn down their request to shift this firing range out of the area. So people had lost hope and were accepting every mishap as their destiny. Tosa Maidan Bachav Front (TBF) and liberation struggle
The resolution reads by promoting the CDART in Tosa Maidan, the deserved community will have control over its own natural resources; the benefits of the said tourism model in Tosa Maidan will reach all strata of the suffering communities. The Panchayats unanimously inked the declaration of promoting Tosa Maidan on CDART basis, yet again. When approached, an initial approval to the proposed model was given by Administration in Governor rule, the additional advocacy by SRDE & TBF, and on 29-May-2016, Chief Minister of the State declared Tosa Maidan as a tourist destination to be developed on Community-driven Adventure and Rural Tourism basis - hence the proposed concept was officially accepted as well as adopted.

Mobilization and Resistance and Demonstrations hit streets: August 2013, the resistance was made public and continued almost for a year. Historical day of success: On 18 April 2014, further extension of the lease for firing range was discontinued after 50 years. Advocacy with government: to clean Tosa Maidan of unexploded ordnance (UXOs) under operation Falah for three months. Tosa Maidan was returned to the community in October-2014.

Data gathering: through the use of provision to the Right To Information and research it was revealed - 68 deaths and 43 were disabled by accidents on the firing range; lease of firing range was renewed after every 10 years, and the Army has to pay compensation for damage to the environment under the Pollutant Pays Principles-PPP, etc. Mobilization and motivation of people capable of contesting in the Panchayat Elections of 2010-2011. Getting affected panchayats together: after 4 years all the elected representatives of panchayats were brought together, putting away old age grudges. Education and local awareness: the medium of panchayats was used and Tosa Maidan village committees were formed to impart awareness on issues related to Tosa Maidan. Parallel sentence: other likeminded people, as well as institutions, were brought together. The emergence of TBF: finally 52 sarpanches representing 64 villages and the masses formed the Tosa Maidan Bachav Front - TBF in 2013 to fight to close down the firing range i.e. for the vacation of the high plateau. Unanimous resolution model: All the sarpanchEs inked a resolution against firing range of Tosa Maidan. Resistance and Demonstrations hit streets: August 2013, the resistance was made public and continued almost for a year. Historical day of success: On 18 April 2014, further extension of the lease for firing range was discontinued after 50 years. Advocacy with government: to clean Tosa Maidan of unexploded ordnance (UXOs) under operation Falah for three months. Tosa Maidan was returned to the community in October-2014.

The process: TBF sensitized the whole area, unified the population under one banner and proceeded with an advocacy campaign. The road to success was full of hardships - threats to life by the army were common, and meetings had to be arranged at concealed places. Following year-long demonstrations, the Government of J&K decided not to extend the lease of this firing range, and on 18-April-2014, Tosa Maidan was handed over to its people after six decades. This has proved to be the first ever success story of a Civil Society movement in Kashmir. Conservation struggle for Tosa Maidan School for Rural Development & Environment was institutionalized in 2015 only for the purpose of conservation of Environment. Under SRDE, an integrated tourism model was planned for Tosa Maidan, under which a month-long promotional campaign on community-based tourism awareness was held in the belt of Tosa Maidan in June 2015. And the year 2015 was entirely devoted to developing a comprehensive research document and a master plan on matching tourism potential of Tosa Maidan to the community in the form of “Tosa Maidan: Community-driven Adventure & Rural Tourism-CDART” that was prepared by Ms Lubna Sayed Qadri, who is also Executive Director-SRDE, & Dr Rasool. The resolution reads by promoting the CDART in Tosa Maidan, the deserved community will have control over its own natural resources; the benefits of the said tourism model in Tosa Maidan will reach all strata of the suffering communities. The Panchayats unanimously inked the declaration of promoting Tosa Maidan on CDART basis, yet again. When approached, an initial approval to the proposed model was given by Administration in Governor rule, the additional advocacy by SRDE & TBF, and on 29-May-2016, Chief Minister of the State declared Tosa Maidan as a tourist destination to be developed on Community-driven Adventure and Rural Tourism basis - hence the proposed concept was officially accepted as well as adopted. And, in early 2017 an independent development authority for Tosa Maidan was announced. When the demand for compensation was not taken up by the Government, even after approaching them multiple times and after many reminders, the matter was taken to the Judiciary in March-2017 by means of Public Interest Litigation. A PIL case was filed by Lubna Sayed Qadri, on behalf of SRDE & TBF, and within one and a half months, the government of J&K did fix compensation for all the victims of accidents on the firing ranges in J&K and rules under Manoeuvres, Field Firing and Artillery Practice Act, 1938 (which is a Central Act) were framed. Future Strategy The CDAR tourism model will be implemented under which holistic development vis-à-vis conservation approach in the Tosa Maidan and its 10 villages will be carried out in phase-1. The capacity of community members will be enhanced by providing them hands-on training in all tourism related areas and revival traditional art and craft forms, agriculture and allied fields using all the local potential to generate income. Apart from the development, conservation of biodiversity will be ensured. Conservation in terms of sustainable use of natural resources, protecting the aquatic environment and water resources, preserving the habitat and its species, combating climate change, appropriate fire regimes, etc. Once successful, the idea is to replicate the said tourism model to the whole of J&K, and in particular, in the Pir Panjal range. As we believe, this is the only resolution which will ensure boosting of the local economy, guaranteeing a decent livelihood for all, and community control over our own natural resources, hence ensuring protection and conservation of the Environment. Contact the authors.