

DISASTROUS DEVELOPMENT: THE NARMADA REPORT



**ALL INDIA PEOPLES RESISTANCE FORUM
(AIPRF)**

**Disastrous Development:
The Narmada Report**

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Disastrous Development: The Narmada Report

For last 14 years, the tribals, peasants, men, women and children of the Narmada valley have waged a heroic and determined struggle against the attempts of the central and state governments, backed initially by the World Bank, to construct a massive multi-purpose project across the Narmada river.

The valley of Narmada river which marks a rift zone where the Satpuda and Vindhya ranges meet, has been home to ancient, pre-historic and historical civilization. It is one of the areas that perhaps holds some of the secrets of human evolution, as the only remains of the *homo-erectus* group in the sub-continent have been found here. The forested, hilly stretches of the valley are inhabited mainly by tribal communities such as the Gonds, Korkus, Bhils and Bhilalas. The rich, fertile plains are inhabited by large peasant populations and some medium and large urban settlements.

The valley and its people are now threatened with submergence by the massive multi-purpose project — the Narmada Valley Development Project (NVDP) which comprises 30 large dams, 135 medium dams and 3000 small dams on the Narmada and her tributaries. The Sardar Sarovar Project dam (SSP), one of the biggest, is located at the end of the river in Gujarat and is at the centre of the controversy. It is scheduled to submerge 245 villages and a huge forest area and will render 40,000 families homeless in the three states of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh.

The SSP will also have the world's largest canal system of over 75000 kms which will further add to the displacement. The future of those cultivators who will be deprived of all or most of their land due to the canal is equally bleak. The Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal (NWDT) (1969-79) has not recognised these people as Project Affected and hence does not consider them eligible for rehabilitation.

Already the dams that have been built as part of the NVDP, notably Bargi dam in Jabalpur, Tawa dam in Hoshangabad and the Barna, Sukta and Kolar dams have displaced lakhs of people. Most of them are now daily wage earners, while some of the affected womenfolk are forced to join prostitution. Narmada Sagar dam will have twice the devastating effect of SSP and is already 25 percent

built! Other dams like the Maheshwar, Veda and Goin are also in the pipeline.

Initially resistance to the project was organised as state wide groups of SSP oustees — the Narmada Dharangrast Samiti in Maharashtra, the Narmada Asargrast Sangarsh Samiti in Gujarat and the Narmada Ghati Navnirman Samiti in Madhya Pradesh — within a short span of time they all merged together and gave birth to the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA). The subsequent struggle against the SSP and other big dams of NVDP is now well known not only in this country, but internationally too, and has brought into focus the crucial question of who stands to benefit from the 'large dams/ mega projects' development model being pursued by imperialist agencies like the World Bank, the governments of the imperialist countries and the comprador rulers of the Third World.

The controversy over the SSP has come into public focus once again following the recent Supreme Court decision to vacate its earlier stay and allow the height of the dam to be raised from 80 metres to 88 metres (including hump) on the basis of the affidavit of the Gujarat government regarding promises of rehabilitation of the displaced people; and the subsequent *jal samarpan* agitation taken up by the NBA, where a number of the oustees and the NBA leader Medha Patkar had declared their willingness to sacrifice their lives if the government ignored the protests and allowed the waters of the dam to submerge new villages this monsoon. The agitation received a further impetus when Booker Prize winner, novelist Arundhati Roy launched a public campaign against the



Satyagrah begins in Domkhedi on 20th June, 99

project.

Against this background a fact-finding team of All India Peoples Resistance Forum (AIPRF) visited the Narmada valley between 17 – 22, July. The team sought to express solidarity with the people struggling against the Sardar Sarovar project, under the banner of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) and also to gather first hand information of the project affected people in the wake of the recent Supreme Court decision. The team, during its visit talked to the affected people in the resettlement colonies, people from the villages in the submergence area, people affected by canals, activists and sympathisers of NBA and other concerned persons.

The People Speak

Interaction with the people in the valley revealed that the governments of the concerned states have hardly any intention or desire to rehabilitate the large number of rural families belonging to disadvantaged sections of society who are going to be displaced by the project. It has tried all methods to cheat the people. In the first place, the criteria of identifying project-affected families have been narrowed only to those families who would come under submergence by the dam. Even these families have not been rehabilitated properly. In the second place, where the 'land for land' compensation principle has been accepted, the quality of land provided is not at all commensurate with the land that has been acquired. Thirdly, when villagers are settled at other places, they were not provided with adequate infrastructure, which existed in their original places. Fourthly, in majority of the cases, the cash compensation provided for land taken over for canal was abysmally low. Similarly there has been no community settlement without disturbing the community of a village. Needless to say that the land whatever is given as part of compensation or rehabilitation package is barren, fragmented, insufficient or waterlogged.

(i) Mukhdi

The villagers of Mukhdi village were resettled in an area which was more than hundred kilometres away. Most of the families returned to the Mukhdi village first because the land they were provided was infertile, secondly the amount of land promised by government were not given, thirdly, families were

separated in several places. All these provisions were against the Tribunal award.

There are about 200 families in village Mukhdi who were resettled at a distance of more than 100 kms from their original lands at Ambawadi in Dediapala taluka of Narbada district. Last year their lands were submerged. Says 76 year old Tulsibhai Sanabhai Taravi, "Due to the submergence I had to rebuild my house at a higher place (on the hill). This year this house will also be drowned. Many officers came, but the government did not help us at all.

"We two brothers had 10 acres of land in the village. At Ambawadi the government allotted us 5 acres of land each. My brother died and his son is doing agriculture there. Here we are growing jowar, makai (maize), urad, bajari etc. On our original lands at Mukhdi we were getting very good production without any fertilizer, insecticide and pesticide. But, At Ambawadi the land was barren and we had to spend more money on fertilizer and insecticides etc. We also could not rear cattle because there were no grazing grounds and fodder was not available while here we can store the fodder for one year and also the cattle can graze on the hill tops. Here everybody had minimum 5 acres of land, with some families having more than that. And also this land is fertile land while there the government has allotted each adult member of the family 5 acres of land. Even those who were having more land were also given 5 acres of land. But if the land is measured properly than for a majority of families it comes to less than 5 acres. What is more important is that the land is barren land with no irrigation facilities.

"Not only the village population has been divided and settled at far off places from each other but also the members of each family has been resettled far from each other. And they have allotted only 5 guntas of land for building a house. Neither there is water supply nor there is a hand pump, nor they have supplied even a tin shed. There is no water for irrigation and there can never be because the village does not fall in the command area."

Not surprisingly out of the 200 families from Mukhdi, while about 35 families did go to Ambawadi, all 35 families have returned back and are now willing to risk death in the rising waters rather than shift to Ambawadi.

Jaitibhai Chekhjibhai, also of Mukhdi comes from a family of four brothers together owning 15 acres of land. Besides meagre earning from agriculture he also works as a wage labourer. This year the family's entire crop will be submerged.

Though his father and the brothers including him together got 20 acres of land, all the four families have been settled about 10 to 15 kilometres from each other and more than 100 kilometres from their original homes. While one brother is cultivating on 5 acres of land there, the others have left the remaining 15 acres of land and returned to their original village because the land at Ambawadi was not suitable for cultivation.

Tulsibhai Sonabhai, an educated peasant has studied upto 7th standard and is married with three children. His wife is educated upto 9th standard. They are four brothers, with less than 10 acres of land. "In Mukhdi our crops were submerged last year and this year also our remaining 3 acres of land will be submerged. My three brothers got 5 acres each, but in government records my age is shown as 8 years though I have three children. Here in this village there is no school. There in Ambawadi though there is a school in the old village, they do not admit our children in that school."

Tulsibhai avers that while all the tribals belonging to the Taravi and Vasava *jati* (caste) have joined the struggle, the upper castes in the Panchayat have stayed aloof. He declares, "We shall die by drowning ourselves along with our families."

Says Tulsibhai, "We have held numerous meetings in all the villages, to try and cure the 'pain in our abdomen'. We have even gone to Baroda, Ahmedabad, Badwani, Delhi, and Bhopal etc. regularly to petition the authorities. But if the government won't listen to us then we will drown and die. We have to die. We are poor Adivasis. The dam is near completion and we are tired now. We have experienced the submergence, but what will happen to the farmers of M.P. with large landholdings, even about 50-500 acres of land. Government has given nothing to us and will not give anything to the M.P. farmers."

Not surprisingly for the struggling people of the area Mukhdi has become a centre of struggle. And there is an air of confidence that they will win the struggle under the leadership of Medha Patkar.

(ii) Vadgaon

Rashikbhai is an NBA activist and stays in Kevadia colony. He is a landless Brahmin by caste and lived in Vadgaon, his in-laws' village. According to him, "my village was one of the first to be totally submerged in the reservoir water and all the families of the village were shifted to other far flung areas at

different places. After the submergence of my village and of my house I did not receive the five acres of land promised to me. I resolved to fight. So I joined the NBA. I fought for my right to be considered a project-affected person (PAP). But the government officials turned a deaf ear to my demand. Then the District Court gave a verdict in my favour but now the Gujarat government has taken the case to the High Court.

"Now my wife and children are staying in a quarter in a vasahat (colony) which is about 50 kilometers from the dam site. My wife and daughter are working as daily wage labourers."

Rasikbhai told the team that the NBA enjoyed support of more than 75% of the people and would resort to various forms of struggle to arrive at a logical end irrespective of what happens in the Supreme Court.

(iii) Undava

Another village with similar tales is Undava. Many of the peasants have lost land to the SSP canal, but under the award of the Tribunal are not eligible for land compensation as those affected by the dam are. Those who are lucky received a meagre monetary compensation at the official rate (Rs. 2,000 per acre), which is well below the market rate.

In the Undava village, people complained that they have not been given even one-tenth the value of their land, while many families had been paid no compensation at all. Many of the villagers were promised that one family member from each family of the affected would be given job, however, this promise has not been fulfilled. As a result of a similar situation in many other canal affected villages there are nearly 1,50,000 petitions from canal affected families were lying before the Gujarat High Court. Most of the 200 families in this village are tribals - Hindu Taravi or Hindu Vasava.

Gopal, a young shopkeeper in the village told us that most of those who lost their land are either working as agricultural labour at a daily wage of Rs 15-20, or go to Surat as contract or casual labourers to earn their livelihood. "We have demanded that we too should receive land in compensation as the other project affected families have received, but leave alone that, not even a single person was absorbed in government service to compensate for their loss. Hence we are with the NBA and Gujarat Visthapit Sangharash Samiti (G.V.S.S.) for land, more compensation and other demands."

(iv) Koti

The team also visited the six villages whose land was acquired for the construction of the colony for the officials in 1962-64.

One of these was Koti village. The land of this village along with other 5 villages was acquired in early sixties for building a helipad initially and later on for the colony of the officials of the SSP.

Prabhubhai, who is also a part timer activist of NBA, informed us that "in 1961 Jawahar Lal Nehru was to come for inauguration of the dam. At that time land was acquired for a helipad. Later they acquired more land for the construction of a colony for the dam officials from six villages i.e. Kevadia, Koti, Vagri, Gora, Navangaon and Limli."

The entire land of Koti was acquired and 90% land from the other villages has either been acquired or has been submerged in ponds for the colony. Prabhubhai continues, "Our demand is that we should also be treated as PAPs. Land should be given for land. The land which has already been acquired but is not being used, should be returned back to the peasants."

The villagers are members of the NBA which has a 9 member committee of these six villages. Prabhu is one of the committee members. "We will go on fighting till we get our rights. Some of us are even prepared for *jal samarpan*. There is no other way out because the government does not listen to our demands. Since 1961 we are demanding land. And for the last 14 years we are consistently struggling. They impose Cr.PC. 144 and do not allow us even to meet the officials. The people of six villages are united.

"In 1990 Chimanbhai Patel came here in a public meeting. He promised that he will consider the affected people of six villages as PAPs, if he wins. He became the chief minister at that time. But he also deceived us. Now our people will boycott the politicians and the elections."

Shankarbhai Manjhibhai a villager from Koti narrated a similar tale of woe. "We were four brothers, together owning 12 acres of land, all of which was acquired in 1961-62. The total compensation we received for the standing crop was Rs.2381/- only. Now all of us are working as daily wage labourers. Earlier we had food grains and other needs for the entire year and some surplus for the market also. Now a daily wage labourer gets Rs.22/- or equivalent grain, along with one meal. If we work at the dam site one may get Rs.25 to 35 per day. But usually the contractors bring labour from outside. Hence we are demanding

that we should also be treated as PAPs and receive land for land as compensation.”

The Resttlement Colonies — Living in Ovens and Caves

(v) Vasana and Malu

The team also visited the Vasana vasahat (Resettlement colony) which is near Navsari town, Narbada district and is about 50 kilometres from the dam site. About 2-3 kilometres off the metalled road, this colony of tin sheds gives one the impression that the landholders (Patils) of Vasana village have been provided very cheap young male and female labour at their doorsteps. The inhabitants of the colony narrated horrifying stories of their plight after their village Vadgaon got totally submerged. Vadgaon was the first village which was submerged due to construction of the Sardar Sarovar Project. Nearly seventy families from this village were settled in Malu Vasahat offering five acres of land each. This land was barren, uneven, rocky and contained wild grass. So the uprooted Taravi tribe from Vadgaon could not plough this land for livelihood. Besides these families had to face the hostile Nayak community, which harassed them and looted their belongings, teased their women folk and chased them away from the area.

They told us, “We are about 70 families who were settled at Malu Vasahat in Sankhera taluka of Vadodara district in 1991. On the one hand the land allotted was not good, there was no facility for water, no education was available, and on the other hand the local Nayak community was very hostile towards us.

“So in 1992, 24 families returned back to Vadgaon and government again resettled these families at Dharmapuri in Dahbol taluka. In 1993, another 22 families returned back to their ancestral village, Gadher. Meanwhile police tried to force the remaining 31 families to stay on. But one night, fed up with the hostile environment, we dismantled our houses and started our return journey. It was the rainy season. We had to halt here with the people known to us in the adjacent Gadher Vasahat. We came to know that this land belongs to the Nigam and is lying vacant. Then we decided to stay here. So, we are here in these tin sheds for last 14 months.”

Bhagwan Bhai Dhaura Bhai, a local Kabir-panthi priest is one of the 31 families who have resettled at Vasana in a plot of 4.25 acres of land. He had

13 acres of fertile land at his ancestral village Vadgaon and was self-sufficient as other families. Now he is compelled to reside in a tin shed along with his family members and milch and other animals, under a single roof constructed by the state government. These tin sheds become so hot in summer and so cold in winter that one can easily say that they are living in iron ovens and caves.

Their plight is truly pitiable. Animals, family members, fodder and kitchen everything coexists under a single tin shed. There are no education, health or water facilities and they have no choice but to work in the fields of Patels of Vasana village merely for Rs. 15 to 20 per day without any meal. Some of the women work in the houses of landlords (Patels) just for Rs. 50 per month with one meal per day.

But the authorities refuse to recognise their existence. They have not been allotted any land and are being compelled to return back to the Malu Vasahat! Meanwhile in the official records, the rehabilitation of Vadgaon is complete!

In the nearby Gadher Vasahat as well, though the displaced people have 'officially' been 'allotted' 5 acres of land per family, basic amenities are missing. The land is not of good quality and irrigation is virtually absent. The displaced peasants are forced to work as agricultural labour at very low wage rates i.e. Rs. 15 to 20 per day or as 'bonded' labour for an amount of Rs. 4000 to 6000 per year without meals.

Other Affected Areas

During the team's visit we passed the historic Hapeshwar Mandir (in Narbada district of Gujarat) situated on the right bank of Narmada and about 60-70 km. from the dam site.

The Pujari at the mandir told us that last year also the mandir was partially submerged. On 18th July the water in reservoir was rising. By the 20th when we passed the site again, the mandir, whose plinth is at the height of 101 metres, was already partly submerged and by the end of this monsoon will disappear under the water. A nearby factory complex (abandoned when it began to get flooded a few years ago), which was partially submerged on the 18th had virtually disappeared by the 20th and even the rooftop were not visible.

Disturbed women not only displaced

The life of Adivasi women in the villages of Narmada valley is very hard. There are no basic facilities like drinking water, health care, education or transport in the villages. The Adivasi women have to carry drinking water everyday from at least more than 2 km distance. Among the Taravi and Vasawa tribes this work is usually done by women.

The Adivasis live in joint families. Their fields surround their houses, with only a narrow snake like path to walk in and out. There are no doors to the main entrance of the house. Only a small kitchen in a corner of the mud hut has doors. The cattle live along with them in the corridor. The children, the aged and the youth have to live together in the house without doors or privacy. It is again the duty of the women to look after every aspect of the house.

The Adivasi women in these villages not only take the responsibility of keeping the house running, but also work hard in the fields. Though men also work in the fields, women have to work both in the fields and the houses, apart from looking after the cattle and collecting the forest produce. It is women who collect firewood, fodder for their cattle and fruits for their children. In this way, the Adivasi women depend more on the forest for their livelihood than on regular agriculture and other sorts of work. In the season they pick bidipatta (the tendu leaves), which help them earn a little savings for the rest of the year. The women also pick up mahua, a kind of flower with which they make liquor. This is also another important activity for women in their own land.

When the team talked to Jantebai Jagachhibai of Mukhdi, she said, "The lands given by the government at the rehabilitation site are barren. No one can grow crops without high doses of fertilisers and pesticides in those lands. We can't afford all these. We can't get fodder for our cattle at the rehabilitation sites." Jantebai's husband and his three brothers have 20 acres of land in the village that is slated to be submerged. While some families in the village were given agricultural land at the rehabilitation sites, 15 km away from the village, her family has not been given any land so far. Talking about her family position now Jantebai says, "We are pushed into everlasting uncertainty by the government. We don't really want to move away from our village. Why should

we?" "But now we are thinking of accepting the land at the rehabilitation site only for the sake of the survival of our children," Jantibai goes on, "What else can we do now?"

All the families of Mukhdi village belong to Taravi tribe. There is no health centre in the village. The government stopped providing any facilities in this village pressurising the people to leave the village. They have to go to Kevadia colony for treatment of any small or serious disease. There are poor transportation facilities.

While many families from the village are yet to be rehabilitated, the conditions of those who are brought to the Vasana rehabilitation site are worse. Again women are the worst effected. Women, who were relatively better off, though with many limitations, in their own village in the lap of the river and the forest, are forced to turn themselves into household servants cleaning the clothes, houses and utensils of local Patedars, who are rich farmers or landlords. This is totally a strange way of life for them. These women get Rs. 65/- per month and a meal a day. Women also work for daily wages in the fields of the local landlords. They work for abysmally low wages of Rs. 15/- per day. In the off season their men have to leave for Surat and other industrial cities in search of work. Because of the low wages even the children in the family are forced to go for daily wages. As the women are living in the insecure, unsafe and new places at the rehabilitation site, they are subjected to sexual harassment by the contractors, landlords and their henchmen.

Champa Behan told us that the entire family has to go without food if on any day they don't get work. She reiterates that after moving to the rehabilitation site they cannot afford to stay back home even when they are seriously ill. From the words of Champa Behan and other women it becomes clear that women are doubly burdened in the case of displacement.

On the whole, the Adivasis of the Narmada valley affected by the Sardar Sarovar Project have not only lost their social, economic and cultural roots, but they, and especially the women, have been transplanted into a strange and oppressive setting. Sexual harassment, strange ways of life, and work are not only the reasons for the fear and intimidation they experience, but also because of the miserable economic conditions that have been forced on them. Even after they are shifted to the rehabilitation sites the Adivasi women are still responsible for collecting firewood, carrying drinking water and feeding the

children. The patriarchy in their society gets reinforced by acquiring more arid forms of it from the Hindu social fabric of the plain areas people. The women who lost their forest and the herbs, roots and fruits are suffering at the rehabilitation centre with malnutrition and anaemia. We must not miss the point that even at the rehabilitation sites the government is not providing drinking water facility to the Adivasi women from whom the river is wrenched away by the same agency. Even here women have to pot their drinking water from several kilometres away.

The gross discriminatory attitude against women is also reflected in Tribunal which deny compensatory land for female member of the family except for widow.

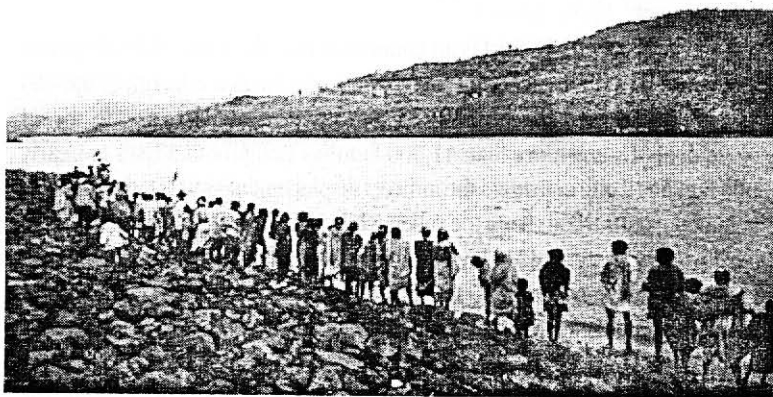
Adivasi Family in Jalasindhi



Jalsindhi and Domkherdi

Betrayed by the government and now abandoned even by the Court, the people of the villages that are now threatened with submergence are determined not to move even at the risk of facing submergence. The fighting spirit of people at the *Satyagraha* site of Domkheri in Maharashtra and Jalsindhi in Madhya Pradesh was quite visible. (Subsequent events when the waters rose to threaten the village, and over 40 NBA members and supporters stood in swirling knee deep waters for over 12 hours before they were arrested by the police is ample testimony to this fact.)

Satyagrahi is taking a pledge on the banks of Narmada



The Development Debate

The struggle against the Narmada Valley Project which began as opposition to one single dam, gradually became part of a larger movement that raised a very basic question – who has really benefited for the so-called development undertaken by the Indian ruling classes in the past 50 years. As a result of this and other similar struggles, the saga of the nearly 50 million people who had been displaced by similar projects in the past five decades and had disappeared from public view has been virtually resurrected from the dead.

The questions raised in the course of these movements have fuelled opposition to all the development plans of the comprador rulers, and especially challenged a number of mega-projects taken up by multinational corporations with the backing of the government in the post liberalisation period. No more are the people of India willing to watch silently as their lands are taken away for the construction of highways, expressways, dams, power projects, airports, mining projects, hi-tech factories and so on.

In fact the people are now demanding that no so-called public project should be taken up by the government and any private sector without a public debate and discussion and every one should be given equal opportunity to express opinion fearlessly. By and large such projects that are taken up by today's governments are always designed to benefit a small section of the rulers and are essentially anti-people though they are initiated in the name of the

people.

False Claims, False Hopes

The Narmada Project is an epitome of how the fruits of development are cornered by a small section of society while the burden is borne by the vast masses of oppressed people. The reservoir alone envisages the direct displacement of some more than 41,000 families (a figure that rises to nearly 85,000 families if one considers the indirect displacement as well), the majority of them being poor tribals from the valley, while some are the rich farmers from the fertile Nimad region of Madhya Pradesh. The canal construction displaces and pauperises lakhs of farmers. The government has made many claims about the rehabilitation package for the project affected people. But, as many reports (including this) have clearly established, these are largely a hoax.

In fact failure on the rehabilitation front was one of the reasons for the withdrawal of the project's initiator, the World Bank, from the project in 1992. Faced with mounting international pressure because of the agitation in the valley, the Bank had commissioned an Independent Review, headed by a former UN official Thomas Morse. The Morse Committee found many flaws in the overall estimates of the project, and severely indicted the state and central governments for its failure to ensure even a minimum level of rehabilitation for the affected people. The Committee gave the government a chance to implement certain minimum packages within a deadline to display its commitment to rehabilitation, and when the governments failed to implement even these, the Bank was forced to announce its withdrawal.

As per government estimates, more than 41,000 families are likely to be affected by the Sardar Sarovar project if it is allowed to be completed. The financial viability of the project which is estimated to cost around Rs 44,000 crore is itself questionable and if the trend up to now is an indicator, it is unlikely that the project could be completed without destroying the economy of Gujarat. The government claims about the irrigation potential, drinking water and power generation is far from reality. It is also to be noted that in the original plan there was no provision for supplying drinking water to drought prone areas of Gujarat. It was included in the project following the stiff resistance of people against the project to create illusions among the people of Gujarat, although there is as yet no financial provision for it.

However the rulers have tried to divert attention from this reality by false propaganda about the supposed benefits of the project. The ruling classes of Gujarat have been specially active in supporting the project, and have attempted to mobilise the masses of the state by making false claims about the benefits of the project and those who will actually receive them.

Take the example of drinking water. It is an important and emotional issue everywhere and more so for the people of Gujarat, whose north-western districts of Kutch and Saurashtra are perennially drought prone. However this supposedly major benefit of the project did not even find mention in the initial project reports and estimates. It surfaced as one of the benefits additionally claimed by the government to stall the criticism of the project which began in the late 80s, and gradually got elevated to the status of the single most important reason for the dam by the mid-90s when they tried to convert the whole issue into a clash of interests between the drought affected people of Kutch and Saurashtra and the project affected people of the valley.

But it is clear that the claimed benefits in this sphere are arbitrary and illusory. Why else would the figures of the so-called beneficiaries as stated in the official reports vary from time to time? The number of beneficiaries were stated to be 28.3 million in 1983, this rose to 32.5 million, again climbed to 40 million, but subsequently came down again to 25.3 million in 1993.

The same holds true for the number of villages which would get drinking water. During the 1980s the government projected that 4719 villages would be benefited, this rose to 7234 in 1990 and the latest figure is 8215 during 1991. None of these figures are based on any concrete study. In fact of these 61 villages of Kutch and 149 villages in Saurashtra are deserted villages. As per the 1983 estimates the total cost of drinking water would be Rs 78 crore. But elsewhere the Narmada Control Ministry projected the cost as 'a few thousand crore'. The arbitrariness of these figures is itself an indication of the illusory nature of the benefits.

When will the drinking water reach the villages? The Gujarat government has been promising the drought affected villages that they would receive water in a few years. But the Central Water Resource Authority estimates that the water would not reach Kutch before 2025. The World Bank reports also suggest that the water would only reach the most drought affected parts which are farthest from the project between 2020 and 2025.

All these estimates are based on the assumption that the water from the Sardar Sarovar is going to be used largely for irrigation and rural drinking water schemes. However there is ample reason to doubt the veracity of this assumption. Actually four cities – Ahmedabad, Baroda, Rajkot and Jamnagar will receive 40% of the total water supply as per a report of the Gujarat Water Supply and Sewerage Board of 1983. This study estimates that the per person per day need of drinking water at 227 litres, 140 litres and 70 litres for cities with a more than one million population, other cities and rural areas respectively. Yet elsewhere the same document also states that only 55 litres of water per day will be supplied to the villages of Kutch and Saurashtra.

The Gujarat government has also claimed that 1.8 million hectares of land would receive irrigation from the SSP. But the project documents also say that only 9.24% of the total cultivable land in Saurashtra and 1.6% of the cultivable land in Kutch will come under the SSP command area. Hence the claim of the 'greening of Saurashtra and Kutch' which is used to whip up support for the project in these parts is clearly false.

Further, as the initial estimates of the annual flow of the Narmada river (incredibly the first figures released in the 60s were not even based on any actual field measurements) have subsequently been seen to be about 20% less in actual fact, there is even a question mark over how much water is actually available for irrigation. Many of these estimates are also based on the entire NNDP project being completed. But as there is no real plan for where the funds for the remaining dams will come from, and as the World Bank estimates that the efficiency of the SSP will reduce by 30% if the Narmada Sagar dam remains incomplete, there is every reason to believe that the claims made of the SSP are false. The claims made by the authorities are also based on untenable assumptions of 60% water use efficiency, with no explanation of how they have arrived at this figure. The actual records show that a water use efficiency figure of less than 40% is much more realistic. As no proper studies of the nature of the soil, the problem of salinity associated with the storage of large amounts of water, water logging and other such hazards now known to be associated with the construction and use of large dams has been done, the actual irrigation benefits may well be less than 50% of what is actually claimed.

The situation may be even worse because the government has already announced the setting up of five star resorts, golf courses and clubs to generate

revenue for the project along the banks of the canal, and though it is expressly disallowed in the original plan, the emergence of a number of sugar factories along the canal means that there will be a large-scale shift to commercial water guzzling crops like sugar cane. The World Bank, commenting on the financial viability of the project in 1995 suggested a 20% reduction in the number of beneficiaries and the granting of permission to 'high value addition' crops as a means of improving the financial viability of the project.

When all these factors are taken into consideration, there is every reason to believe that the real beneficiaries of the project are other than those officially stated. A closer look at the development of the state of Gujarat will reveal who they really are. In the last 10-15 years there has been a spurt in industrialisation in the golden corridor stretch between the southern tip of Gujarat, Vapi and the capital city Ahmedabad. In this period there has been a massive inflow on investment into the region, according to estimates amounting to over Rs. one lakh crore. Most of this is for the highly polluting chemical industries that are becoming unpopular in the imperialist countries, and which as per the suggestion of former World Bank officer and present senior functionary in the US government, Lawrence Summers, should be shifted to the Third World where the cost of lives is substantially cheaper. Thus the entire region needs much more water than ever before, both to sustain the growing industrial population and to provide inputs to the factories for industrial purposes.

Alongside this there is also a growing agro-industrial lobby comprising a small section of the very big, rich farmers who are shifting to the cultivation of cash crops and the industrialists who are setting up factories for the processing of agro-based products. The sugar lobby is one such example. While such a lobby would not mind paying a higher cost of the water from expensive projects like the SSP, the medium, small and marginal farmers who cannot sustain the high costs of inputs required for commercial cash crop farming would gradually find their activity being rendered economically unviable. The large number of peasant suicides in recent years, mostly in areas that have taken to commercial cash crop farming in a big way should be a warning in itself to the medium, small and marginal farmers of Gujarat, who are being misled into believing that the SSP is meant for their benefit.

There can be no two opinions about the SSP. It has to stop immediately. A project which will cost more than Rs 40,000 crores, submerge cultivable land

of more than 41,000 families (of which 33,000 families belong to Madhya Pradesh alone) and render them homeless was never even discussed among the affected people, let alone giving any weightage to their opposition. Even the highest court of the country has taken five years to decide on the demand of the Project Affected People that the project should be totally scrapped or at least to be reviewed again by an independent Tribunal. The myth that in the construction of SSP the losers are only the cultivators of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra and the people of Gujarat stand to gain is patently false. Lakhs of canal affected cultivators in Gujarat have filed petitions in the Gujarat High Court and the people of Kutch and Saurashtra are gradually becoming aware that their support is being enlisted on false grounds. In fact in recent years, with the SSP consuming more than 85% of the annual irrigation budget of the Gujarat government, work on all other small and medium irrigation projects in the state have more or less stopped during the last decade. This alone is a telling indication of the government's so-called concern for the drought stricken regions and the medium and small peasants of the state.

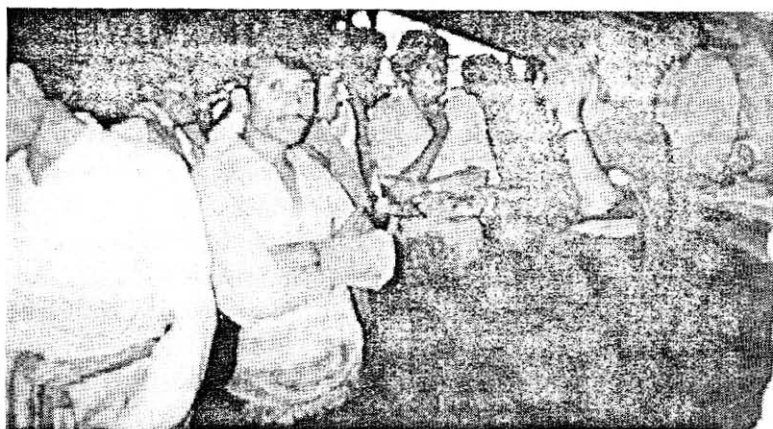
Build Firm Resistance

Despite the clearly false claims of the governments and the vast amount of literature to prove the destructiveness of the project, despite the international campaign in support of the people of the valley, despite popular support and repeated mass mobilisations, the fact remains that the movement has been unable to halt the major part of the construction of the SSP. What are the lessons to be learnt from this? This is a question that should be discussed and analysed, primarily by the participants in the agitation, but also by all democrats and patriots in the country who wish to build a genuinely free and independent India, rejecting both imperialist aid and the imperialist development model.

The experience of the struggle in the valley and similar experiences of people's movements against destructive projects elsewhere in the country need to be taken into account. A preliminary analysis points to the need for direct opposition, militant mobilisation, actual physical obstruction and prevention of initial work, etc. rather than on lobbying in the corridors of power and litigating in courts. The negative experience of the role of the courts in the case of the Enron or Narmada projects should be contrasted with the positive experiences in cases like Dupont, Baliapal, the Bhopalpatnam dam and the Pulichintala

project to name some of the successful stories of people's opposition. (In the case of the NVDP too, with the courts and governments having made it clear on whose side they are, it appears that the only path to move forward on is one of more direct resistance to the further development of the project.)

Such movements must develop a complete reliance on the struggling power of people and link the direct confrontation with the project authorities to a long term struggle for the building of parallel system of people's power and governance. It is crucial that such militant mobilisation must also prepare the people to confront the physical violence and armed attacks that are used by the rulers to attack people's movements everywhere.



Medha Patkar with people standing in rising water in the Satyagraha centre of Domkhedi on 10th August, 99

People centred development--The Real Alternative

At a broader level the project has also to be opposed not just for its false claims and promises, but because of the very destructive and anti-people nature of the model of development on which it is based. Ever since 1947, what has passed in the name of development is a model based on the interests of ruling classes i.e. imperialism, comprador big bourgeoisie and landlord classes. This has had a disastrous impact on the lives of the people in a number of different ways. Real development of the rural areas through a comprehensive land reforms programme has been neglected on the one hand. On the other

hand, millions of tribals and small farmers have been displaced as their lands have been acquired in the name of public purpose. But actual experience shows that the mega-projects, power plants, factories, mines, highways, airports and other such projects have only aided the further development of the big land owners and industrialists. Naturally, there was never any democratic process involved in finalising these projects, and the people who were to be displaced were neither consulted or considered in the actual decision making.

Nehru had in fact summed it up accurately when he said that "big dams are the temples of modern India." For, just as the dalits and some OBCs were kept out of the temples of the caste bound society of ancient India, so also the vast majority of the oppressed people have been excluded both from the process of planning and from the supposed benefits of these temples.

Of course all these projects had one clear logic – they promoted the benefits of the imperialists, the local comprador capitalists and the big land owners in that order. The imperialists offered aid to these projects, and earned interest on loans as well as an assured sale for their equipment and goods which were to be involved in the construction of these projects. The limited industrialisation and partial growth of a market-economy (which helped provide an outlet for their goods) also suited their long term interests. The comprador capitalists in India, who never had any aim of developing an independent, self-reliant industrial society, got the necessary inputs like power and water for their industries (many of which were joint ventures with the imperialists), and the big landowners were able to adopt to some limited extent the modern inputs for cash crop production and boosting output, earning immense profits in the process. Such limited development also served as a buffer against the possibilities of spontaneous widespread agrarian revolts that arise from starvation and pauperisation of the peasantry in a stagnant feudal economy, without radically altering the land relations and power structures in the rural areas as a whole.

As a result of fifty years of such development, the Indian countryside today presents a curious mixture of a few islands of advanced hi-tech industrial units and mega-projects existing amidst a vast underdeveloped, backward expanse of poverty, unemployment, undernourishment and starvation.

Further, this development model has led to the lopsided industrialisation of the country with the growth of immense urban concentrations at the cost of the masses of the rural area. Those displaced by 'development' in

the rural areas are forced to migrate to the urban areas where they eke out a miserable existence in the most horrifying conditions. These urban concentrations are overcrowded, lacking in basic amenities for the vast majority of the population and cannot be equated with real development in any way.

Added to this are the environmental destruction and long term costs involved in these projects. The ruling classes have successfully tried to sidetrack this issue by portraying those who raise it as being more concerned with saving the animals and trees than with human development. While there are some environmentalists who do raise the question in this manner, the real issue is that of the failure to take into account the overall impact of the destruction of an eco-system on long term human development. But the ruling classes underplay or ignore these costs, and mostly they are never taken into account while calculating the cost-benefit analysis of such projects. For example there is now a sufficient amount of circumstantial evidence to indicate a correspondence between the artificial storage of large bodies of water in man made dams and the incidence of earthquakes to warrant a serious and scientific investigation before embarking on any new projects. Similarly the link between the widespread cash-crop farming encouraged by the Green Revolution and the depletion of the water table and rising salinity of the soil, rendering it unfit for cultivation in such areas provides a sharp critique of its supposed benefits. If this long term destruction is factored in than the real destructive nature of the development becomes much clearer. As one commentator pointed out, "What used to be regarded as merely the unavoidable negative side of progress is now part of a looming threat to the continuation of life on earth.

We should however remember that if today's technology being promoted by the imperialists has proved to be unscientific and destructive, and the development it promotes is unsustainable, the problem is not so much one of inadequate scientific knowledge, as its control and domination by powerful MNC's. These global corporations have monopolised and shaped scientific research and development in the direction of increased profits rather than toward fulfilling social needs. Nature has been privatised and exploited for profit, rather than socialised and developed for fulfilling human needs.

Logically, in order to be physically sustainable, an eco-historical formation has to meet three conditions: (a) the rate of utilisation of renewable resources must be kept down to the rate of their regeneration; (b) the rate of

utilisation of non-renewable resources cannot exceed the rate at which the alternative sustainable resources are developed; and (c) pollution and habitat destruction cannot exceed the assimilative capacity of the environment. A system geared only to maximising the immediate profits of a few powerful companies and countries globally, is obviously incapable of giving a thrust to develop science in this direction.

Thus today's technology promoted power based on huge oil and coal based generation plants (not coincidentally, both extraction and generation are monopolised by a few MNC's), or World Bank aided multipurpose, mega-dams, totally neglecting the development of renewable and sustainable alternatives like solar or wind power, bio-gas, scientific watershed management based on use of tanks, bunds etc. and a series of small and medium dams.

A radical change in the approach to these questions is called for. The people's movements have to comprehensively reject the development projects thrust on them by the rulers and seek to build a new India based on a totally different pattern.

But while the NBA has been opposing the destructive NVDP, its leadership should review the successes and failures in the alternative programme and strategy it has presented. It has failed to link the struggle against the project to struggles of the people to demand from the state their due share of development expenditure of last 50 years. There is no road, electricity, drinking water, schools, health care facility, postal facility and so on. Under the pretext of submergence, the entire tribal belt of some lakhs of adivasis of Narmada valley was allowed to deteriorate fast during the last three decades. Even land ownership rights are denied to the adivasis living there for generations. But none of these issues have been properly taken up.

While opposing the mega-projects of today's development model, the country should adopt and comprehensively implement land reforms so that the land passes into the possession of the actual tiller. This will boost incentives to increase production. Based on this radical restructuring of the relations of production in the rural areas, modernisation of agriculture must be carried out scientifically and democratically by unleashing the people's initiative through control over resources and technology. Tribals should be given rights over their land and forests. Localised industry should be developed in conjunction with agriculture. Employment generation should be an important component of such

industrialisation. Capital-intensive hi-tech projects should be avoided as far as possible. Steps should be taken to minimise pollution and displacement. Local industrial projects should be related to the educational, scientific and cultural levels of the surrounding populations, and must be linked to campaigns for education so as to facilitate people's understanding and control. Generally the peasants should at first be educated about improving local resources. Gradual modernisation should be undertaken by increasing the peasant's self-reliance regarding the utilisation of local resources.

The seeds of this path of development can be most clearly seen in the rural areas of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and some parts of the forest areas of central India popularly known as Dandakaranya. Here the revolutionaries who are leading the armed struggles of the peasantry have linked the issues of the people to the question of building an alternative system of people's government to lead this alternative development. Alongside confronting the attempts of the state and the ruling classes to push through their favoured projects, these movements have also begun to mobilise the masses to take up their own alternative path of development. Thus while the revolutionary peasant masses of A.P. launched a struggle against the destructive Pulichintala dam project in the Guntur district of A.P., they have also taken up widespread programmes of launching their own eco-friendly and people centred development projects like the renewal and repair of village tanks and bunds and construction of local irrigation projects through shared labour etc. under the leadership of revolutionary people's committees. Based on an approach once described by Mao Tse Tung as "walking on two legs", these movements have tried to link scientific knowledge to the mobilisation of people's initiative. As a result the once backward districts of Telengana have not only survived some of the attempts of the rulers to impose destructive development, but are also embarking on their own alternative vision of things and actually taking up such projects at the grassroots level as well as building the village committees necessary to oversee and implement such schemes. This is the real path of development along which the movement against destructive mega development projects should advance.

Oppose the Ruling Class Attempts to Push Through the SSP

It is a foregone conclusion that the present government cannot, nor can any government in this blatantly anti-people system compensate such a

large number of families to be displaced. AIPRF strongly believes that Sardar Sarovar project is essentially anti-people, particularly anti-farmer and pro-big business. The project is the brain-child of deliberate planning of domestic comprador sections and foreign interests. This is a plan to provide water to industries and the accompanying lop-sided urbanisation as well as the big landed farmers of Gujarat at the cost of the tribals of the valley and the peasants of Nimad. Even in the peasantry, it is small, marginal and medium farmers who would be the worst affected, swelling the ranks of the dispossessed families in urban centres, working at below-subsistence wages.

The role of the judiciary in the whole episode reveals its anti-democratic and anti-people character. Without taking into consideration how many families would be further displaced or whether they have been adequately rehabilitated or not, it ordered increasing the height of the dam from 80 to 88 metres based on false affidavits by Gujarat government. Not satisfied with its anti-people verdict, it has now censured Arundhati Roy and NBA for challenging its verdict. AIPRF strongly protests this attitude of the court to disallow public debate on issues concerning people. We demand that Supreme Court should arrange a public hearing to bring justice to the people.

AIPRF appeals to all democratic and patriotic sections in the country to oppose not only the Sardar Sarovar project but also all anti-people, imperialist sponsored projects.

AIPRF demands:

- 1) Stop the Sardar Sarovar project and have a independent, complete and comprehensive review of the project with the active, meaningful participation of the people and their organisations. Appoint a fresh Tribunal.*
- 2) Full and just rehabilitation of all those who have been displaced hitherto, immediate settling of their claims. The canal affected and other categories of affected by the dam too be declared as project affected and be given all the benefits due to the dam-affected persons.*
- 3) Stop all malicious propaganda and high-handedness against the Narmada Bachao Andolan in Gujarat.*
- 4) Commission for an independent, open, peoples participatory review of all large dams in India till date.*

Annexure

People's Struggle against Pulichintala Project in Andhra Pradesh

The people of Palnadu and Krishnapatti areas in Guntur and Nalgonda districts of Andhra Pradesh have been waging struggles against the construction "Pulichintala Balancing Reservoir" Recently AIPRF has taken up agitation programmes involving many mass organisations as well as the people-to-be-effected in the reservoir area.

The project, actually was planned by the British Government 100 years ago as a reservoir to supply water to the dryland up-areas on either side of the river Krishna. But now this project has been modified as a Balancing Reservoir which will supply extra water in time to the already well-irrigated Krishna-delta lands for the first and second crops. The Andhra Pradesh Government in the last 15 years, both under Congress and TDP regimes concealed the fact that the big landlords in Krishna-delta area have managed to change the nature of the project by completely diverting Krishna water to the delta area depriving the dry lands of water once again.

35 villages will be submerged in the reservoir water displacing 50,000 indigenous people. 35,000 acres of fertile land which these people are cultivating will be submerged only to provide extra water to the delta lands. Several thousands of forest land, general vacant lands also get submerged in addition to the 35,000 acres fertile agricultural lands. Barytes mines (limestone) in hundreds of acres will also be submerged in water. As a result, thousands of workers in cement factories and Barytes mines will loose their jobs.

In 1984 when N.T. Rama Rao, the then Chief Minister laid foundation stone, people rose against him. The police opened fire in air to make way to the CM to come out. The police heavily lathicharged on the people. A committee against the construction of Pulichintala was formed soon after the incident.

AIPRF alongwith the leaders of many mass organizations sur-

veyed the area. Venkata Subbiah, Rytu Cooli Porata Samiti, Ramakrishna, AIPRF, CSR Prasad, RWA, Rajendra Prasad, Vikasa, J. Kamalakar, Dalit Mahasabha and others joined the survey team. The team visited the project area and the surrounding 20 villages and met hundreds of people.

The people said that they would not leave the area at any cost. The climate is very pleasant and hygienic and people scarcely get any disease. The lands are fertile. Mosquitoes are never present in any season. Those who do not have land survive on the river and the forest. People also live on sheep, cattle and other animals for which abundant vegetation is available. They ask, "Why should 50,000 people living for thousands of years in the project area have just to facilitate delta area rich peasants with surplus water for a second crop?" The people asked AIPRF to join them in their struggle. With the initiative of AIPRF a "Solidarity Committee for the Affected People of Pulichintala Project" was formed with many mass organisations in November 1995.

A day-long convention with 1000 people was held on 16th December 1995 in Piduguralla, the nearest town to Pulichintala project which was concluded with a procession of 5000 people and a public meeting. The public meeting was attended by more than 8,000 people who raised slogans against the construction Pulichintala Project.

In the convention and the public meeting Dr. K. Purushottam an environmental scientist addressed the meeting. He said that the project was going to be built only to pocket huge amounts of money by the ruling political leaders and their contractors as it was already clear to everyone that there was no more water in Krishna river for any new irrigation projects.

In the village of Bodan, another public meeting was conducted on 25th February, 1996 by the Solidarity Committee. In this meeting Mamidi Nagabhushana Rao, Chava Vara Prasad, Neelakantha Ramulu all displaced by Nagarjuna Sagar Project participated along with leaders of AIPRF and other mass organisations. This public meeting

resolved that the dalals, politicians and contractors conspired for money from the state exchequer. Nazar, a renowned folk artist (who died later in March 1997) performed in support of the native people of Pulichintala region. Local people played street plays against political dalals on the seats of Power.

After these two public meetings and protest rallies, AIPRF is able to raise the issue of Pulichintala Project everywhere. The ruling party helped some rich peasants in the plain areas of Krishna and Guntur districts recently in disguise to form a "counter-committee" against the "Solidarity Committee" to spread disinformation about the Pulichintala Project.

Later AIPRF visited the project area with more intellectuals and environmentalists in its team once again. With the acute problems of irrigation water in the dry lands of Telangana districts, an overwhelming opposition against the construction of this project has been consolidated. AIPRF appeals to all democrats and democratic organisations in the country to raise voice against the construction of the Pulichintala Project. Very recently, it is being propagated by the Government officials that the Government has decided to reduce the height of Pulichintala Project succumbing to the wide protests.

These actions were followed by many other peoples protests and a series of strikes. Finally people along with their organisations announced that they would obstruct the transportation of machinery and materials to the project site. Then the Government has stopped building the roads and has taken back the machinery. Though there is no announcement from the governments side that the project is stopped, for all practical purposes the construction has been virtually stopped.

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An Introduction to AIPRF

From Kashmir to Kanyakumari, from Andhra Pradesh and Dandakaranya to Assam and the North-East, or in Bihar, Chattisgarh and the Narmada valley, lakhs of people are turning the fields, factories, colleges, bastis land streets into a vast battleground against the Indian ruling classes.

Some may be battling for wages and against higher prices, others for autonomy or independence, many challenges the deprivation and displacement in the name of development or stand opposed to the growing environmental degradation. There are organisations which oppose the governments new economic policies and those which stand for the smashing of the economic, political, social and cultural oppression by landlords and compradors, and as part of that struggle especially the redistribution of land to the genuine tiller. These are movements with different ideologies and various strengths, not all have consciously or unconsciously mobilised the people towards a common aim- to fight against exploitation and oppression and in the process build a new, genuinely democratic, Indian society.

Today, as imperialism is intensifying its oppression, the country is in a severe crisis and facing deep turmoil, the different movements of the people hold out the promise of radical change. Though these movements have not been spared by state terror and hundreds of martyrs have laid down their lives in the course of these struggles, they continue to advance. Past experience has shown that while individual movements may be isolated and crushed by concentrating the immense might of the Indian state, the combined resistance of these movements could well prove to be an irresistible force. Only such a resistance struggle holds out the hope of transforming the dreams of the people's movements into the reality of a better tomorrow.

It is to this better tomorrow, to the fulfillment of the dreams of hundreds of martyrs that the AIPRF, which has initially been formed by several struggling organisations from all over the country, stands committed. And to fulfill this aim it will work towards building the widest possible platform for a combined peoples resistance. They may kill all the flowers but they cannot hold back the spring.