

CONSERVATION BEGINS AT HOME

The environment is just being rediscovered by people living in it. A few decades ago the words ecosystem, environmental crisis, were restricted to a small sphere. Not many were concerned with our assaults on nature. Things are changing fast and today we find wide public recognition of the crisis our planet is facing. All of us agree in principle, that each and every person should contribute to environmental conservation. Nobody tells us however, what a common man like me is supposed to do! We find people giving numerous confident explanations of the cause but very few can come up with the cure.

The proximate cause and the ultimate cause:

People talk about causes of environmental damage. For example, an industry that does not care to treat its wastes, illegal felling of trees, large river valley projects leading to the submersion of highly forested valleys; corruption among forest officials, licensing authorities and contractors; so on and so forth.

These are, no doubt, the 'causes' of environmental damage, but they are only the proximate causes. Nobody seems to be aware that the 'ultimate cause' lies with you and me!

Thirty years back, a sofa set and dining table were luxury items in a typical Indian middle class family. Now these things have become common place in this class. See the changing picture of a marriage party; the indiscriminate use of paper dishes, paper cups and paper napkins! Have a look at your wardrobe. Count the number of dresses or sarees you have. Try to remember how many you, or your family had thirty years back.

Well, what has this to do with the environment? Certainly, we have only one source of all materials, and that is nature. So the more we consume, the more we degrade nature! Both by fast consumption of natural resources and by adding to the ever increasing heaps of garbage.

Our changing life style, changing social values and concepts of 'modern living standards' are the 'ultimate cause' of the ecocrisis we are facing. While adopting the technological advancements of the West, we have adopted their life style, their social values, and their exploitation based economics also. Before following the West, we must think of an important equation. The multiplication product of the total population and per head resource consumption, should be less than or equal to the rate of regeneration of renewable natural resources. So if you have a huge population, the per capita resource consumption should be kept fairly low. In other words, we in India cannot afford to increase our 'standard of living' beyond a limit.

Beating around the wrong bush:

We are burning wood in our 'chulhas' for thousands of years. The forests never retreated. Then, the cities started growing in the 20th century, and the forests started vanishing surprisingly fast.

So when people talk about villagers, tribesmen and their fuel-wood requirements and try to improve the 'chulhas' and seek alternative fuels, they are not only beating around the bush, but they are beating around the wrong bush! The ultimate cause lies in the cities; so any serious conservation effort should start from cities. Cities are like an octopus, with several long arms that continuously rob resources from remote areas.

What can we do?

1) **Avoid all disposables** : Disposables damage the environment in two ways. On one hand they demand tremendous amounts of natural resources and on the other they create garbage problems. Avoid using paper dishes and paper cups. Prefer fresh fruits to cold drinks, and among cold drinks prefer the bottled ones to those in paper/plastic packs. Avoid consuming pre-packaged foods. Fresh foods are always better even from the health point of view.

Disposable diapers, not only contribute to the garbage problems, but are also unhygienic and in fact absolutely unnecessary.

Why go for disposable packs of cooking oils, vegetable oils, ghee, milk etc. when these things can be bought loose?

In hotels, nowadays paper napkins are on the verge of replacing wash basins! This is again an unhygienic habit, particularly where water is not so scarce that you can't even wash your hands!

2) **Save paper** : 10 tonnes of bamboo has to be pulped to get a few hundred kg of paper! In this era of advancing knowledge, use of paper is unavoidable in mass communication, education, and documentation. Yet in many ways, use of paper can be minimised. Avoid all unnecessary paper work. Open envelopes and packages carefully so that they can be reused. At primary school level encourage the use of slates rather than note books. Do not use large papers where smaller ones suffice. Use paper from both sides.

3) **Furniture** : Dining tables, chairs, and drawing room furniture are neither part of our culture nor are they essential. Any drawing room can be tastefully decorated even without sofa sets, false ceilings, partitions, wooden panels, etc.

Replacing wood by metal is also not a very satisfactory solution as the process of conversion of metal ore to the final product requires tremendous fuel and also causes pollution. The practical solution then, is to identify the indispensable items and buy only those.

4) **Tea, coffee, tobacco** : Under tea, coffee and tobacco plantations was originally under rich forests. As the demand for tea and coffee increases, more and more forests disappear. Today thousands of acres of fertile land is under tobacco plantation. Tea and coffee more than double the household fuel requirement. Also the harmful effects of these on health is common knowledge. So try to cut down on these items if at all you cannot avoid them completely.

5) **Save Electricity** : We do need electricity but our demands should be kept to a minimum, as electricity cannot be generated without substantial environmental damage. Thermal power stations not only consume fuel, but also pollute air. Hydroelectric projects necessarily involve submersion of forest and many associated problems. Solar electricity is still far from large scale use.

How many of us, for example, turnoff the lights or fan when we go from one room to another? Do you have an air-conditioned room just because you can afford to? The fact that majority of people do very well without it implies that it is an unnecessary luxury and a sinful waste of a valuable resource.

In a nutshell, we can hope to conserve only by keeping our day to day needs to a minimum. Think of how many dresses we have, and how many we actually need, whether we use synthetic fibre (which consume resources and pollute) or cotton (which increases per capita land requirement) is not as important as the number. 5-7 dresses per head should surely be acceptable as sufficient. If we have more than that, it is an assault on the environment.

We want to make it very clear that these arguments are NOT anti-development or anti-science. Development should lead to sufficient food, shelter, clothing and education to everybody. Further more we will be glad if everybody is able to live a more luxurious life. But looking at the state of the environment today, and our population, it is very clear that we just cannot afford any luxury.

A Purely Indian Thought :

We have borrowed the environmental movement from developed countries. And so our environmental philosophy has a foreign origin. But the above thought has probably not originated there. This, because on the one hand they have maintained a low population density and on the other have wisely learnt to maintain a high standard of living by depleting resources of the so-called developing countries. So the above thought has to arise in India or similarly situated countries and if we fail to realise these facts, we simply do not have a future.

WE DON'T HAVE THE RIGHT TO....

- We don't have the right to talk about deforestation sitting in 'well-furnished' wooden panelled rooms.
- We don't have the right to talk about air and noise pollution caused by vehicles if we cannot walk or cycle down even short distances.
- We don't have the right to talk or worry about receding forests and depleting wild life if we cannot cut down on our tea, coffee and tobacco.
- We don't have the right to protest against any hydel or thermal power projects if we just cannot do without electricity in our home for even a few hours.
- We just don't have the right to call ourselves nature-lovers, conservationists, environmentalists if we fail to realise that our ever-increasing day-to-day wants have something to do with our environment.

ENTROPY AND ENVIRONMENT

The second law of thermodynamics tells us that in any reaction the entropy or disorder of the universe increases. Thermodynamically 'open' systems can maintain their organised state at the expense of ever increasing disorder of the environment.

This law is applicable to us. If we want to live a more organised, more sophisticated life with a 'high' standard of living, we are bound to degrade the environment to a greater magnitude. So by the basic law of nature, it is impossible to increase our standard of living without a corresponding degradation of our environment.

THE PARADOX OF ENVIRONMENTALISTS

The more the resource consumption of a family the more the environmental damage inflicted by that family. Accordingly the higher middle class and the rich are the maximum degraders of the environment. Paradoxically almost all of today's environmentalists and conservationists come from the same class and they fail to realise that they are pretending to fight against problems created by themselves.

Do preserve this leaflet for others to read, as we do not want to waste paper for reprinting !

From:

Life Research Foundation

10, Pranav Society, 1000/6-C Navi Peth Pune 411 030, INDIA.

Amte to float 'Green Front'

HEMALKASA, GADCHIROLI, Apr. 25 (UNI): -- As a first step towards formation of a 'Green Front', over 80 environmentalists, social activists and journalists have formed a committee to draw up a 'Green Document' which would serve as a platform for politicising the environmental issue.

The decision to form such a committee, which would contact environmental and social action groups all over the country, and convene a meeting later this year was taken at a meeting held here on Saturday.

The meeting, convened by Magasaysay Award winner and social worker Baba Amte, was a follow-up of a similar meeting held at Anandvan, in Chandrapur district, which had come out with a declaration asserting the collective will of these activists against big dams.

Pressure

Setting the tone of the meeting, Baba Amte said, the time was ripe for such a 'Green Front' which would act as a massive pressure group and force political parties to take notice of the millions who suffer from the degradation of environment and the 'Destruction which so-called developmental projects wreck.'

Stating that "Tribals in this country are more alienated than the Sikh population," Baba said it was time that the massive numbers that they constitute be brought home to political parties.

Mr. Amte who had recently concluded a 'Knit India' march from Arunachal Pradesh to Gujarat, said the need for such a pressure group was growing in the country, especially in view of the increasing pace of launching massive projects all over the country.

The meeting, which was attended by activists from all over the country, was unanimous that the present developmental model, based on massive projects and centralisation of political and economic power, was harmful to the environment and opposed to social justice.

They were also of the view that all political parties irrespective of their ideologies were only concerned with short term benefits and were not really bothered about the harm that the present policies caused.

Participants

Prominent among the activists attending were Smitu Kothari, Rajesh Tandon, Meghnah Bhattacharya, Sharad Kulkarni former



Madhya Pradesh Minister Omprakash Rawal, and senior bureaucrats like Kamla Chowdhary.

Sounding a warning to all political parties, speakers at the meeting said that the number of people affected by the 'Environmental and social disasters caused by developmental projects,' were about 200 million and would as such decide the fate of any party vying for power.

In view, of the fact that general elections were scheduled to be held by the year-end, the meeting also agreed in principle to hold a meeting at New Delhi to demonstrate the force that these groups represent. The date of the meeting would be decided later.

The 'Green Document' to be prepared will form the basis of action for all environmental groups fighting against the degradation of environment.

The document which would give a detailed reasoning for the opposition to the present developmental model and also suggest alternatives would be the crystallisation of a long process of environmental awareness in the country, speakers at the meeting said.

Tribals join hands against big dams

By CHINU PANCHAL

The Times of India News Service
HEMALKASA (Maharashtra),
April 24.

AT sunrise here yesterday, several thousand tribals joined hands with Baba Amte and together with over 100 environmentalists, pledged to fight against the construction of big dams.

They stood in the water at the confluence of three rivers — Indravati, Pamal, Gautami and Pearl Kota — and shouted slogans against big dams and for conserving forests. This is a symbolic act, the Baba said, "to raise a chain of human hands and fence of human legs against big dams in the country."

The tribals had trekked 30 kms to reach Hemalkasa on Saturday afternoon ceremoniously carrying small trees in "palakhi". They called it "taru dindi". They heard the Baba and others speak on the need to conserve forests and why they were against the Bhopal Pattanam dam on the Indravati river, which would submerge every inch of land in their villages and displace them to unknown places. Later, they danced and sang songs through the night in the river-bed which is a few kilometres away from the proposed site of the dam, before taking the pledge in the morning.

Addressing the gathering, Baba Amte stressed the need for forming a "green front" and publishing a "green manifesto" before the election. Mr Shailesh Kothari, a member of the steering committee, supported the idea and said the issue of environment should become part of the political agenda during the election campaign.

The meeting decided to invite the various people working in this field to Nagpur in June to draft the mani-

festo. It was also decided to hold a rally on October 2 in Delhi, against big dams and other related issues.

The day-long discussion was devoted to various agitations against Sardar Sarovar (Narmada), Koyalkaro (Suvarna Rekha), Bhopal Pattanam (Indravati) and Bodhghat (Indravati). Mr Omprakash Rawal, a former state minister, and others from M.P. said the World Bank had cancelled the loan for the Bodhghat project but there was need for vigilance as the state government might raise money from other sources and go ahead with the project. They said their information was that the state government had already spent over Rs 100 crores on the project.

Members from Bihar complained against police repression against the activists opposing the Koyalkard dam project. Similar complaints were also voiced by the activists working in the Narmada project area.

The strategy for further action to be taken on the issue of the Sardar Sarovar project in Gujarat dominated the discussion. A meeting of signatories to the memorandum to the Prime Minister on this issue is called in Bombay next month to work out the action plan. The general view was that the people of Gujarat were "brainwashed" on the issue of the Narmada project and there was need for re-educating them on the issue.

Baba Amte referred to his own recent experience in Gujarat and said the people felt so strongly against all those opposing the Narmada project that he feared danger to the life of Ms Medha Patkar, a leading activist in Gujarat.

He said during his Gujarat tour he was told of Japanese "floating pipe technology" which could provide drinking water to towns and villages in Saurashtra. This technology is stated to be cheap in comparison to the costly Narmada project and would not displace tribals.

Mr Ashish Kothari and Dr Kamla Choudhary said there was need for collecting more information and supplying it to MLAs and MPs. There was a lack of communication, especially on the Narmada issue. Mr Kothari advocated the need for publishing two journals in Hindi and English.

Mr Shailesh Kothari said a study conducted on the model rehabilitation village showed that the people died early; there was no firewood available and, the land problem remained the same as the displaced persons were given one piece of land in several names.

Mr Omprakash Rawal from Indore said their effort to persuade political leaders on the Narmada issue had shown some results in Madhya Pradesh. Two top BJP leaders, the

leader of the opposition, Mr Kailash Joshi and the state BJP president, Mr Sunderlal Patwa, had assured them support to oppose the Narmada project in Madhya Pradesh and also support any agitation for the proper compensation to the displaced persons.

He pointed out that the state government was discriminating even in paying compensation. The government was not prepared to pay compensation to persons displaced because of diverting the railway line at the same rate it was giving the persons displaced when land would be submerged due to the construction of the dam.

Dr Abhay Bang of Ghadchiroli talked of the need for enlisting the co-operation of tribals in the struggle against big dams as it was mostly they were displaced. Therefore, it was imperative that they should take interest in their problems.

He said tribal co-operatives should be set up for the growth and sale of forest produce. The Maharashtra forest department, for instance, sold 200 million bamboos to the Dallarpur paper mills of the Thapar group at the rate of eight paise per piece. But the same bamboo was sold to the tribals for making baskets at Rs 3 per piece. This discrimination should go and the tribals should be allowed to manage their own co-operatives, he said.

Dr. Vikas Amte

ANANDWAN Pin-44

Via Warora (C. R.)

Dist. Chandrapur

Maharashtra

Phone: 34 (Warora)

13 July 1989.

Dear Friend,

Many of us are becoming increasingly concerned with the ever increasing pace of liquidation of the country's heritage of natural resources, a process that is going hand in hand with the widening social and economic gulf between different segments of our society. Big dams are only one symptom of this process, which needs to be viewed in the wider perspective of the model of development being pursued by us. Shri Baba Amte had mooted the idea in this context of holding a meeting of environmental activists, theorists and others to work out such a perspective as a follow-up of the Adivasi Mela held at Hemalkasa (Maharashtra) on April 22-23, 1989. Such a meeting was held at Nagpur on July 8-9 and was attended among others by Shri Omprakash Rawal, Shri Mohan Hirabai Hiralal, Shri Madhav Gadgil, Shri Vijay Lapalikar & myself. At this meeting an attempt was made to pinpoint the main issues of relevance in the whole environment- development debate, and to indicate the direction which an environmentally sound, sustainable and socially just development policy should take.

We believe that such a statement needs to be widely debated among environmental activists, scientists and other concerned citizens so that a consensus on a broader perspective may be arrived at. Such a shared perspective could enable us to come and work together in a network of all groups concerned with issues of environment and social justice.

I enclose a copy of the preliminary statement drafted at Nagpur on July 8-9. There is ofcourse no pretence to this being in any sense final. Hopefully, it would serve to initiate a wider debate among us that could eventually lead to a consensus on an overall perspective. I would therefore, be grateful if you could go over the statement critically and discuss it with your friends and colleagues. I would then urge you to please write back to me within a month giving your detailed comments on this draft and suggesting any additions, deletions, modifications or perhaps reorientation. We shall compile these reactions and then perhaps plan to meet together to come up with a more refined statement. In the meanwhile, I would like to request you not to pass on this statement to the Press.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

(DR VIKAS AMTE)

ENCL: Environment and Development: The Indian Perspective.

Environment and Development: The Indian Perspective

The major problems facing our country include: (a) Environmental degradation in its many forms such as overuse of renewable resources like groundwater and forests, destruction of biological diversity and pollution to depletion of ozone layer in the earth's atmosphere (b) Growing social and economic disparities, (c) Large-scale unemployment and underemployment, specially in the rural areas and consequent large-scale migration of the poor to the cities.

(2) These problems are inter-connected in many ways and relate to: (a) The culture of highly inefficient, wasteful resource use, both by the poor and rich each in their different ways (b) Cornering of the benefits of development by a narrow segment of the society, and (c) Progressive alienation of masses of people from access to natural resources on which they have been intimately dependent for many generations.

(3) All these are ultimately linked to one all pervasive process; the organisation of highly subsidised flows of resources under sponsorship of the state apparatus to the few islands of prosperity in the cities, industry and intensive agriculture. This is complemented by a counterflow of waste and pollutants into the oceans of poverty from these islands of prosperity.

(4) Beneficiaries of subsidies, be they paper mills receiving bamboo at one thousandth market price, city dwellers receiving water at one fiftieth of the actual cost, or farmers receiving electricity for their pumpsets at one twentieth of the production cost end up using these resources in a highly inefficient fashion. With the users thus indifferent, the resource use is also administered in a highly wasteful fashion, e.g. with large transmission losses of electric power and poor maintenance of irrigation systems. The high margins of profit that the subsidies make possible promote corruption, with the beneficiaries of subsidies, the bureaucracy and politicians constituting an iron triangle of vested interest that push for resource mismanagement.

(5) The pockets of prosperity that this system of subsidies has generated are increasingly indulging in an ostentatious lifestyle. Such a consumerist culture simply cannot bring our large population within its orbit; but its attraction is forcing further resource flows out of the rural hinterland by people looking desperately for cash. The resultant impoverishment of large tracts of our countryside is hardly compensated for by the money being pumped in through the rural employment programmes, since these are never effectively used to generate long-term productive assets for the poor.

(6) It is evident that we must take a firm stand against all state sponsored subsidies, except for the purpose of generation of productive, environmentally sound employment for the masses. When all consumers begin to pay the proper price for all resources used, be they water, electric power, or pulpwood etc., far more efficient systems of resource use would naturally tend to develop. This costing should not only include straightforward economic considerations, but also long-term consequences of depletion of nonrenewable resources like oil or topsoil.

(7) In particular, we must take a firm stand that all State interventions should leave everybody atleast as well off, if not a little better off, than before the intervention. This implies that nobody should be displaced by a development project without his or her consent, and the project should include a full-fledged component of total rehabilitation of displaced persons in the manner that Tibetan refugees have been looked after.

(8) Such a reorientation of the manner in which development projects are assessed and implemented would force a welcome change in their composition. Today gigantic projects tend to be favoured because they provide gigantic scope for wasteful resource use and large-scale corruption. With premium on very careful resource use, a different mix of environmentally sound, socially just development programmes is bound to emerge. These would for instance go in for energy conservation, rather than Nuclear power generation, careful execution of irrigation water delivery, rather than building up large dams.

(9) Today the beneficiaries of wasteful resource use live for away from where resource degradation is having its immediate impact and are well shielded from the negative consequences. They have therefore no motivation for prudent resource use. It is the rural poor dependent on the health of the local resource base for their well being, who suffer the consequences. It is this segment of the population that is likely to be most highly motivated for sustainable resource use. But they are totally deprived of all powers to control their resource base, and in fact are daily being further and further alienated from access to it. In their attempts to eke out a living, they are instead further destroying the environment.

(10) It is this situation that needs to be turned around. This calls for empowering local communities to take good care of the resource base of their environment. Here the local community has to mean a group of people who can all come together, interact and decide on resource use, and not for instance the elected Panchayat members from a hetrogenous cluster of villages. This system of involving them in good resource management, therefore, needs to be worked out with great care, ensuring that it would not be subverted to serve the interests of a small village elite.

(11) A major challenge before us is the development of a decentralised system of integrated planning, execution and monitoring of natural resource use. Such a system implies complete access to information to all citizens, this right to know is an important ingredient of genuine democracy. The system would put to full use indigenous knowledge and on the spot monitoring of actual performance of development programmes by the local people. This would go a long way in restoring a measure of dignity and self-confidence among the people.

(12) A system of community land and water sources would have to be set up to provide for the basic needs such as food, fuel, fodder and housing material of local people. While constituting the system, the emphasis should be on matching land use to capability and needs rather than administrative categories such as reserved forest or minor irrigation department tanks. The local people should have proper authority with adequate checks from higher levels in managing well all these resources.

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The system would promote the health of gross natural product shared equitably by all, rather than the gross national product cornered by a few.

(13) Educational institutions should come to serve as repositories of information about the natural resources of their locality and work with local people in planning, implementation and monitoring of resource use. Such an alternative should enable us to prune down the presently bloated bureaucracy, which along with the military is swallowing all the resources of the country.

(14) Gainful employment must be recognised as a constitutional right of all citizens. State investment should, therefore, focus on rural employment generation for the purpose of eco-restoration. Special efforts would have to go into weaning people away from environmentally destructive occupations such as steep hills for cultivation into which they are now being forced. Instead the bulk of our forest land should be enriched with a variety of non-timber yielding species such as mahua, myrobolan, soapnut and nux vomica etc and these produce be used for effectively supporting the rural economy. All wood needed for industry and urban construction should come to be produced on marginal agricultural lands. Only with such a programme could we hope to break the vicious cycle of poor becoming poorer while degrading the environment further in their efforts to eke out a subsistence.

(15) It is undoubtedly true that the ever increasing numbers of poor in our country are imposing demands that play a significant role in degradation of the environment. But while they are engaged in a scramble for resources, and see no hope for improvement in the quality of life, they would never be motivated to invest more in each child and limit their number. Only when we could transform the current system to confer on them dignity and assured supply of basic needs would they be motivated to do so.

(16) We must realise that we are witnessing the development of a hierarchy of resource flows--out of the Indian countryside into cities--out of India to Japan, USA, each impoverishing an already poor region. By indulging in dependence on foreign loans to execute gigantic development projects managed most wastefully to provide resources at highly subsidised rates to those already well off, we are sinking deeper and deeper into a morass of financial and environmental bankruptcy.

(17) We must now recognise that we share this world with millions of other species of living organisms who too have a right to exist on this earth, and hold its resources in trust for generations to come. We must, therefore, cease treating it with contempt as a warehouse of commodities to satisfy the consumerism of a narrow elite, and treat it with respect so that it can be preserved as a habitat for humanity and all other life forms for generations to come.

Narmada Sagar protest

'My voice can't be silenced'

Baba Amte writes to PM



NAGPUR, Sept. 26: — "My voice cannot be silenced in this or any other manner. Nor will you be able to crush the rising spirit of those of our countrymen and women who are to be brutally devastated by these projects...."

Thus warned humanist Baba Amte in a very strongly worded letter to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, expressing his "great shock, distress and anger" at the news that the Planning Commission has given clearance to the Narmada Sagar Project (NSP) ignoring all voices of caution which have repeatedly expressed their reasoned and humane opposition to the Project".

Strong reasons

After giving eight strong reasons why the Narmada Sagar Project must not be given clearance, Baba Amte states in the end: "I completely fail to understand what it is that motivates your Government to insist on pushing through a project which has repeatedly and abundantly been demonstrated to be technically unsound, procedurally invalid, financially unviable, economically worthless (benefit-cost ratio less than the minimum required), environmentally destructive and above all one which will render lakhs of people homeless. Not once, not twice, hundreds of times over and over again these arguments have been placed before you. You have chosen to respond in the only manner you seem to know— by not responding at all. You seem to harbour the illusion that this strategem will eventually work— that these voices will one day melt away. Let me remind you, however: My voice cannot be silenced in this or any other manner. Nor will you

be able to crush the rising spirit of those of our countrymen and women who are to be brutally devastated by these projects— nor will you be able to warp the minds of increasing sections of our people— scientists, academicians, social workers, lawyers, journalists, artists, environmentalists — who are joining the struggle in larger and larger numbers.

Ray of hope

"Recently you mooted the idea of "Protect the planet fund". A ray of hope glimmered, but alas! Only for a short while! In politics, the critical factor is credibility and history pronounces the verdict that credibility is always achieved through performance.

"Gather enough courage to give a stinging blow to your pride. Please do not stand on the fault lines of history. The hour is here. Take creative approach to release the tension in the tribal world, before the volcano of discontent erupts.

"Dear Rajiv, your puzzling silence has baffled me. Intolerable pain of the tribals, their suffering and their tears are before my eyes and have become deeply engraved on my soul".

The letter dated September 23, 1989, gives a detailed reasoning of the environmentalists against the Narmada Sagar Project and also the entire Narmada Valley Project. It expresses regret and surprise that "Typically, the Planning Commission not only refused to say a word to answer any of the long series of questions which have been raised about the NSP". The questions, or the various aspects of the argument of the environmentalists, have been listed in the letter in great length. Aspect marked as (A) challenges the technical ground upon which the Government has based its clearance to the Narmada Sagar Project. It states that the "official estimate of the run-off available from the Narmada, which shows that this has declined by 4.2 million acre feet since the time projects were designed. Thus, on purely technical grounds, there is an unsalable case for reviewing the project".

Point marked as (B) talks of the directive of the Planning Commission in the Seventh Plan document in favour of exploiting fully the existing irrigation projects and completing on-going projects. Point (C) quotes from the annual report of the Ministry of Water Resources for 1988-89, the figure of 181 on-going major irrigation projects from various plan periods as having been carried over into the Seventh Plan period. It quotes the report as estimating the total cost of all these projects at 26,270 crores. "The financial absurdity of sanctioning any more new major projects



is evident from the fact that the total Seventh Plan allocation for major and medium irrigation was less than half this requirement, viz. Rs. 11,55.56 crores. In this situation, sanctioning massive investment of Rs. 2,000 crores as in the case of NSP can only mean perpetuating further the endless cycle of lack of finance.. further delay..."

Other points discussed the submergence of land in the State of Madhya Pradesh, water logging and high salinity, massive investment of 62 per cent of resources to electric power and only 4 per cent to biometal cost of loss of forests; and cultural ethnocide of lakhs of tribals.

There were some quarters who had been advising Baba Amte against becoming an environmental activist. They had been also of the opinion that the struggle for environment may not be stretched so far. However, ruling out their objections, Baba Amte said, in effect, that after a deep thought, he chose to address the letter directly to the Prime Minister.

Baba Amte was in Ashokvan, one of his projects, just ten kilometres from Nagpur on Wardha Road. He started his journey this morning to Harsud in Khandwa district of Madhya Pradesh where a massive protest rally is to be held on September 28 against the proposed Narmada Sagar Project.

Harsud town getting ready to sink or survive



Baba Amte, Sunderlal Bahuguna, Shabana Azmi and Medha Patkar at the anti-Narmada protest in Harsud, Madhya Pradesh, on Thursday. — TOI photo.

By USHA RAI

The Times of India News Service
HARSUD, September 30.

THE mood in Harsud town, the biggest little town to go under the Narmada Sagar dam, varies from panic selling of land and property to acceptance of the inevitable that the town will be drowned and people will have to sprout new roots and set up business all over again wherever they are shifted.

But after the massive rally on Thursday and the media blitz of the event (over 150 journalists covered the event including BBC, *National Geographic*, *Time* and several representing regional and even mofussil papers), there is a glimmer of hope.

Harsud has suddenly been catapulted into the international environment arena — it represents at the Indian level the kind of battles that have been on to save the tropical rain forests of the Malaysia Amazon.

Harsud got two to three minutes of space on BBC's breakfast news yesterday morning. Along with Baba Amte, Shabana Azmi, Menaka Gandhi, Sivarama Karanth and Sunderlal Bahuguna, journalists galore were signing autograph books because young students wanted a memento of the great day when the world stopped by to save Harsud from drowning.

Even as the euphoria and excitement of the rally settled down along with the dust churned by departing trucks and bullock carts, the question on every lips was: "Can the Narmada Sagar be stopped? Can Harsud be saved?"

Ramesh Billorey, who with Claude Alvares has written the book *Damming the Narmada*, says for 40 years the people of Harsud have been hearing about the dam. So many do not take it seriously.

Some fear they may not get compensation at all if they do not take whatever is offered. With the tremendous support expressed at the rally, they realise it is possible to resist.

Only time will tell if Harsud will sink or survive. But the authorities are going ahead with their plans for moving the township.

Blue identity cards have been given by the Narmada Valley Development Authority to each family that has to move out.

A new Harsud town is planned at Chamera on 100 hectares of land about 15 to 20 kms from the present site. The NVDA is planning a model town that will tempt them out of their old homes.

New Harsud will be another Chandigarh," said the young collector, Mr Raghav Chandra. Top city planners and architects are being invited to design the new city.

The NVDA has not yet identified the land for resettlement of those to be displaced by the big dam, the environmentalists claim. There is no land available, say others.

But, according to an official, the ten per cent of government land called "Istar" land is being put together to rehabilitate the displaced. Even the government is not hopeful of moving out villages en masse. Villages will be splintered in accordance with the land available.

At the command area of the Tava

Dam in Hosangabad, land is available the official says. Since there is a shortage of labour in the area, the daily wages for unskilled labour are Rs 20 as against Rs 11 elsewhere and we are confident that we can move the people."

But there has been resistance to the government efforts to move people out of the 302 km stretch of villages along the railway line between Kidhhiya and Talwadiya. The railway line is being diverted because the area is to be submerged.

There seems to be no uniformity too about the compensation being paid. The villagers feel there is not enough land for them to get land for land.

"In a few years there will be 50 feet of water where I am sitting today," a shop-keeper, Mr N. M. Sand said. "The government is both blind and deaf."

"I have property worth Rs 10 lakhs in the Harsud and Bagri block of Jhabaria. Can the government give such vast sums as compensation?"

Local businessmen claim the township has a business turnover of Rs 30 crores a year. The collector scoffed at the figure but could not give an estimate of the earnings of the township.

The government is confident that business can flourish even from the new township. What is more a petroleum refinery is proposed near Chamera which will add to their business prospects, says an official.

While 12 villages are to be drowned in the first phase in 1991, 40 villages are to go under in the second phase. The town that refuses to die, Harsud, has still a few years to fight for its life.

BABA AMTE

ANANDWAN Pin-442 914

Via Warora (C.R.)

Dist. Chandrapur

Maharashtra

Phone: 34 (Warora)

23 September 1989.

**SHRI RAJIV GANDHI
PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA
NEW DELHI.**

Dear Shri Rajiv Gandhi,

It is with great shock, distress and anger that I received the news of the Planning Commission's clearance to the Narmada Sagar Project(NSP), ignoring all voices of caution which have repeatedly expressed their reasoned and humane opposition to the project. Typically, the Planning Commission not only refused to say a word in defence of its decision, it also failed to answer any of the long series of questions which have been raised about the NSP. These questions, which have been recounted innumerable times in the past, both in communications to the Government as well as in the media, are:-

- a) The technical basis upon which the project (indeed the entire NVP) is conceived has been undermined by an official estimate of the run-off available from the Narmada, which shows that this has declined by 4.2 Million Acre Feet since the time the projects were designed. Thus, even on purely technical grounds there is an unassailable case for reviewing the project.
- b) The clearance to the NSP constitutes a flagrant violation of the Planning Commission's own directives as stated in the seventh plan document which gives highest priority to measures for utilisation of existing irrigation potential and the completion of on-going projects. The document also argues that greater emphasis should be placed on minor irrigation and stipulates that new starts should be restricted to medium projects in drought-prone, tribal and backward areas.
- c) Here it would be pertinent to note that according to the Annual Report of the Ministry of Water Resources for 1988-89, as many as 181 on-going major irrigation projects from various plan periods were carried over into the Seventh Plan. The total requirement for completing these projects was as much as Rs.26,270 crores. The financial absurdity of sanctioning any more new major projects is evident from the fact that the total Seventh Plan allocation for major and medium irrigation was less than half this requirement, viz. Rs.11,555.56 crores. Thus we do not even have money to complete our on-going projects. In this situation, sanctioning massive investment of Rs.2000 crores as in the case of NSP can only mean perpetuating further the endless cycle of lack of finance --> delay in completion --> cost escalation --> increased financial stress --> further delay especially when the burden of the project is to be borne by Madhya Pradesh, a state already in dire financial straits. There is just no way MP can undertake the timely mobilisation of Rs.2,167 crores for the NSP in addition to the Rs.1,124 crores which, according to the NWDT Award, it has to contribute to the other major project on the Narmada, the Sardar Sarovar Project(SSP).

....contd.2/-

Let me also remind the Planning Commission of its own words that "on an average the States are losing more than Rs.427 crores per year on their irrigation investments". Among the reasons for this "the first and foremost is the delay in completion of schemes".

- d) Apart from the financial costs, the NSP will place an unbearable burden of submergence on M.P. The NSP will submerge a total of 91,348 ha. of land in M.P. of which 44,363 ha. is largely prime quality culturable land and 42,322 ha. is forest land. This is in addition to the submergence caused by the SSP of 39,134 ha. of land (13,744 ha. forests; 11,318 ha. culturable), most of which is in M.P. Thus we have the unbelievable situation of a State having to spend thousands of crores of rupees to submerge as much or perhaps even more of its territory than it is going to irrigate (1.23 lakh ha.) through the project.
- e) How far the irrigation promised by this project will actually help farmers is again seriously open to question. According to a study by the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore given the nature of the prevailing soil and rainfall regime, 40% of the Command Area faces the very real risk of water-logging and salinity. This is under the assumption that the cropping pattern visualised by the project authorities would materialise. However, experience in all our large-scale river valley projects has shown that the actual cropping pattern turns out to be far more water-intensive than the original plan. Official statistics show that this has led to waterlogging in 6 million hectares and salinity/alkalinity in 7 million hectares of land and the extent is growing. Furthermore, as the former Irrigation Secretary, Government of M.P., Shri R. L. Gupta has pointed out the I. I. Sc. study ignores completely the impact of the SSP submergence area which deeply impinges upon the NSP Command Area. According to Shri Gupta, this will make providing relief from waterlogging virtually impossible while giving rise to the danger that those living in the NSP Command Area could even suffer occasional submergence due to the SSP reservoir.
- f) The massive investment in the NSP is sometimes sought to be justified in terms of the approximately 200 MW of firm power it will generate. I would, however, also like to put this investment in some kind of perspective. According to meticulous calculations made by the Murugappa Chettiar Research Centre, Madras, of the total available energy in India, bio-mass (fuelwood, agricultural/vegetable residues and dung) contributes as much as 50%. The contribution of electric power (thermal, hydel and nuclear) is a mere 3%. If we look at our Plan investments in this light we find a complete lopsidedness of priorities. In the Seventh Plan, of the total outlay for the energy sector 62% was allotted to electric power and a mere 4% to biomass development (forestry + non-conventional sources of energy). Our planners must ponder seriously the wisdom of such an approach to the energy sector which not merely neglects biomass development, but actually leads to its destruction through submergence of vast tracts of forest and culturable land.
- g) The estimate made by the Ministry of Environment & Forests of the environmental cost of loss of forests due to the NSP is a staggering Rs.30,923 crores. The inclusion of this figure in the cost-benefit analysis of the project means that it no longer satisfies the Planning Commission's own minimum stipulated benefit-cost ratio of 1.5:1.

..contd.3/-

h) Finally and above all, I oppose the NSP for the large-scale cultural ethnocide it will perpetrate. I refer to the rendering homeless of 2 lakh people living in the submergence zone of the NSP, a large proportion of whom are Adivasis. This is in addition to the 1 lakh people who will be displaced by the SSP. It is one thing for bureaucrats and politicians to ease their consciences by putting down grand rehabilitation policies on paper and misuse their immense propaganda resources to make a loud and vulgar display of these through the media. It is really quite another matter and one well beyond the capacity of your Governments to see to it that 3 lakh people are properly rehabilitated.

I COMPLETELY FAIL TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IT IS THAT MOTIVATES YOUR GOVERNMENT TO INSIST ON PUSHING THROUGH A PROJECT WHICH HAS REPEATEDLY AND ABUNDANTLY BEEN DEMONSTRATED TO BE TECHNICALLY UNSOUND, PROCEDURALLY INVALID, FINANCIALLY UNVIABLE, ECONOMICALLY WORTHLESS (BENEFIT-COST RATIO LESS THAN THE MINIMUM REQUIRED), ENVIRONMENTALLY DESTRUCTIVE AND ABOVE ALL ONE WHICH WILL RENDER LAKHS OF PEOPLE HOMELESS. NOT ONCE, NOT TWICE, HUNDREDS OF TIMES OVER AND OVER AGAIN THESE ARGUMENTS HAVE BEEN PLACED BEFORE YOU. YOU HAVE CHOSEN TO RESPOND IN THE ONLY MANNER YOU SEEM TO KNOW - BY NOT RESPONDING AT ALL. YOU SEEM TO HARBOUR THE ILLUSION THAT THIS STRATEGEM OF YOURS WILL EVENTUALLY WORK - THAT THESE VOICES OF PROTEST WILL ONE DAY MELT AWAY. LET ME REMIND YOU, HOWEVER: MY VOICE CANNOT BE SILENCED IN THIS OR ANY OTHER MANNER. NOR WILL YOU BE ABLE TO CRUSH THE RISING SPIRIT OF THOSE OF OUR COUNTRY-MEN AND WOMEN WHO ARE TO BE BRUTALLY DEVASTATED BY THESE PROJECTS - NOR WILL YOU BE ABLE TO WARP THE MINDS OF INCREASING SECTIONS OF OUR PEOPLE - SCIENTISTS, ACADEMICIANS, SOCIAL WORKERS, LAWYERS, JOURNALISTS, ARTISTS, ENVIRONMENTALISTS - WHO ARE JOINING THE STRUGGLE IN LARGER AND LARGER NUMBERS.

RECENTLY YOU MOOTED THE IDEA OF 'PROTECT THE PLANET FUND'. A RAY OF HOPE GLIMMERED, BUT ALAS ! ONLY FOR A SHORT WHILE ! IN POLITICS THE CRITICAL FACTOR IS CREDIBILITY AND HISTORY PRONOUNCES THE VERDICT THAT CREDIBILITY IS ALWAYS ACHIEVED THROUGH PERFORMANCE.

Gather enough courage to give a stinging blow to your pride. Please do not stand on the fault lines of History. The hour is here. Take creative approach to release the tension in the tribal world, before the volcano of discontent erupts.

Dear Rajiv, your puzzling silence has baffled me. Intolerable pain of the tribals, their suffering and their tears are before my eyes and have become deeply engraved on my soul.

Yours sincerely,

Baba Amle

23/9/89

Indira aide flays Narmada project

By NAJM-UL-HASAN

The Times of India News Service

SIMLA, November 2.

PROF Satish Dhawan, adviser on science and technology to the late Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi, considers the Narmada project a disaster.

The noted scientist spelled out a number of arguments against the execution of the Narmada project in an interview to the TOINS here recently.

Prof Dhawan, who was here to deliver the Gujar Mal Modi award lecture, questioned the wisdom of going in for such big dams when a series of small dams could serve the purpose.

There was a time when planners considered big dams an all-purpose solution for many problems. But now the same people condemned them as a disaster. "Shall we not, therefore, learn from our own mistakes of those committed by others?"

Recommending a study of the first report of the central water commission (which now stood split into various units, Prof Dhawan stressed it had unequivocally stated that the siltration rate in bigger dams had been five to 500 times higher than what was originally

estimated. What was more, the resulting salinity of soil was not taken into account or even mentioned at the time of conceiving the project. While constructing the dam, the problem of drainage (of sub-soil water) was ignored.

Pointing out that more than a billion dollars were spent on desilting the Colorado reservoir, he quoted several other similar problems arising in other big dams in the U.S.

Wondering what the haste was in executing a project which was conceived 40 years ago and was likely to take another 40 to complete, he lamented that the project, if taken up, would "uproot more than half-a-million people. He said the interests of the affected tribals should have been earnestly taken into consideration and the opinion of the displaced people sought before proceeding with the project.

SPACE PROGRAMME

Talking about the country's space programme, Prof Dhawan noted that some significant development had taken place though it was not fully satisfactory. He stressed that the success or otherwise of a programme should not be measured by a string of failures. He said the failures helped in designing future projects better taking care not to repeat mistakes.

In Prof Dhawan's opinion, the space programme should have

given a boost to industry and it was happening slowly.

Speaking on technological development in the country, Prof Dhawan lamented that except for borrowing technology from advanced countries through collaborations, "we did little on our own." For instance, there were more than 20 state electricity boards in the country but none had attempted to develop an indigenous technology to reduce transmission losses. While continuing to face heavy transmission losses every year, they looked towards the west to provide them with a solution to the problem.

New fund for nature

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI, November 2: The Worldwide Fund for Nature-India (WWF-India) announced the launching of a Jawaharlal Nehru community biodiversity movement from today.

Mr M. S. Swaminathan, president of WWF-India, told newsmen that biological diversity was the very foundation of biological productivity. "We can neither sustain a national food security system nor face the challenge of climate change

and rise in sea level if we fail to conserve our genetic wealth in flora, fauna and micro-organisms."

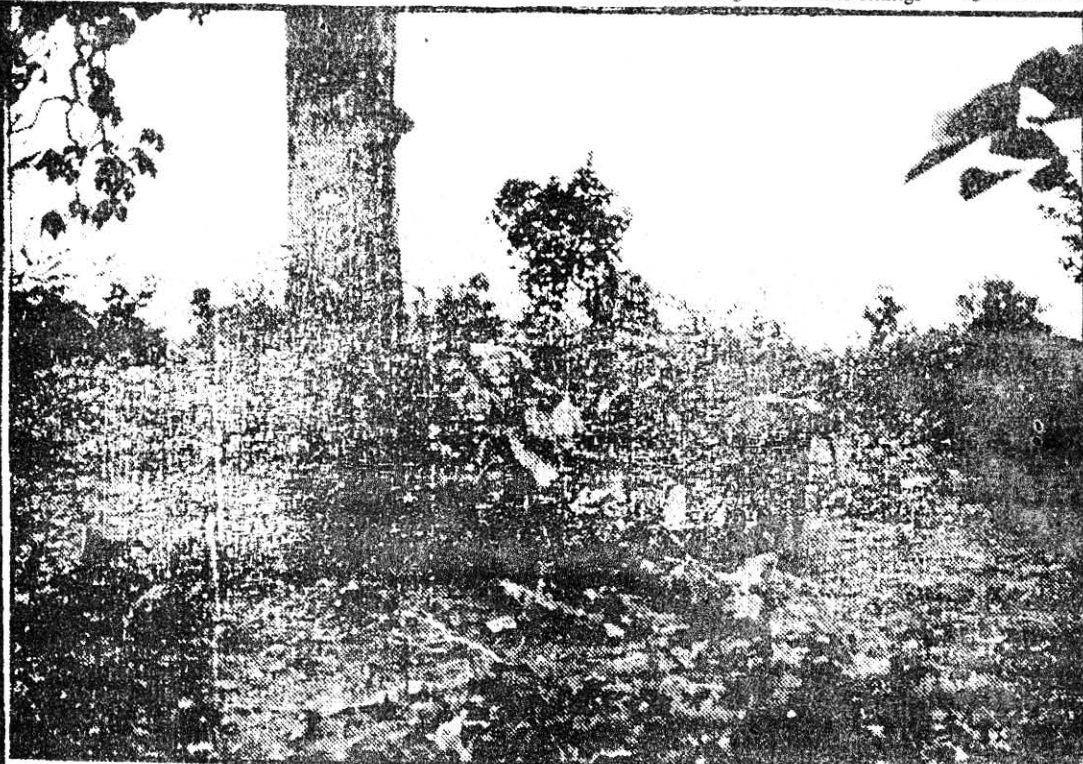
The Prime Minister, Mr Rajiv Gandhi, is to launch the movement in the presence of the Duke of Edinburgh, the international president of the WWF for nature.

A community biodiversity conservation fund is being launched to support a wide spectrum of projects involving local communities, conservation groups, research and education institutions, professional bodies and government institutions to protect and manage the vital species and safeguard the country's biological diversity.

A conservation corps of technically trained young men and women is to be established to assist local communities and conservation groups.

At its new headquarters behind UNICEF, Lodhi estate, an Indira Gandhi Conservation Monitoring Centre is to be set up. It will house a computerised data base on conservation parameters such as flora, fauna, micro-organisms, protected areas, endangered species and threatened eco-systems.

On November 3 and 4, a national symposium is to be held on the conservation and sustainable management of India's genetic estate.



The biomass needs of the 15 million inhabitants of the Narmada valley exceed nature's capacity to produce it. The resultant deforestation threatens to reduce the effectiveness of the dams well before their "lifespan" is over.— Picture by Bittu Sangal.

Dams are tombs of destruction, says Amte

By A Staff Reporter

BOMBAY, May 6 "When the sun of my life is about to set, I have set out to catch the rising sun of environmental awareness in this country," said noted social activist Baba Amte, delivering the keynote address at a two-day seminar organised by the 'Narmada Bachao Andolan' here today.

Referring to the large number of gigantic dams being built and those being planned in the country, Amte said: "These are not the temples of prosperity (referring to Nehru's phrase), but tombs of destruction. They are being built only to satiate the greed of people in power. But when greed becomes the creed, nature wreaks vengeance on them."

Amte said those in power used a host of lies to hide the truth of destruction and mismanagement that lies behind most of these schemes.

He said after living all his life for the leprosy-affected, he was now in the Narmada valley telling people about the ill-effects of the Narmada Valley Project (NVP).

Amte said the youth of the country must take a pledge to protect every river in the country. The meeting, attended by over 110 activists from various organisations, discussed the various facets of the NVP, such as rehabilitation of evacuees, the danger to the environment



Baba Amte speaking at the Narmada Bachao Andolan seminar on Saturday — SHAILENDRA YASHIWANT

because of the dams, the cost-benefit ratio of the scheme and other economic aspects.

Medha Patkar, who is one of the leading opponents of the project, said alternatives to this

sort of development must be evolved and presented.

Discussing the future course

of action, Patkar said mobilisation of the masses against the project should be the top priority of activists, with special emphasis on people in the affected area. With elections approaching, the government is bound to display urgency in completing the project. This must be countered effectively by stepping up the movement, she said.

She called for the mobilisation of support by 'decision makers', and said pressure must be kept up on the government. MPs could be contacted and made aware of the issue.

According to eminent geologist A K Singh, the NVP is located on geologically unsuitable land, on an arm of the Cambay triple junction (a meeting point of three tectonic plates). Thus, any movement as far away as below the African continent would have grave repercussions on the site. He said earthquakes up to the intensity of 8 on the Richter scale could be experienced in the area.

Vijay Paranjpe, noted economist who has conducted studies on the cost-benefit ratios of several hydel projects, said the NVP was economically unviable. Its benefits were highly exaggerated and its costs deliberately underplayed for the World Bank team, he said.

The meeting will discuss the future course of action tomorrow and a number of resolutions are likely to be passed.

विनाश के प्रतीक बड़े बांधों के विरुद्ध आदिवासियों का संकल्प

भवानी शंकर कुसुम

23 अप्रैल की भोर की पहली किरण ने जैसे ही इन्द्रावती नदी के पवित्र जल का स्पर्श किया, हाथ में हाथ डाले नदी की गोद में खड़े हजारों आदिवासियों के बड़े बांधों के विरुद्ध तारों से आकाश गुंथ उठा।

रात भर खुले आकाश के नीचे नदी किनारे नाचते गाते ये आदिवासी महाराष्ट्र के चन्द्रपुर जिले में हेमल-कसा के पास इन्द्रावती नदी के संगम स्थल पर बनने वाले भोपालपटनम बांध के प्रति अपनी विरोध प्रकट करने इकट्ठे हुए थे। रेल और मोटर की तो बात ही क्या, दूर-दूर तक सड़कों का भी अत्यन्त अभाव। पहाड़ों की गोद में बसे आदिवासियों के भुंड जंगलों के भुरमुट में से होते हुए ऐसे चले आ रहे थे, जैसे किसी बहुत बड़े उत्सव में भाग लेने जा रहे हों। सप्ताह का दिन इनके लिए किसी उत्सव से कम नहीं था। जिन पहाड़ों की कन्दराओं में जंगलों के छाँटे में सदियों से ये आदिवासी रहते आ रहे थे, वे जंगल तथाकथित विकास के मंदिर बड़े बांधों की टभें चढ़ने वाले हैं। उनका बसेरा छीना जा रहा है। अपने इस नीड़ को बचाने के लिए संकल्पबद्ध होकर आज यहाँ ये आदिवासी एकत्र हुए थे।

'बड़े बांधों के विरुद्ध सामूहिक संकल्प का इजहार' के नाम से गठित मंच ने यह नीडा उठाया है कि वह देश के लाखों आदिवासियों को बेघर और बर्बाद करने वाले, लाखों हेक्टेयर बनों और खेती की जमीन को निगल जाने वाले, पर्यावरणीय तन्त्र को नष्ट करने वाले बड़े बांधों को नहीं बनने

देंगे। सुविख्यात मानवतावादी भारत आंदोलन अभियान के प्रणेता बाबा ग्रामटे इस संकल्प के प्रेरणा स्रोत हैं।

गत वर्ष जुलाई माह में बाबा के आश्रम आनन्द वन में देश भर के जाने सामे पर्यावरण प्रेमी एकत्र हुए। सभी ने एक राय व्यक्त की कि:

—इन बांधों ने देश को सूखे से बचाने की बजाय सूखे की तरफ ही धकेला है। इसके मूल में अधिक पानी का उपभोग करने वाली कृषि पद्धति का प्रचलन है जो कि पर्यावरण की दृष्टि से अत्यन्त अनुपयुक्त है।

—ग्राम आदमी की बजाय थोड़े से धनी किसानों और शहरी सम्भ्रांत लोगों का ही इनसे हित साधन हुआ है।

—इनके कारण बहुत से क्षेत्र बाढ़ के शिकार बने हैं।

—लाखों आदिवासी और गरीब ग्रामीणजन इनके कारण बेघर, बेजमीन और बेरोजगार बने हैं।

—लाखों हेक्टेयर बनों की काट कर इन्होंने पारिस्थितिक तन्त्र को नष्ट किया है। इनके कारण हुए व्यापक वन विकास के परिणाम स्वरूप उस क्षेत्र का मौसम और मानसून का चक्र असंतुलित हुआ है।

और इसी आधार पर सबने यह मत प्रकट किया कि बिना इन परिणामों पर विचार किये, बिना राष्ट्रीय बहुसंख्यक चलाये तथा पर्यावरण विशेषज्ञों के विरोध के बावजूद सरदार सरोवर व इंदिरा सागर बांध, टेहरी बांध, पोलाबरम बांध, भोपाल पटनम आदि परियोजनाओं को सरकार ने जो

स्वीकृति दे दी है, वह देश के लिए दुर्भाग्यपूर्ण घातक है। इसका सशक्त विरोध करने तथा पीड़ित प्रभावित लोगों को संगठित कर संघर्ष करने के लिए इस मंच का गठन किया गया। मंच की एक संचालन समिति भी बनाई गई, जिसमें अनिलग्रवाल, डेरिल दे मोन्टे, स्मिथु कोठारी, मोहन कुमार, भारत भूषण, मोहन हीराबाई हीरालाल, मेघनाथ, सतीनाथ सारंगी तथा बी. एम. कलपाडे को लिया गया। डा. विकास ग्रामटे को सयोजक बनाया गया गया।

इसी परिप्रेक्ष्य में 22-23 अप्रैल को हेमलकसा में देशभर के पर्यावरण प्रेमी तथा बड़े बांधों के विरोधी श्रमियों का सम्मेलन बुलाया गया था और आशा के विपरीत कठिन यात्रा मार्ग को तय कर न केवल देश के विभिन्न हिस्सों से लगभग दो सौ पर्यावरण से जुड़े कार्यकर्ता पहुंचे, बल्कि आसपास के क्षेत्र के कोई दस हजार आदिवासी भी वहाँ एकत्र हुए। महाराष्ट्र, आंध्रप्रदेश और मध्य प्रदेश तीनों प्रान्तों की सीमा से जुड़े इस स्थल पर कितने ही आदिवासी तो आठ-दस दिन तक लगातार पद यात्रा करते हुए बड़े बांधों के विरुद्ध अपने आदिवासी भाइयों को संदेश देते हुए सम्मेलन में पहुंचे थे।

22 अप्रैल को दिन भर की चर्चा और विचार विमर्श के बाद विनाश के बड़े बांधों के विरुद्ध कई कार्यक्रम भी तय किये गये जिनमें गुजरात के सरदार सरोवर बांध पर स्थानीय लोगों का प्रदर्शन तथा दिल्ली में संसद पर राष्ट्रीय स्तर के विरोध

प्रदर्शन का कार्यक्रम मुख्यरूप से उल्लेखनीय है। इसके साथ ही बड़े बांधों के विरोध में प्रचार-प्रसार और स्थानीय स्तर पर जन संगठन तैयार करने का काम चलता रहेगा। सम्मेलन की पूरी चर्चा में बाबा ग्रामटे बराबर मौजूद रहे।

रात्रि में हेमलक्ष्मी आश्रम के प्रांगण में आदिवासियों की विशाल ग्रामसभा देखने लायक थी। मराठी और तेलुगु भाषा जानने वाले तो काफी लोग थे लेकिन उन आदिवासियों की भाषा बोलने समझने वालों की कमी थी और उनकी भाषा में बोले बिना उनकी समझ में नहीं आता। इसलिए आश्रम के ही एक कार्यकर्ता ने दुभाषिये का काम किया। सम्मेलन की चर्चा और उसमें लिये गये निर्णयों की जानकारी उस आदिवासी जन समूह को दी गई। एक स्वर से सभी ने इन निर्णयों का स्वागत किया।

आदिवासियों का यह विशाल समूह रात को ही नाचता गाता आश्रम से 4 किमी. दूर इन्द्रावती नदी के संगम पर, जहाँ भोपाल पटमन बांध बनाया जाना प्रस्तावित है, पहुँच गया। नदी के किनारों पर पेड़ों के नीचे राग की रोशनी में रात भर यह जन-समूह हँसता गाता रहा। उस रात वह प्राकृतिक अंचल जैसे सजीव हो उठा।

प्रातः सूर्योदय से पूर्व ही बाबा ग्रामटे संगमस्थल पर पहुँच गये और समूचा जन समूह उनके साथ नदी की धारा में डूब पड़ा। देखते ही देखते घुटनों जितने पानी में खड़े हाथ में हाथ डालने हजारों स्त्री-पुरुषों की

लम्बी कतार एक ज़ोर की तरह बन गई। यह मानव श्रृंखला नदी के किनारों पर डाली जाने वाली बांध रपी बेड़ियों को रोकने के प्रतीक के रूप में खड़ी हो गई थी। और जैसे ही दूर क्षितिज में सूर्योदय की लालिमा बिखरी, हजारों मानव कंठ-बांध विरोधी नारों से मुखरित हो उठे। “नदी हमारी माता है, हम इसे कँद नहीं करने देंगे। बड़े बांध हमारे जीवन और आदिवासी संस्कृति को नष्ट करने वाले हैं। हमारे जीवन स्रोत वन, प्रकृति और पर्यावरण के ये दुश्मन हैं। हम शांतिपूर्ण तरीकों से इनका विरोध करेंगे। बड़े बांध न बनने देने के लिए हम कृत संकल्प हैं।” यह संकल्प सभी ने नदी की गोद में खड़े होकर सूर्योदय की बेला में लुत्ते आकाश के नीचे लिया।

इस अभूतपूर्व और ऐतिहासिक संकल्प को देखने के लिए शहरी लोगों की भीड़ नहीं थी। पत्रकारों और छायाकारों का जमघट नहीं था। रेडियो और टी.वी. वाले भी नहीं थे। नीचे दूर-दूर तक फैला नदी, पहाड़ और वनों का प्राकृतिक अंचल था और ऊपर था नीला आकाश, और संकल्प लेने वाले भी कोई पेशेवर लोग नहीं थे। न ही किसी राजनीतिक दल से इनका कोई सम्बन्ध था। उनको लाने के लिए ट्रकों या बसों का इन्तजाम भी नहीं किया गया था। ये संकल्प कर्ता थे बड़े बांधों के घासन्न खेतों से अस्त आदिवासी जो अपनी पीड़ा और उससे लड़ने के सामूहिक संकल्प का इजहार करने के लिए मीलों पैदल चलकर यहाँ पहुँचे थे। इस तरह एकान्त जंगल में नदी किनारे पर हजारों आदिवासियों का यह सामूहिक प्रदर्शन अपने आप में

अनूठा, अद्भुत और अभूतपूर्व था।

बड़े बांधों के विरुद्ध सामूहिक संकल्प प्रदर्शन के इस आयोजन के पीछे यद्यपि इसके लिए गति मंच के सभी निष्ठावान कार्यकर्ताओं की शक्ति थी लेकिन सबसे बड़ी और मूक शक्ति थी—डा. प्रकाश ग्रामटे। गत दो दशकों से इस घनघोर जंगल में आदिवासियों की सेवामें तल्लीन युवा डा. प्रकाश अपने पिता बाबा ग्रामटे के पद चिन्हों पर हैं यह कहा जाय तो कोई प्रतिशयोक्ति नहीं होगी। यह उन्हीं की सतत मौन तपस्या का फल था कि इतनी बड़ी संख्या में आदिवासी इस क्षेत्र में एकत्र हुए।

राष्ट्रीय एकात्मता के लिए अपनी 40 वर्षों से स्वतः स्वीकारी हुई आनन्द वन की कैद को छोड़कर सड़कों पर निकले बाबा ग्रामटे ने भारत जोड़ो अभियान के अन्तर्गत कन्याकुमारी से काश्मीर तक और ईटानगर से श्रीलंका तक की साइकिल यात्रा देश भर के युवाओं के साथ अभी समाप्त की है। इस दौरान उन्होंने देश की चारों दिशाओं में पर्यावरण के क्षय से उपजे संकट को नज़दीक से देखा है और अभी शायद बड़े बांधों के विरुद्ध संघर्ष का संकल्प उनके मन में पैदा हुआ। उनका यह संकल्प तथाकथित विकास की उल्टी दिशा को नया मोड़ दे सकेगा—यह अपेक्षा सहज ही की जा सकती है, क्योंकि इसके पीछे किसी प्रकार का स्वार्थ या महत्वाकांक्षा नहीं है।

—भ० शं० कु०



Frontline

विकास

Questions in the
Narmada valley

उत्तर प्रदेश
सरकार है साहुकारों के साथ सहयोगी विकास हमारे हाथ

नर्मदा बचाओ आंदोलन



इंजिनियर कॉटवटर

What price Narmada

A chain of 30 big and more than 3,000 smaller dams, the Narmada Valley Project spanning several States is one of the biggest of its kind, and the authorities look at it as a panacea for the problems of the region. But the ecological and socio-cultural impact of the project, particularly that of the two super-dams, Narmada Sagar and Sardar Sarovar, will be enormous. This has touched off a wave of protests, led by environmentalists and other activist groups. In the wake of the rally at Harsud, Madhya Pradesh, on September 28, AMIT BARUAH discusses the contentious issues.

"HERETICS" are questioning the sanctity of the "temples" of modern India — big dams. Not just the dams, but the entire gamut of development-related issues, the central one being: who benefits? The September 28 rally at the tiny town of Harsud in Madhya Pradesh is a milestone in the movement against this "development" policy.

In focus is the gigantic Narmada Valley Project (NVP), whose two "super dams," the Narmada (Indira) Sagar Project (NSP) and the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP), are under attack from both activists and people living in the potential submergence areas.

According to one commentator, the NVP "would be the largest irrigation project ever planned and implemented as a single unit anywhere in the world. If executed, it will affect the lives of about 12 to 15 million people in the States of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan."

The NVP envisages the construction of 30 big dams, 135 medium projects and over 3,000 minor projects on the

Narmada river and its tributaries.

Originating in the Amarkantak plateau, the Narmada's 1,312-km course is studded with lush forests, rich agricultural fields and rocky gorges, before it reaches the Arabian Sea.

The authorities lay the benefit part on thick. They are convinced that the two projects are the magic cure for the problems of the region — from urban water supply to fish farming. Counterpoise this with the environmental, social, cultural and human dimensions of a mammoth river valley project.

The Narmada Sagar is envisaged to irrigate 1.23 lakh ha and generate 1,000 MW of power (firm power being 140-256 MW), besides providing benefits such as pisciculture, tourism and urban water supply. But the dam will submerge 91,348 ha — marginally less than the area it will irrigate. Of this, 40,322 ha is forest while culturable land makes up for 44,363 ha. The likely displacement will be about 1.3 lakh people, of whom a little over 30,000 are tribals.

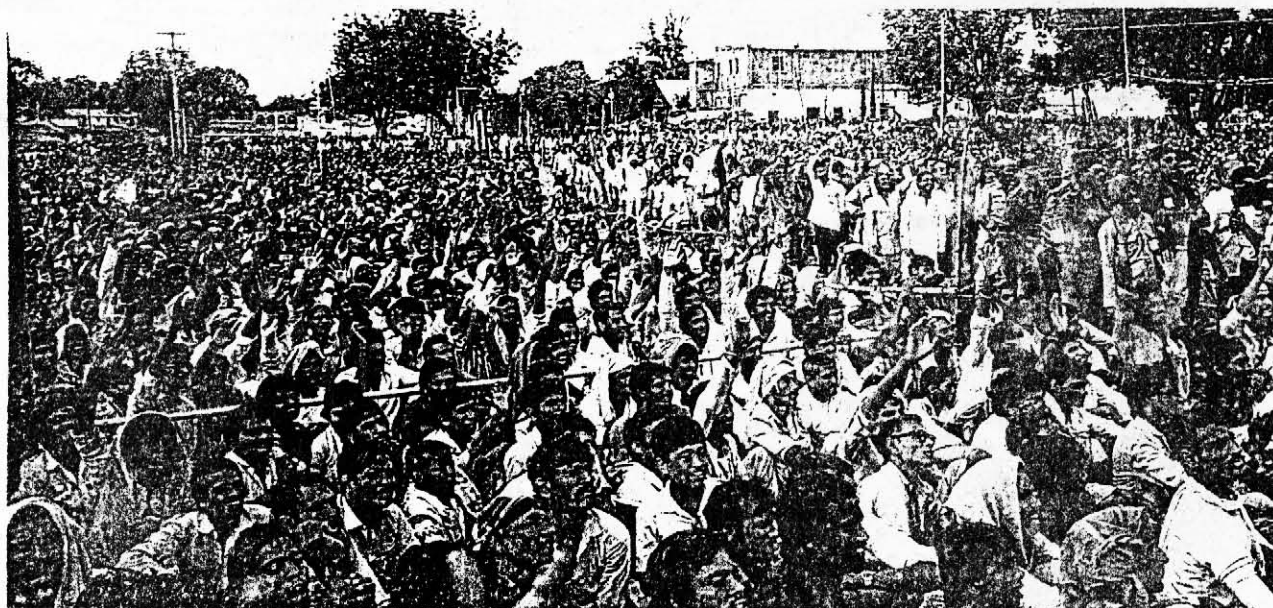
The NSP site is at Punasa in

Khandwa district of Madhya Pradesh and may displace people living in 254 villages in the districts of Khandwa, Dewas and Hoshangabad. The cost of the project, as estimated in 1987, is Rs 6,000 crores.

The Sardar Sarovar, with its site at Vadgam, Gujarat, will irrigate a far larger area compared to its upstream counterpart, the Narmada Sagar, which will also act as a storage dam for the SSP. With an irrigation potential of 18.7 lakh ha and an installed capacity of 1,500 MW (firm power 300 MW), the project will also offer benefits such as flood control, pisciculture, tourism and urban water supply.

The SSP will submerge an area of 39,134 ha, of which forests comprise 13,744 ha and culturable land, 11,318 ha. The authorities say the SSP will displace about one lakh persons from 248 villages falling in the districts of Bharuch and Baroda (Gujarat), Dhule (Maharashtra), Dhar, Jhabua and Khargone (Madhya Pradesh).

Official estimates quoted by activists say the "single mega project (SSP) will



da Valley?

cost as much as the total outlay on all major and medium irrigation projects of the Centre and all the States during the entire Seventh Plan period." The cost of the project (estimated in 1987) is Rs. 9,000 crores.

Say the activists: "It is astonishing that a project of this magnitude was officially cleared for investment and construction work was allowed to begin despite the fact that several critical studies and surveys essential for assessing the social and environmental costs of the project had not been completed — and remain incomplete even today.

"It is precisely for this reason that clearance for the SSP and the NSP was withheld by the Ministry of Environment and Forests as well as the Planning Commission for almost eight years — until, in April 1987, the Chief Ministers of Gujarat, M.P. and Maharashtra met the Prime Minister and impressed upon him the political necessity of getting the projects cleared without delay," they maintain.

A show of unity at the Mandi grounds, Harsud; (right) as Baba . Amte speaks, film star Shabana Azmi is all ears. for a new development policy.



The project authorities are sure that Sardar Sarovar will be "a permanent solution for the drinking water supply problem of the water-hungry regions of Saurashtra and Kutch." They maintain that a new industrial corridor will be developed around the Narmada main canal and Ahmedabad and would also "create employment potential for seven lakh workers during the construction period and six lakh workers during the post-construction stage."

The answer to the "permanent solution" argument is emphatic. "Of the 69 taluks in Saurashtra as many as 56, that is, 81 per cent, will not get any water from SSP. Only one of the six districts and 10 per cent of the taluks are to get water from SSP. In Kutch district five out of the nine taluks will not get any water. While the Government has not provided the detailed figures of the percentage of each taluk's area cover-

COVER STORY

Narmada Valley Project



On the stage; (right) Janata Dal leaders Vidya Charan Shukla and Maneka Gandhi; (below) Chipko movement leader Sunderlal Bahuguna is at left and writer Shivarama Karanth in the centre an unprecedented event.

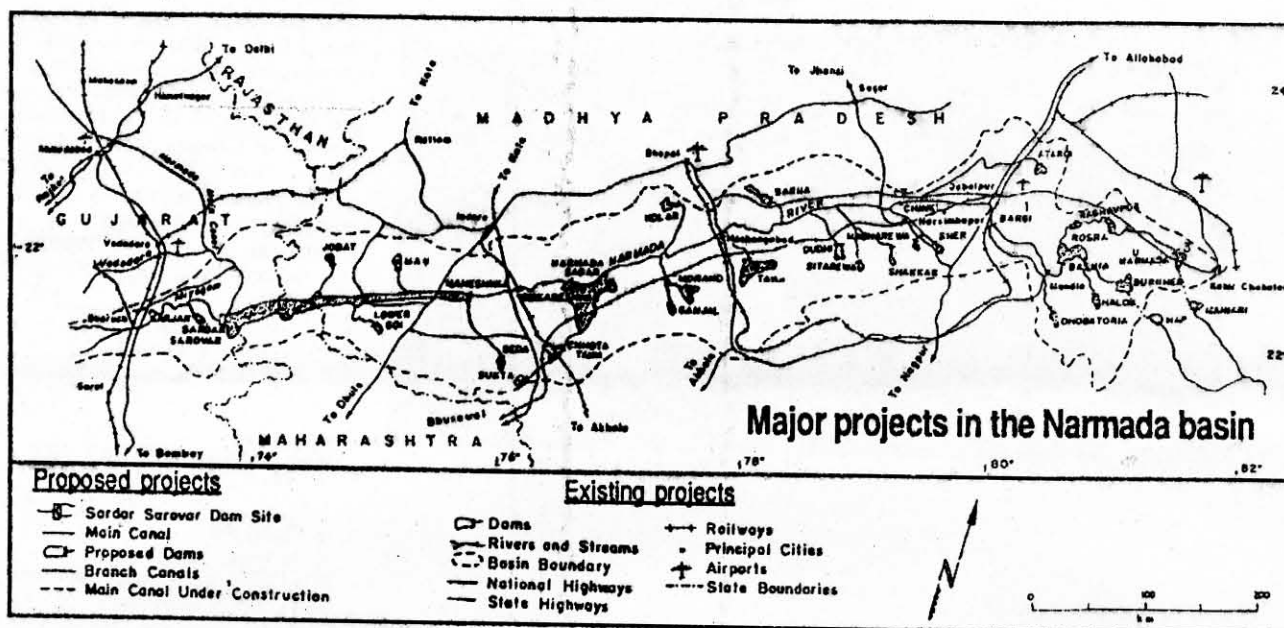


ed by the SSP command we do know that of the total culturable command area (CCA) of the SSP, a mere 2 per cent falls in Kutch." (Baba Amte, "Cry the Beloved Narmada," July 1989)

Baba Amte is of the opinion that of the 43 drought-prone and nine arid taluks in Gujarat, as many as 30 (of a total of 52) will not get a drop of water from the SSP. Among the 22 taluks which are to get water, five taluks in Bhavnagar, Panchmahal, Rajkot and Banaskantha will have only one-third or less of their area covered by the SSP command "

COVER STORY

Narmada Valley Project



The clearance given in early September to the Narmada Sagar by the Planning Commission, according to the activists and economists opposed to the project, is against "economic objectivity and financial discretion." In support of their argument they quote an extract from the Seventh Plan document: "The Seventh Plan will give priority to the completion of unfinished projects which are in an advanced stage and are capable of yielding full or partial benefits in the VIIth Plan." Other objectives include the restriction of "new starts to medium projects in drought-prone, tribal and backward areas" as well as more emphasis on "minor irrigation programmes which could be completed quickly and start yielding benefits."

By 1989-90, it is said, the total number of incomplete dam projects will be 141 major and 433 medium. "Madhya Pradesh has a backlog of incomplete projects equal to five major and 15 medium dams. Gujarat also has five major and 33 incomplete dams excluding Sardar Sarovar, and in the case of M.P. excluding Narmada Sagar. The obvious impact of the sanctioning of the SSP and the NSP will be that completion of all the other dams will get delayed further."

World Bank officials have expressed reservations about the resettlement and rehabilitation aspects of Sardar Sarovar and Narmada Sagar, though these have not been expressed in their "official pronouncements."

Where are the successful resettlement projects in the country? Are those resettled for even smaller projects happy with their lot? Or have they joined

the ranks of the landless labour in rural areas or the millions of slum dwellers? Do the planners have the right to disrupt the lives of tens of thousands of people living in fertile land? Were the potential oustees aware of what was in store for them, prior to the intervention of the activist groups?

A social scientist attached to the

World Bank has given an interesting report recently. It says: "The problem of the World Bank is the unlikelihood of the resettlement and rehabilitation component enabling the majority of the oustees — especially those from M. P. and Maharashtra — to regain their current living standards. Hence the R&R component would not meet minimal

A strident voice

FROM treatment and rehabilitation of leprosy patients to confronting the Government on issues and causes — Baba Amte has come a long way. His "Bharat Jodo", "Knit India" and now his crusade against big dams have made him a "trouble-maker" in the eyes of the Government.

As far as big dams are concerned, Amte's first salvo was against the Inchampalli-Bhopalpatnam dam coming up in his home district of Chandrapur in Maharashtra. It is probably that awareness which catapulted him into the thick of the agitation against the Government's "development" policies.

The Baba has come under fire from "developmentalists." He has in the recent past received several letters threatening him over taking a stand against the Sardar Sarovar Project.

It was on his initiative that 300 leading figures sent off a letter to

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in September last year expressing their concern over the implications of the Narmada Valley Project.

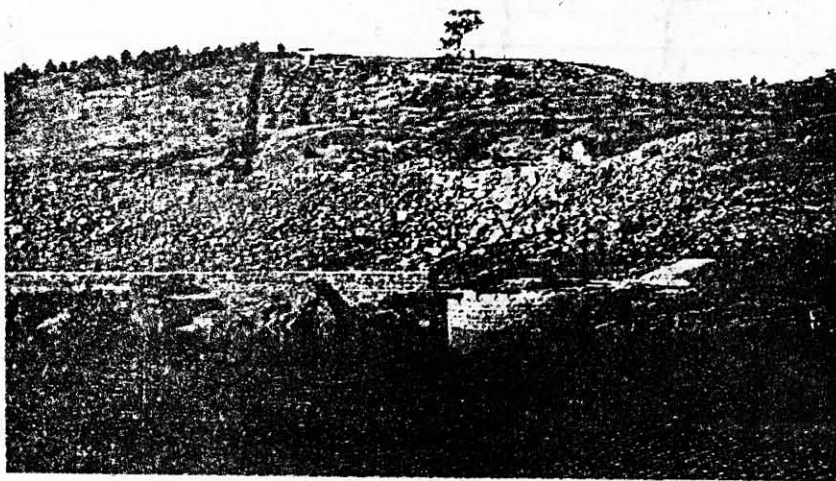
In his covering letter, the Baba wrote: "This is the time for all of us to get together to assert our will as scientists, environmentalists, planners, activists — all of us."

The letter itself provided a detailed account of the problems associated with the NVP — financial, environmental, social and human. It called for detailed and honest studies by the Government before giving the "green signal."

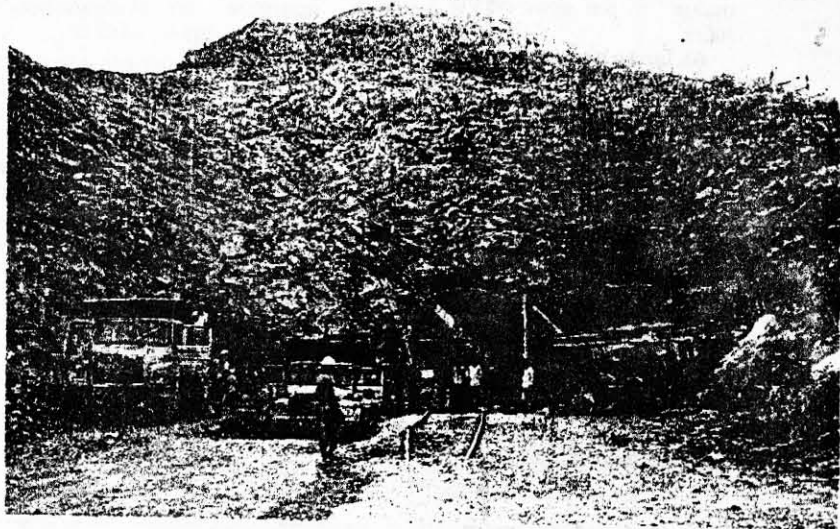
It also, it called upon the Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat Governments to suspend work on the projects till studies were undertaken.

Amte's voice, however, fell on deaf ears, with the Planning Commission clearing the project early this year from the financial angle. □

A.B.



At the site for the "super dam," Narmada Sagar, quiet flows the Narmada, through rocky terrain; diversion tunnels under construction. against "economic objectivity and financial discretion."



World Bank requirements." But this view proved a minority one and the World Bank opted for a "soft" line of giving more time, say the activists.

The activists' arguments and protests are not confined to the air-conditioned comfort of five-star seminar rooms. Of course, "five-star" activists are there, but they are in a minority and have a limited say in the movement.

"Harsud will stir the conscience of the nation," said Baba Amte at the

Pictures
V. Sudershan

Before the dam

DUST rises from the dam site. Cutting work is in progress at Punasa, where the Narmada Sagar Project is coming up. About 20 workers are loading sand on to a truck.

The expected high-pitch activity is, however, absent. A lone machine is cutting away at obstacles. The noise is also limited — only the hum of the cutter.

Upstream, the river meanders its way through rocky gorges. The view is breathtaking. White lines indicate the stretch of the dam. Work on two tunnels is also in progress.

The workers live in shanties while the engineers and other officials occupy bungalows. The workers are paid less than the stipulated minimum wage. The minimum wage has been fixed at Rs. 20, but Rs. 2 goes to the labour contractor as his "cut." Men get Rs. 18, while women are, as is the norm, paid even less — Rs. 15.

As we enter the first gate to the dam site, our car is waved down. "Please enter the number of your car and the name of its owner." The reason: there was a robbery of over Rs. 1 lakh from the house of an engineer.

The road is good, with signs directing the newcomer to various points in the dam colony. One sign points to the helipad — occupying a pride of place in the colony. There are, of course, the rest houses and guest houses.

It is afternoon, not a single engineer is to be seen at the dam site. Our work over, we leave the dam site and colony. A thought crosses one's mind — next time around, what will it be like? □

A.B.

COVER STORY

Narmada Valley Project

Harsud rest house, his arm in a plaster cast. "There must be sufficiency for all, before superfluity for some."

"Every ripple of the Narmada will vibrate with violence," if the Government decides to go ahead with Narmada Sagar and Sardar Sarovar. Coming from a Gandhian, these words reflect the gravity of the situation. "There will be a 'youth quake' in the country," he declared, hoping that the youth will come forward to question the path of development the country has embarked upon. "It is a question of injustice, of deprivation."

Refuting the statements made by Union Water Resources Secretary S. A. Chitale that he had not opposed the construction of a dam project in his home district of Chandrapur (Maharashtra), Baba Amte said he had raised the banner of revolt against the Inchampalli-Bhopalpatnam project. "I wrote to then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi opposing the project." The Baba was both angry and sad that his views were being "misrepresented" by important representatives of the Central Government.

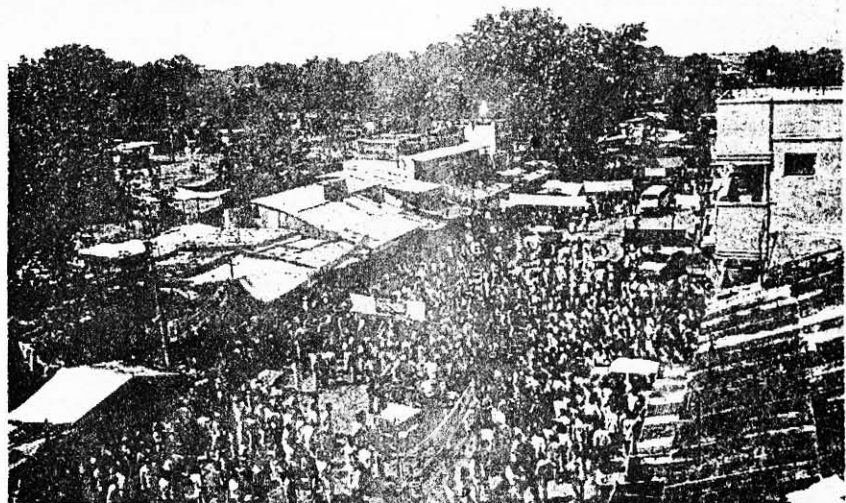
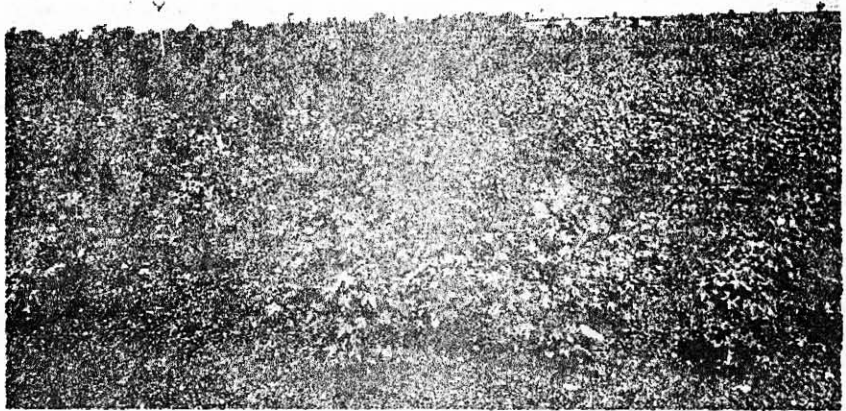
Baba Amte came down heavily on political parties — both the ruling party and those in the Opposition. "Monopolistic vision is not the sole privilege of politicians." No political party is able to take a stand on the issue for "fear of hurting their vote banks," he said.

"I am practising what Rajiv Gandhi is preaching from international forums," said the 75-year-old Baba, who seemed more than frustrated with the developments.

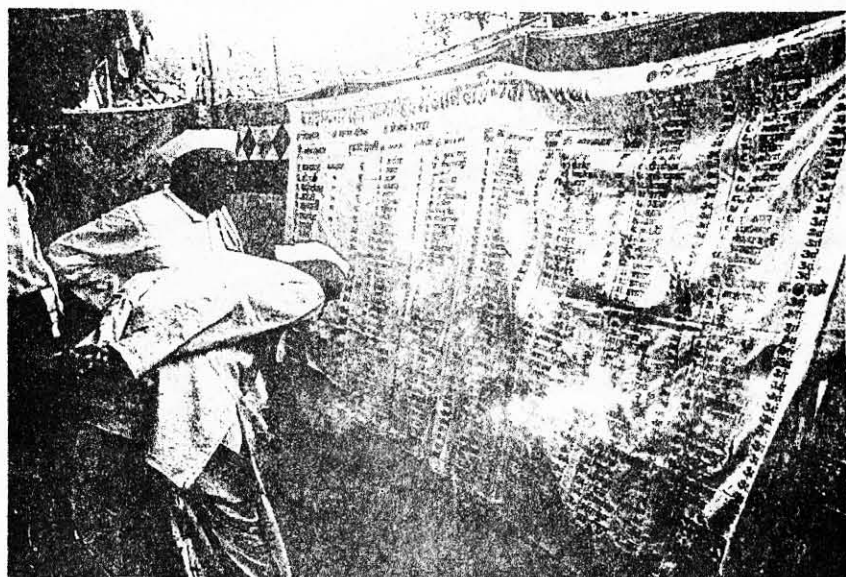
When *Frontline* contacted Janata Dal leader Vidya Charan Shukla who was at Harsud along with his party colleague Maneka Gandhi, the ex-Congressman did not voice any concrete opposition to the Narmada Sagar Project. "We don't want to make it an election issue," Shukla said. Earlier, both he and Maneka Gandhi had been politely told that they would not be able to address the rally.

Voicing his "individual opposition" to the project, Shukla said his party had not taken a formal stand on the matter. "When the time comes, we will take a stand." Asked about the grounds for his "individual opposition" to the project, Shukla said, "The grounds are the same as these people (rallyists) are saying." As an afterthought, he said, "Scientific and human grounds."

Vinod Raina, an activist associated with the Narmada Bachao movement, says the opposition to Narmada Sagar began with the creation of the Nav Nirman Samiti at Indore. It was then



A cotton field in the fertile region; protest in Harsud; a list of villages likely to be submerged, put up as part of the rally.... building up awareness.



that the question whether the dam would be in the interests of the people was raised. That was also the time when the verdict of the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal came, deciding the share of waters for the three States — Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh.

Two former Health Ministers of the State, Kashi Nath Trivedi and Om Prakash Raval, played a leading role in the movement which struck roots in Badwani also. But it was only when the issue of rehabilitation of the oustees of the SSP cropped up some years ago that the people's involvement in the issue began. In Dhule, the Narmada Dhanagrat Samiti was created.

But the organisation was not, like most of the Gujarat groups, against the dam *per se*, but interested in securing for the potential oustees proper relief and rehabilitation. It was only at a later stage that the Narmada Dhanagrat Samiti took a formal stand against the SSP.

Soon some persons, who were active in the Bhopal gas leak issue, formed the Campaign Against Indira (Narmada) Sagar (CAISA) in Bhopal. Many of them, including scientists and filmmakers, went to Harsud and made it their base. The Nav Nirman Samiti, meanwhile, organised meetings on the issue. Also active were several Bombay and Delhi-based environmental groups and individual activists, many of whom provided the information and data to be used in campaigns against the projects.

A meeting convened at Anandvan by Baba Amte decided to work against the "anti-people" big dams. Following this, a memorandum was sent to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, signed by 300 prominent citizens of the country.

The agitation assumed a more popular character with the morcha at Kevadia Colony in Gujarat on January 31, 1988. The Official Secrets Act was imposed on 12 villages in the vicinity of the Sardar Sarovar dam site in October 1988 declaring them "prohibited places."

A poster exhibition on different aspects of the dam projects was prepared by the Bhopal-based group. Eklavya, "Narmada Puran," a film on rehabilitation, made by Arvind Deshpande, had a powerful impact on some villages that would be submerged by the Narmada Sagar.

The residents of Harsud town, led by Laxmi Narain Khandelwal, took a leading role in the agitation, giving a broad base to the anti-dam movement.

The fact that 300 groups sponsored the Harsud rally, many of them fighting against the "development" projects in

different parts of the country, has given the Narmada Sagar issue a national stature. The future plans of the movement are not clear, but activists privately say the next step will be a march to the dam site at Purasa and stopping the work.

Whether the unity of purpose demonstrated at Harsud can be carried

forward will be seen only by the course of events. Clearly, the State and Central Governments have to play a more positive role in dealing with the issue.

Just as pressures by the landed and the contractor-engineer-bureaucrat lobby can create an environment in favour of dam projects, a mass movement can create one against them.

Are the Governments alive to this reality? □

Rallying at Harsud

"Koi nahin hatega, bandh nahin banega." (No one will move, no dam will come up.)

THIS popular slogan sums up the opposition to the Narmada Sagar Project (NSP) at Harsud, about 200 km from Bhopal.

Singing and dancing, they came from Maharashtra, Karnataka, Orissa, Bihar and, of course, from adjoining areas of Harsud. There have been protests galore, but unlike the previous ones which had concentrated on specific issues, here the Government's development policies were disputed.

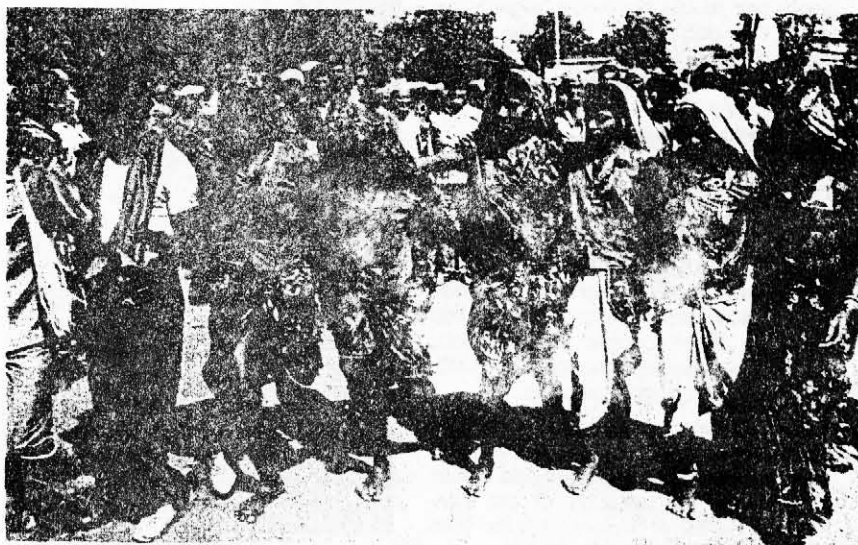
Harsud town wore a festive look with banners vying with one another to welcome people to the rally. The entire town was busy arranging water, food and accommodation for the 25,000 guests that it played host to on September 28.

Shabana Azmi, Baba Amte and other VIPs "shocked" the town a bit, for it

had never before witnessed such an assembly and, perhaps, never will again. It was an unprecedented media event too.

Townpeople were a little dazed by the video cameras, commanded by "hep" city-dwellers. The international press was there in strength — BBC, the *New York Times*, Reuters, Associated Press, *Time* — apart from a number of freelancers and representatives of the national press.

The local administration led a subtle campaign prior to the rally. A meeting was held at Harsud, three days before the rally, where all the sarpanches and panches from villages threatened with submergence were summoned. They were told of the "rehabilitation measures proposed. (Till date, the Madhya Pradesh Government has not come out with an official rehabilitation policy.) The *ad hoc* nature of things is evident from the fate of those affected by the diversion of a metre gauge rail





A torchlight procession through the streets of Harsud, on the eve of the rally. "No one will move, no dam will come up."



way track. These persons were paid Rs. 100 an acre for "good land," but following popular pressure, the sum was raised to Rs. 19,200 an acre.

The mood in the adjoining villages, which the *Frontline* team visited, was both of hope and protest. The villagers are prepared to fight, but are, of course, wary of the consequences. The area is rich — stocks of grain are piled high in households. Cotton, wheat, jowar, groundnut, soyabean and a host of other crops are grown in this fertile region. The reluctance of the people to leave is understandable. "They are making tall promises today. Who knows what they will do later?" asked one resident of Jaitpur Kalan village.

IN "AWE" OF THE OFFICIALS

"If they pile us up in trucks and send us away, what can we do?" said an old man, one of the more vocal among the villagers. Asked whether any of them had put forward their point of view at the meeting convened by the authorities, the reply was in the negative. It was clear that they were in "awe" of the "mighty" officials.

Inspired by a meeting held in their

village by the activists, some villagers uprooted the numerous boards put up by the NSP authorities. But their show of defiance is muted.

At Jaitpur Khurd, the sentiments are a little more emphatic. "We will not go even if we are given alternative land," declared one resident. They are, however, not convinced by Government statements that they will be given land. "Where is the land?" they ask. In this village, holdings are large and there are barely a few landless families. And the land is mostly irrigated, for there is a plethora of rivulets and rivers which are a ready source of water.

The awareness level is relatively high, and the people know that their lands and houses are going to be submerged. "People are becoming aware that big dams should not be built," said 50-year-old Rameshwar.

Many of them walked a long distance — like the 3,000-odd Adivasis who had come from Dhule district of Maharashtra. Some had left a good three days before the rally and walked 30-odd km before reaching a place where they could board trucks or buses.

Medha Patkar, one of the organisers, told *Frontline*: "The project would need our approval. Our right to know must be recognised." Addressing the rally, she said people had come to Harsud to understand the "definition of a people's policy."

The pledge taken by 25,000 people was indicative of the mood — they were prepared for a protracted struggle against what many perceive to be the inevitable, the construction of the Narmada Sagar dam.

MINIMUM POLICE PRESENCE

To the credit of the local administration, especially the Collector of Khandwa district, Raghav Chandra, police presence was at a minimum during the rally.

At the end, the rallyists began their walk to ring the town, in a symbolic protest. The human chain was reflective of the people's determination.

The poorest of the poor had gathered for the rally — a far cry from the "elitism" of many city-bred environmentalists, who are prone to misunderstanding the problems □

A. B.



All the way from Dhule district of Maharashtra, these Adivasis marched, singing and dancing at the rally; at a camp. a far cry from "elitism."



Anandwan Facing Death

CHANDRAPUR: Before coming to Anandwan, Chandramani had been an accomplice to murder, a bigamist and a communist revolutionary. Then he fell victim to leprosy, with a useless amputated right arm and almost certain to become one of the millions in India who have to beg to keep alive.

Today he is a pillar of his community, a gifted wood carver and the developer, with others, of a system of low-cost house construction which could do much for India.

But now, the place which has given him the support to make all this possible — the Anandwan colony in India's Maharashtra state — is under threat after discovery of huge coal deposits in the area.

Western India Coalfields Ltd. has issued eviction notices to the sprawling 465-hectare complex, founded in 1949 by Baba Amte. With the discovery of coal, there is increasing pressure to set up a thermal power station nearby.

The colony — one of India's model community projects for the care and training of leprosy patients — is also a world leader in rehabilitation techniques: "I've never come across anything remotely comparable in Europe", says a visiting Irish occupational therapist.

Anandwan, which means "Forest of Joy", is home for more than 2,000 people like Chandramani. Over 1,400 are leprosy patients but there are also 72 blind schoolboys, 56 deaf-mute children at a special school, 36 crippled by polio, 75 handicapped young people undergoing vocational training... and so the list goes on.

The community boasts that the only goods it buys from the outside world are sugar, salt and kerosene and this is very nearly true. Certainly, it grows all its own food, weaves its own cloth, makes its own clothes and shoes and builds its own buildings. It makes bandages, school notebooks and wheelchairs for the Indian Government to earn cash for items like cement, which it cannot make itself.

One of the building projects completed by the leprosy patients some years ago was a college where young people from the nearest village could study. This is now a branch of the University of Nagpur and, apart from its educational benefits, it is one of the ways in which Anandwan has broken down the barriers between the colony and the outside world.

BY RICHARD DOUTHWAITE

Anandwan, Baba Amte's internationally renowned colony for the rejects of the society mostly leprosy patients, is endangered by discovery of coal in the area. The colony which can be a model of what every Indian village could become is today threatened with death by demolition or suffocation by pollution.

The result is that there is now no local reluctance to visit Anandwan or to buy its fruits and vegetables, in sharp contrast with the early days.

One of Chandramani's first acts after coming to Anandwan was to make an artificial arm for himself out of wood, with two bolts for hinges and leather straps to hold it in place. It cost only 15 rupees (US \$ 1) but it enabled him to do carvings properly and that changed everything. He began to do carvings in wood which sold well at Anandwan's craft shop. He also went back to his trade as a carpenter.

Now Chandramani supervises all the construction in the leprosy colony which, because of its open-door policy, is bursting at the seams and has been building as fast as it could.

A particular success has been the low-cost housing Chandramani helped develop from work done elsewhere.

This has two special features. One is that the walls are built of bricks made of ordinary mud mixed with 10% cement. The bricks are shaped and compacted in a hand-operated press and cured for 48 hours under moist-sacking. They are then immersed in a tank of water for several days to complete their cure.

"Because the bricks are bigger and more uniform than ordinary fired bricks, construction is quicker and we need less cement for mortar", says Dr. Vikas Amte, Anandwan's medical superintendent, who has been closely involved in the work.

The other feature is the roof, which is made of fired bricks set in mortar to make an arch. The houses are cool and airy because the inside of the roof is high and Chandramani's design provides a window at each end for cross-ventilation.

"We build the houses in blocks of four and, by moving the wooden formwork for the roof from one house to the next, we can complete a block every four weeks. Each house costs 9,000 rupees (US\$ 560) complete with kitchen, concrete floor and elec-

trical wiring. That's not bad for 300 square feet", says Amte.

The colony owes its character to its founder, Baba Amte, who, at 74 still goes around the wards before dawn every day, greeting the patients like the old friends they are, and welcoming anyone who comes to the door: no one is ever turned away at Anandwan.

Baba's slogan, "Work builds, charity destroys", is not only painted prominently on a sign in the colony but has also been put into effect. Every patient, no matter how disabled, is given work through which they can rebuild themselves.

"People branded Baba as cruel for putting the sick to work", says Dr. Amte, who is his son, "However, not only was it the only way that this place could survive but it was the best thing for them".

Vikas Amte has been at Anandwan since it started. He was with his father, mother and younger brother when they moved on to 50 acres of abandoned quarry with seven leprosy patients, a lame cow and 14 rupees. Now he runs the colony, leaving his father free to campaign against religious and racial divisions which afflict India.

"If leprosy sufferers can do it, so can everyone", is the message that Vikas Amte tries to spread through his involvement in an organisation called the Centre for Social Action. Anandwan is seen as a model of what every Indian village could become, given dedicated leadership and hard work.

But Anandwan, and the livelihood of all those who live there, is threatened with demolition because of the planned coal-mining.

"Eviction would mean starting all over again. The government may give alternate land but it would mean shifting the entire base of our operations in the area", says Vikas Amte.

Having realised that eviction will not be easy, the government has adopted the tactic of taking over land on the periphery of the colony. "The pollution and blast tremors from open-cast coal mines would naturally force us out", concludes a concerned Dr. Amte. /PANOS

The Sardar Sarovar controversy Are the critics right?

The damming of the Narmada is running into fierce opposition. On the one hand, the authorities have been touting the Sardar Sarovar Project as "Gujarat's life-line". To its critics, however, the mega-project has come to symbolise all that is wrong with the prevailing model of development: ecological destructiveness; callous unconcern for the displaced tribals and rural poor; fascination with gigantic, enormously costly and ill-conceived schemes which benefit the relatively few and are unable to alleviate widespread poverty. Such projects are increasingly seen as representing an unjust and exploitative pattern of resource use that is fueling social conflict — often violent — in several tribal and non-tribal areas of the country. What ultimately drives the anti-dam activists and critics is a powerful new vision of equitable and ecologically sustainable development for all

The fierce controversy currently raging over the Sardar Sarovar Project — and the growing public opposition to large dams and other development projects — is a phenomenon so unfamiliar and perplexing that the commonest response to it is still one of blank incomprehension. At the same time, the anti-dam movement is steadily gaining strength and popular support, and now includes within its ranks some of the most eminent and distinguished individuals in this country.

One of them, Baba Amte, has put his life

on the line and publicly sworn a solemn oath: "While there is breath in my nostrils, I will not allow this dam (Narmada Sagar) to come up." He has issued a passionate challenge to the authorities: they can go ahead and fill the dam if they wish, but they will have to drown him first.

And when that time comes, Baba Amte will not be alone; thousands will be with him in the submergence zone. A whole new movement has emerged against "destructive development", consisting of a wide assortment of social activists, intellectuals,

environmental and human rights groups, with increasing grassroots support among project-affected people in several different parts of the country.

At the same time, it remains true that most people, including a majority of our economists and development planners, simply do not see what the activists and critics are driving at and what the fuss is all about. They tend to dismiss the anti-dam activists and critics as sincere but misguided people, as latter day Luddites who are afraid of the social dislocation that inevitably accompanies growth and development, backward looking romantics who wish to put the clock back and stop the march of progress.

The incomprehension that has typically characterised the controversy over the Sardar Sarovar Project is in evidence each time an attempt is made to answer the critics. It is blithely asserted that the critics have not made their case — when it can be readily shown that the real issues that arise in connection with the project have not even been correctly perceived, let alone adequately addressed.

In what follows, we shall not let ourselves be distracted by the plethora of facts and figures put forward by the government and disputed by the critics, nor dwell on the welter of claims and counter-claims, accusations and recriminations, that have obscured the deeper issues. Many of these points of dispute — such as



National Rally Against Destructive Development, Harsud: local struggles are being seen in a national perspective

Santosh Verma



Leading activist Medha Patkar: working with oustees and raising larger issues

the gross underestimation of the siltation rate and the consequent overestimation of the life-span of the reservoir, major lacunae in the planning process which will inevitably reduce the projected benefits, manipulation of the cost-benefit analysis with deliberate underestimation of costs and overestimation of benefits which place the viability and the project in doubt, denial of the public's Right to Know — are indeed of considerable importance. But in the present situation, it is even more important to grasp the essence of the phenomenon and not miss the wood for the trees.

Central issues

Two sets of issues are central to the Sardar Sarovar controversy: first, resettlement and rehabilitation of the nearly 100,000 oustees (nearly 230,000 if we also take Narmada Sagar into account), and, second, the ecological implications of the project.

Taken together, these two issues have far-reaching implications that carry us well beyond the pros and cons of a particular project: on the one hand, we are led to a critique of the prevailing model of development which is increasingly seen as socially unjust and ecologically unsustainable; and on the other hand, we are brought face to face with the exciting prospect of an alternative model of development, based on ecological restoration and sustainable livelihoods for all our people.

Let us first look at the problem of resettlement and rehabilitation (R&R). The establishment view does not deny that there has been considerable delay on the crucial question of acquisition and allotment of

land for the oustees. But it takes a lenient view of the delay, preferring to believe, in the words of *The Economic Times* editor, that "there is evidence that the authorities have learnt by experience and there is faster progress now, partly in response to the (oustees') agitation as also the concerns expressed by the World Bank". In other words the problem is conceded, but we are asked to believe that it is being taken care of now. Having thus satisfied their consciences, and got this inconvenient little matter out of the way, they are ready to get on with the project.

The activists working with the oustees' organisations, on the other hand, have not been able to find any such "evidence". Having had the bitter experience of dealing with the government of Gujarat on the oustees' behalf for the last five years, they can see that the oustees' interests are being sold down the river. It is clear to them that the project authorities are least concerned about the tedious and bothersome

business of R&R since the big bucks and the best career prospects are elsewhere. In any case, the oustees have little choice but to curse their fate and accept whatever treatment is meted out to them. To the activists, however, the fate of the oustees has become a major human rights issue, involving the fundamental right to life and livelihood of the poorest and weakest sections of our people.

Voices of protest

To see the issue a little more clearly, let us for a moment put aside intellectual disputations and listen to one of the many authentic voices of the new activism. Here is a newspaper report of Srilata Swaminadhan addressing a gathering of some 35,000 project-affected tribals and small farmers last month at the National Rally against Destructive Development in the little town of Harsud in Madhya Pradesh:

"I have come," says this fiery activist from Rajasthan who was physically attacked last year by people who took amiss her work on behalf of the tribals, "all the way from Rajasthan to tell you something. They built dams in Rajasthan, too. There too they promised all sorts of things — land for land, compensation in the thousands, everything. The people trustingly gave up everything they had. Do you know where they are now? Scrounging around in the garbage heaps of big cities, hoping to snatch a morsel of food for their hungry bellies — believe me, I work with these people. That's why I have come to tell you, don't believe this government. Don't even listen to their promises. Above all, don't allow this dam (Narmada Sagar) to come up and flood you out of your hearths and homes. Tell me, will this dam be built? Nahin, comes the answering roar, but Srilata is unhappy: 'Unless you shout



Baba Amte, Swami Agnivesh and Sunderlal Bahuguna at Harsud Rally

louder they can't hear you in Delhi,' she says. *Kabhi nahin*, the crowd yells back, and this time the echoes shake the earth."

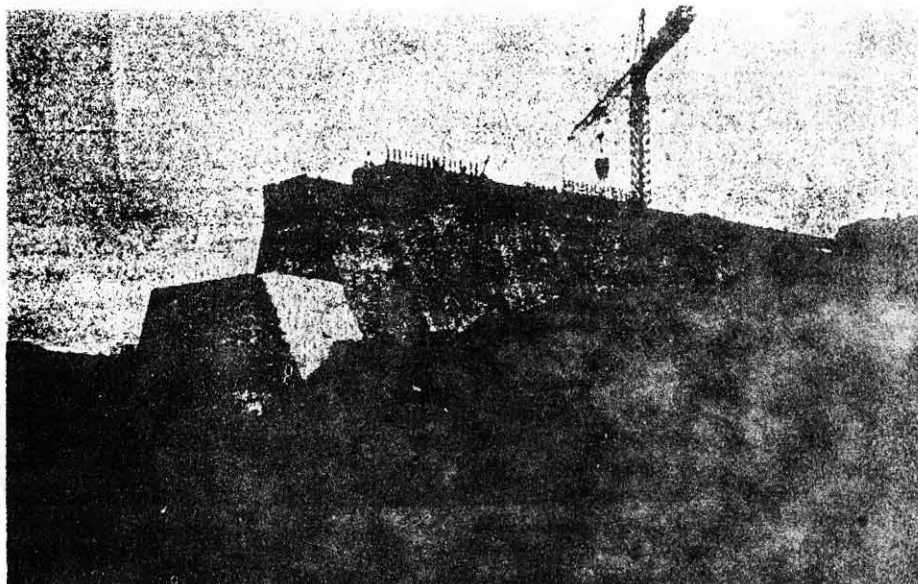
Let no one mistake this for rabble-rousing; it is the authentic voice of protest against injustice. Still, for those who would prefer a more sober tone, here is the May 1989 report of Thayer Scudder, consultant to the R&R sub-group of the World Bank's Reappraisal Mission for the Sardar Sarovar Project that visited India earlier this year. Incidentally, Scudder is professor of anthropology at the prestigious California Institute of Technology and one of the world's leading experts on R&R.

In the first sentence of his report, Thayer blandly announces that while R&R in connection with large-scale projects is always difficult, it is especially so in the case of Sardar Sarovar "since there is little precedence in India for execution of equitable R&R in connection with development projects". Translated into ordinary language, Scudder is saying that the treatment of oustees in this country has always been less than fair, that they have been uprooted and more or less left to fend for themselves, and consequently, as Srilata Swaminadhan asserted, they have almost invariably been pauperised and reduced to destitution.

Shocking neglect

Scudder's indignation at what he found comes across even through the bureaucratic prose of his report, which is a scathing indictment of the R&R aspect of the Sardar Sarovar Project: "Ten years after the Tribunal rendered its decision, poor implementation continues to be the main deficiency of the R&R component.... It is important to examine not only what has been accomplished but also the 'spirit' in which such accomplishment has occurred.... The favourable oustees, policies of Gujarat have resulted primarily from external pressure rather than from the 'good will' of the Government of Gujarat (GOG) towards its oustee population.

"As documented in detail in this report, the GOG has attempted neither to implement expeditiously its new policies nor to correct deficiencies (in the resettlement) of those relocated prior to December 1987 (when the new liberal policies began to be announced). During April 1985 I made a special effort to search out examples of 'good will' on the part of GOG towards its oustees in regard to a number of long-standing trouble points which the government, at small financial cost, and at significant benefit to oustees, could easily have



Construction on Sardar Sarovar dam is proceeding apace

achieved. I found no such cases."

So much for the boast often repeated by the project authorities, that the compensation norms established by the Gujarat government are "the most liberal not only in India but perhaps the world". For, what use are liberal norms when the government shows every day by its actions that it has no intention of implementing them?

It is important to note that the activists and oustees' organisations which have now taken a firm "no dam" position and are adopting an increasingly adversarial, even militant, stance, have been driven to this position only relatively recently. To begin with, they came into the picture with the intention of merely acting as intermediaries between the government and the displaced villagers, to help the oustees to actually get what was being promised to them by the government.

Scudder's report provides ample corroboration of the fact that it was only when the oustees' organisations discovered, after years of bitter experience, that the government was not sincere in its promises and was trying to cheat them, that their stance finally hardened into the uncompromising position: '*Koi nahin hatega, bandh nahin banega*'. If Scudder, after making a "special effort to search out examples of goodwill on the part of GOG", could find "no such cases", the oustees can hardly be blamed for resisting the government's efforts to uproot them from their homes and drive them from their ancestral lands.

The demand of the oustees' organisations is simple, unexceptionable, and per-

fectly just. All they are saying to the government is: if you want us to give up our homes, abandon all we have and move out lock, stock and barrel, at least give us some tangible proof that your promises are sincere and that you mean what you say. Show us, on paper, what land you have acquired for us; show us what plans you've formulated as to where and how we are to be rehabilitated, what arrangements you've made to see to it that our relocation to some unfamiliar far-away place will be accomplished reasonably smoothly and without undue hardship. Above all, show us how you've actually rehabilitated the handful of villages displaced since 1970-71, and let that example convince us that it will be to our advantage to move. If you can't do any of these, you have no right to ask us to move.

Severely criticised

The resettlement of the few displaced villages already carried out — which was to have been a model that would persuade the rest of the oustees to move — has in fact been severely criticised not only by the World Bank but also by the official monitoring agencies appointed by the government itself, viz, the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Bombay, and the Centre for Social Studies (CSS), Surat.

Scudder relates in his report that whenever the CSS pointed out what they considered to be planning or implementation weaknesses, GOG replied that their conclusions were invalid since everything was on schedule. And he goes on to add, "In fact, everything is not on schedule, in part



Poor but living with dignity: a tribal family from the submergence zone

because of the total absence of date specific targets relating to all aspects of land identification, acquisition, purchase, titling and development process".

If further proof is needed, the National Institute of Construction Management and Research (NICMAR) — the official agency appointed by the Narmada Control Authority set up by the Central government to monitor compliance with stipulations laid down in the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal award and in the World Bank loan agreement — states in its January 1989 report: "As a Central monitoring and evaluation agency, we tried to locate if there was any detailed implementation plan for the R&R work. We have not come across any such plan, Central or inter-state or even at the level of each involved state."

To cap it, in July this year, following the adverse report of its Reappraisal Mission, the World Bank has given the concerned state governments one more year to come up with acceptable policies and plans for R&R; and if they fail to do so by 30 June 1990, the Bank has threatened to cut off its credit to the Sardar Sarovar Project. (That the threat comes too late, because by that time the project may be irreversible and the oustees' fate would have thus been sealed, is another story.)

All this is bad enough, but worse is to come. The problem is not only in the implementation. The fairly liberal R&R policies announced by Gujarat apply only to less than 20 per cent of the oustees who are to be resettled in Gujarat. A large majority of the oustees — more than 80 per cent —

are from Madhya Pradesh (M.P.) and Maharashtra and are to be resettled in those states. Gujarat's liberal policies will not apply to them: they will be dealt with under the R&R policies of their own states which are much worse in decisive respects. Yet the large newspaper advertisements issued by the project authorities continue to mislead the public into thinking that Gujarat's liberal policies are applicable to all oustees.

Betrayal of oustees

Thus it is clear that as of today there is nothing even remotely resembling a comprehensive and detailed action plan for R&R, and that acceptable policies applicable to all oustees do not exist. Nor have the project authorities bothered to set up a strong, functional agency for carrying out R&R, staffed with people having the necessary skills, dedication and compassion, without which there is no chance of successfully accomplishing the difficult and enormously complicated business of rehabilitating such a large number of people. Nor can anyone realistically claim that the requisite policies, plans and implementing machinery will be brought into being in the short time before the remaining displacement is due to begin.

The conclusion is therefore inescapable: if construction of the dam is allowed to proceed, there is little doubt that a large number of poor people will be pauperised and condemned to a lifetime of destitution. A grim fate awaits a large proportion of the oustee population — futile wandering in search of work, toiling in the most

exploitative conditions, begging on city streets and scrounging around in rubbish dumps, shunned by all, and in the end reduced to such dire straits as to be forced to sell their wives and daughters. Such is the sacrifice being demanded at the altar of "progress".

Such a demand is unacceptable, not only to the oustees themselves, but to a large and growing cross-section of concerned citizens who believe that under these circumstances the project must not be allowed to go on. As Baba Amte has aptly said, we simply cannot stand by and watch some people's "life-line" being allowed to become other people's death-line.

It is necessary to remind ourselves that equitable R&R is not a matter of state generosity: it is a fundamental right of the oustees guaranteed by the Constitution. The concerned state governments on their part are legally bound to rehabilitate all oustees in accordance with the norms and stipulations laid down by the Tribunal and the World Bank — not to mention their own policy pronouncements.

Violation of rights

The appalling lack of preparedness with regard to R&R is so well documented that the government's wilful breach of these stipulations, amounting to a violation of the oustees' fundamental rights, would be easy to establish in a court of law. In such circumstances, any court — provided it does not have one law for the powerful and another for the weak — would be constrained to issue a stay order against the project until the authorities have demonstrated their compliance with the stipulations.

The argument holds irrespective of the magnitude of benefits expected from the project; indeed, one could say that the greater the magnitude of benefits, the greater the obligation on the government and the beneficiaries to adequately look after those whose sacrifices have made those benefits possible.

So far, it has been argued that the government has not made acceptable arrangements for adequately resettling the oustee population; but it is possible to go further and show that such arrangements cannot be made in the foreseeable future. Given that R&R is to be carried out on a 'land for land' basis, the crux of the problem is the non-availability of suitable land. Unutilised cultivable land outside forest areas simply does not exist, and the Central government has been rightly refusing

to release forest land for resettlement purposes. The only remaining possibility is to resettle oustees on private irrigated land purchased by the government for this purpose in the command area.

While this option is technically feasible, it is known to be politically unworkable, for it involves compulsory acquisition of irrigated land from relatively rich farmers (only they have any surplus that could be acquired) at well below market prices, and handing it over to oustee families, which almost always belong to social strata much lower than the host community in terms of caste, social status and power. Their successful rehabilitation under these circumstances is virtually impossible.

As the experience of legislation in Maharashtra (1976) and (MP) (1985) enabling state governments to compulsorily acquire land in the command area has clearly shown, state governments lack the political will to enforce such legislation, which merely remains on paper. (The same has been the fate of land reforms legislation which has remained largely unimplemented, and for the same reasons.) Thus if we consider — as we must — the social and political context in which R&R has to be carried out, the conclusion cannot be avoided that satisfactory resettlement and rehabilitation of the oustees is just not possible.

Who gains? Who loses?

This is an astonishing conclusion, for it means that, in the present socio-political set up, grave injustice towards the poorest and weakest sections of our people is an intrinsic feature of all development projects involving large-scale displacement of people. We can now begin to understand the significance of the increasing mass mobilisation and public opposition to large development projects — such as dams, mining projects, thermal and nuclear power stations, and even defence related projects like the missile testing range at Baliapal. All these development projects sharply raise a potent political issue: "Who gains from such development? And who loses?"

The Sardar Sarovar oustees have been told that the project will brook no interference and must go through because it is in the "national interest". The chief minister of Gujarat has publicly declared his willingness to call out troops, if necessary, to deal with any attempt to obstruct the construction work. But the oustees are no longer in a mood to submit meekly to this



Callous unconcern for their fate

sort of thing. The spontaneous question to which they are now demanding an answer is: "We are told that we must sacrifice for the nation. But who really comprises our nation? Are we also not part of this nation?"

It is a question that is becoming increasingly insistent. In almost 40 years of so-called planned development, many of the oustee villages have not seen an iota of improvement in their living conditions, not a single ray of progress has penetrated there. They do not have clean drinking water, schools or the most elementary health care facilities; people have little productive work, and employment opportunities are non-existent. How can we ask these people to make sacrifices for others when no one has ever sacrificed anything for them, or even spared a thought for them? The simple truth is that planned development has passed them by. Not only has it done very little for them, it has often left them worse off than before.

Politicisation at grassroots

The oustees are now refusing to take things lying down. They are no longer prepared to become victims of other people's development. Their self-assertion is part of a wider politicisation of the many who have been marginalised and excluded from the gains of development. The rising tide of protest against "destructive development" we are witnessing today is the backlash of our lop-sided development

policies that have created relatively small islands of affluence amidst the vast surrounding ocean of poverty and deprivation. In agriculture as well as industry, in rural as well as urban areas, the benefits of growth and development have been highly unevenly distributed. Wealth has remained confined to the relatively few and has refused to 'trickle down' fast enough to the many. The oustees' protest draws its strength from the growing unrest at the grassroots which is the inevitable consequence of unjust and unequal development.

The stock reply to this sort of criticism has always been that what we need is not less development but more and faster development. The fact of unequal and lop-sided development is not denied, but it is maintained that growth has not trickled down and spread more widely simply because there hasn't been enough of it.

This brings us to the second major issue we have to consider. The prevailing model of development is under challenge not only from the point of view of equity and social justice, but also because of its disastrous ecological consequences. Thus, more growth — of the present kind — would also mean a bigger ecological disaster.

Early phase

When 'environmentalists' take a stand against Sardar Sarovar or any other large project, what exactly are they saying? It is important to distinguish several distinct strands in their argument. In the early phase of the environmental movement, the emphasis was on the conservationist or preservationist impulse which seeks to prevent the destruction of natural forests and wildlife occurring as a direct consequence of the project. For instance, Sardar Sarovar and Narmada Sagar together will submerge 54,106 hectares of forest and 55,681 hectares of cultivable land.

No one any longer denies that the submergence of a centuries old forest, with its profusion of flora and fauna, including rare species, is an unmitigable tragedy and a major cause for concern. Once destroyed, this intricately balanced community of plant and animal life, evolved over millennia, is impossible to recreate through human effort and for which man-made plantations are no substitute. To this was added a recognition of the crucial role of forests in soil and water conservation and in the regulation of climate, and their value as gene pools and as a storehouse of biological diversity.

Sardar Sarovar Dam project



Narmada near the Sardar Sarovar dam site; and part of a village to be submerged

The environmentalists are concerned that large projects are helping to destroy the last vestiges of this country's forest cover at a time when the crying need is not only to safeguard all our remaining forests but to substantially *increase* the area under forest. It is true that loss of forest due to such projects accounts for a relatively small proportion of the total deforestation taking place each year. But the destruction in each case sharply brings home the fact that, despite much talk, the government does not know how to even partially make up for the loss by means of "compensatory afforestation"; nor does it have a workable reforestation strategy for restoring vegetational cover over vast tracts of this country's barren and degraded lands.

In recent years, however, the environmentalist viewpoint has matured and evolved much beyond the limits of the conservationist perspective. Its focus has broadened and shifted from 'conservation' to 'ecologically sustainable development'. Large dams (and other mega-projects) are now being opposed not only for the direct destruction they cause, but because they are seen as key features of a type of development that is playing havoc with our natural resource base and life-support systems, and is therefore unsustainable.

Sustainable development

The concept of 'ecologically sustainable development' is so new that its far-reaching implications have by no means been fully articulated. Nevertheless, it is a concept that answers a deep need of our times, and provides the conceptual underpinning for a radical critique of the prevailing model of development, as well as a basis for an alternative model of development.

The public animus being directed against Sardar Sarovar (and other large-

scale development projects) is not due only to the direct damage the project will cause, in terms of environmental destruction and human displacement. Ultimately, what fuels this animus is not just an individual project but the whole pattern of development, of which these projects are an integral part. It is necessary to understand what this pattern of development is, and why it provokes the ecologists' wrath.

The purpose of a giant multipurpose project like Sardar Sarovar is to provide large quantities of irrigation and power. The basic goal is to extend the use of new production technologies that will lead to increased production in both agriculture and industry. In agriculture, the project will help to usher in the Green Revolution over a large area; and the power it generates is essential for industrial development.

These goals appear perfectly laudable and benign, until we realise that there is a snag: the process is destructive and unsustainable. The Green Revolution route to agricultural development locks us into a pattern of resource use that has no future. Every ingredient of this particular technology package — high levels of fertiliser and pesticide use, high yielding varieties of seeds (HYVs), and intensive irrigation — is riddled with problems.

It is a technology that demands high and continuously rising inputs of chemical fertilisers and pesticides to maintain yields, but forgets that these critical inputs are petroleum-derived products, based on a depleting stock of fossil fuels that may be exhausted in a generation. The Green Revolution pattern of agriculture is sustained by oil: what happens when the oil runs out?

In addition, depleting supplies of fossil fuels also mean continuously rising prices of farm inputs which further fuel inflation.

Worse, high levels of use of chemical fertilisers result in declining soil fertility over time and the eutrophication of water bodies, while pesticide use creates serious and well known health hazards — toxic contamination of food, high concentrations of DDT in mother's milk, carcinogenic PCBs in human brain tissue. The hazards of manufacture need no reminder — a pesticide plant was responsible for the Bhopal tragedy.

The use of HYV seeds has its own problems, ranging from the risks of monoculture, depleting gene pools of plant cultivars, dependence on a small number of artificial varieties of seeds and their built-in susceptibility to new pests and diseases, due partly to the phenomenon of pesticide resistance among pests. All these things, taken together, leave little room for doubt that a system of agriculture based on such foundations cannot long endure.

Already, in the US — the home of chemicalised agriculture — serious rethinking is under way and has already achieved official recognition. The prestigious National Academy of Sciences as well as the US Department of Agriculture have recently acknowledged that natural farming using modern techniques is now a fully viable option, and have recommended policy changes that would help transform US agriculture in that direction.

Resource illiteracy

The third ingredient of the Green Revolution package — intensive irrigation — presents a different kind of problem. Our irrigation engineers and planners believe that the best solution to the acute water problem of our drought-prone, semi-arid areas lies in large-scale transfers of surface water over long distances through large irrigation projects. B.B. Vohra, a lone

official voice crying in the wilderness, has aptly characterised such thinking as a product of the "resource illiteracy" or ecological ignorance of our planners. Sardar Sarovar provides a prime example of such thinking, in-as-much as the solution to the acute water crisis in Kutch and Saurashtra is sought in the waters of the Narmada transferred, at enormous cost, over long distances.

Man-made problem

To grasp this matter a little more clearly, we need only to recall that many of our so-called drought-prone areas were not always so — that their present desiccated condition and acute water scarcity is not natural but man-made. Till fairly recently, say 50 to 70 years ago, Saurashtra was a green and prosperous region, and its rivers, tanks and wells had plentiful water all the year round. There is historical evidence to show that several regions which are today barren, drought-affected and almost desert like, were once covered with rich pastures or dense forests.

For instance, in the 18th century, when Sarbuland Khan, the regional ruler of Gujarat, attacked the capital city of the Jethva rulers of Saurashtra, his cavalry could not advance due to dense, impenetrable forests, and could reach its destination only by cutting and burning its way through it! Similarly, the barren and chronically drought-affected Jhabua district in MP was thickly forested within living memory.

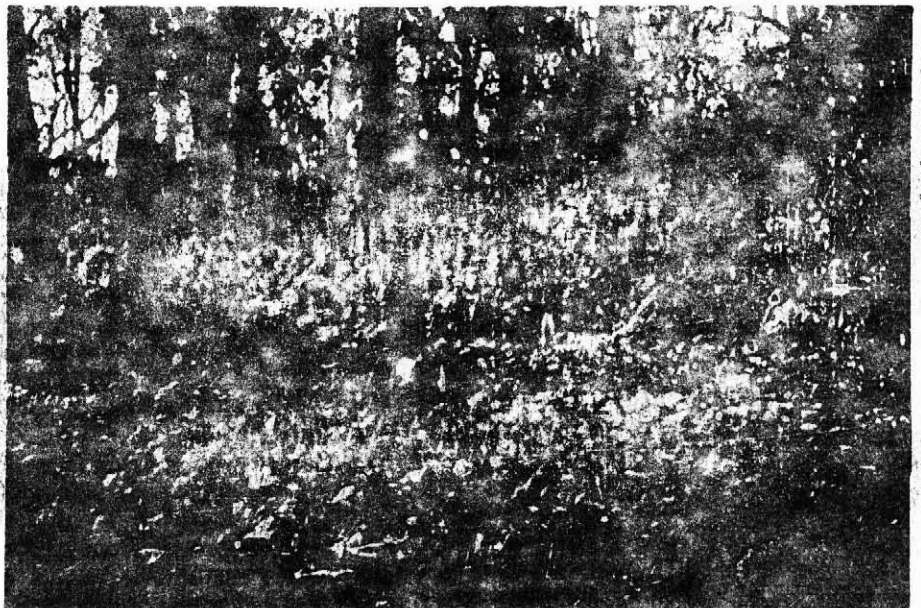
It is the destruction of the once rich pastures and forests of these areas which is the real cause of their acute water crisis today. It is crucial to realise that the low rainfall in these areas is *not* the main culprit, as can be seen from the fact that, despite low rainfall, wells used to have water all the year round. Rivers which are today drying up a month after the monsoon used to flow almost perennially when the land had not yet lost its vegetational cover. Conversely, the connection between water scarcity and loss of vegetation is clearly seen in *high* rainfall areas in Kerala or the Himalayas where acute water shortages are developing in the wake of deforestation.

Once this connection is seen, restoring vegetational cover to the land becomes the first priority. In B.B. Vohra's memorable phrase, a massive "internal haemorrhage" has been going on in the country's natural resource foundations which is bleeding the patient white. In this situation, to run after complex and enormously expensive

technological 'solutions' like the Sardar Sarovar Project is to be like the man who refuses to look after his body sensibly and continues to inflict on it every kind of abuse — heavy smoking and drinking, foolish eating habits, no exercise, constant stress — and then looks to the marvels of medical science to fix any problems that arise.

The analogy is pretty exact. Just as sensible care of the body effectively prevents many ailments, but does not mean that hi-tech medical intervention will never be necessary, so also proper care of the land could effectively eliminate many a water problem, without implying that *all* prob-

example among many. Rainfall here is low and highly erratic, varying between a mere 200 mm and 800 mm, with an average of 574 mm — not very different from large parts of Gujarat to be served by the Sardar Sarovar Project. Before the watershed development programme was initiated just a few years ago, the village faced acute drinking water shortage, yields of jowar and bajra were very low, and more than half the food requirements of the village had to be purchased from outside. After the watershed programme, drinking water shortage has been *totally* eliminated, irrigated area (in terms of limited water application) increased twelvefold, the



Forest in submergence zone: destroying the last vestiges

lems could be solved in this way and that large dams will never be necessary. As with the body, so with the land. Sensible and inexpensive steps to maintain health ensures that costly and sophisticated technological interventions will be needed less often, and in some cases avoided altogether.

This is not romantic and fanciful 'back to nature' nonsense. Village level efforts in several drought-prone areas of the country have conclusively demonstrated the truly amazing results that are possible with a programme of small watershed development and ecological restoration, rainwater harvesting and small-scale storage, and increased efficiency of water utilisation.

The village of Ralegan Shindi, in the severely drought-prone Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra, is one well-known

cropped area as well as yields have more than doubled, and the village is now a net exporter of foodgrains.

Equitable and sustainable

All this has been achieved in just a few years, with limited means, without using any exogenous water from any large system — and results are expected to be even better in the coming years. This, and several other similar examples have clearly shown that with this approach it is possible to meet all reasonable water requirements in rural areas, without the human and environmental costs invariably associated with large projects.

It is important to note that this approach is inherently equitable, in-as-much as it needs to be implemented over the whole of the country's cultivable area. In contrast, major or medium irrigation

projects are location specific, and represent a concentration of investment capable of benefiting only a small fraction of the country's cultivable area.

If the colossal sum to be spent on the Sardar Sarovar Project — the latest estimate is Rs.13,500 crores — were to be spent on implementing the new approach, it could achieve results like those in Ralegan Shindi in every village in Gujarat. What is wrong with large projects like Sardar Sarovar is well expressed by Baba Amte: "There must be sufficiency for all, before there is superfluity for some." In the new dispensation, recourse would be had to dams, of the smallest size necessary and mainly to meet urban needs, only to the extent that a deficit still remains after fully implementing the new approach.

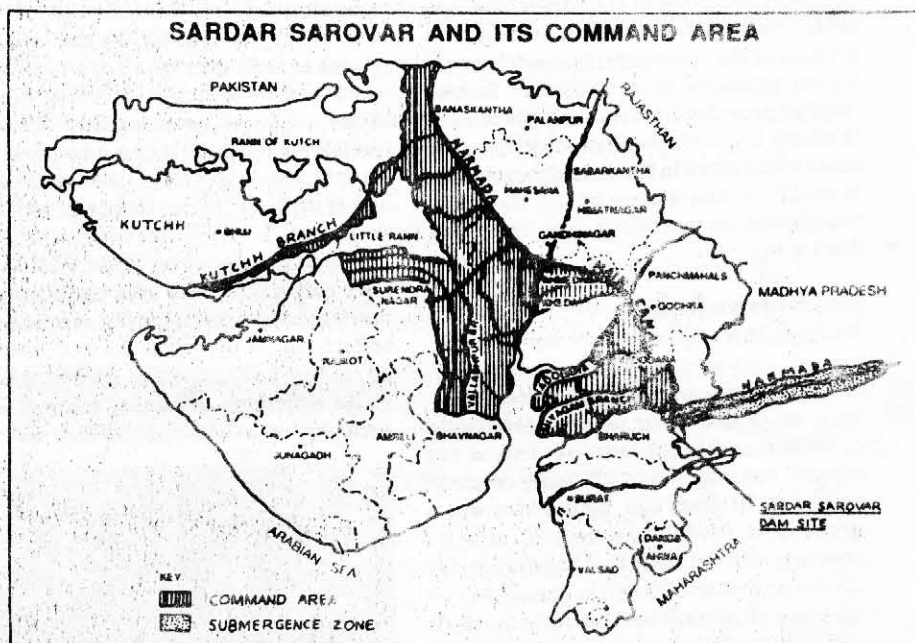
So, it turns out that the ecological viewpoint shows us a whole new way of thinking about development — the kind of development in which the need for ecological sanity and the demand for social justice coincide and mutually reinforce one another. This convergence of ecology and equity is perhaps the most promising and creative new development in the country today.

It is not too much to claim that we are witnessing the emergence of a new developmental paradigm, a new way of seeing — of which the critics of 'destructive development' and the activists fighting against large projects are the early representatives. Admittedly, in view of its recent birth, the new paradigm is as yet only imperfectly articulated and all its ramifications have not been clearly spelt out. But the power of its central vision is already evident and its coherence is growing with every year that passes.

False trail

According to the new vision, our economists and planners have been on a false trail. Instead of focusing on people and on how to improve their lives, they have sought to increase production and maximise GNP. They have tended to forget that the ultimate objective of planning is not to produce so many million hectares of irrigation or so many thousand megawatts of power. These things are not ends in themselves — they are useful only in so far as they help in eliminating the poverty of vast masses of our people. This the existing model of development has conspicuously failed to do.

After 40 years of the sort of 'progress' we have had, the gains of development remain confined to the relatively few, and



Stupendous cost, unequal distribution of benefits: the most drought-prone and water-scarce parts of Gujarat are outside the command area

the proportion of people below the poverty line remains more or less unchanged. India continues to be the home of a majority of the world's poor, hungry and malnourished; our so-called planned development has left us poorer than sub-saharan Africa; and our per capita income continues to rank near the bottom of the list of the world's nations. Clearly, the old medicine has not worked, and it is time to change the prescription.

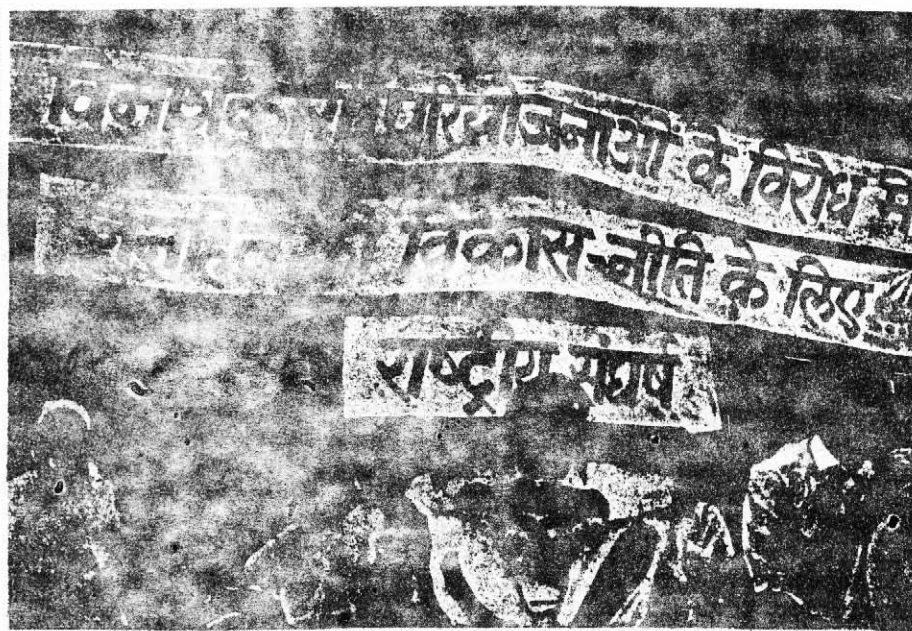
A development plan which has the ob-

jective of finding decent and sustainable livelihoods for the entire population would look very different from present day plans for so-called development. It would, first of all, put unemployed rural labour to work on ecological restoration and regenerating the natural resource base which is the foundation of all real development. Village by village plans would have to be worked out — requiring substantial decentralisation of planning and decision-making — for small watershed develop-



Tribal girls: charming and carefree, but for how long?

Photo: Sakshi, Sanctuary magazine



Mass movement for a people-oriented and ecologically sustainable model of development

ment, afforestation of all barren and degraded lands, soil and water conservation works, rainwater harvesting and small-scale storage, fodder and pasture development, the development of biomass-based energy sources, and small-scale industries based on agri-silvi-pastoral development.

Greening of India

A country-wide programme of this sort, for the regeneration of the "uncultivated half of India", urgently needs to be recognised for what it is — a prime developmental activity, fully comparable in scope and importance to agriculture, and forming the core of a new strategy of sustainable development capable of eliminating the worst forms of rural poverty and unemployment within a decade. What makes such a strategy even more attractive is that it presupposes the active involvement and participation of the people, and therefore provides a unique opportunity for a major thrust towards democratisation at the grassroots.

The unprecedented turmoil in Indian society today is not unrelated to the imbalances and injustices inherent in the present model of development. In particular, the resurgence of ethnic self-assertion and widespread tribal unrest is frequently the result of terms of resource use resembling colonial exploitation.

The Narmada Valley Development Project, for instance, is not a project for the development of the valley's resources for the welfare of the valley's inhabitants.

A new developmental paradigm is rapidly emerging, based on social justice, ecological restoration and sustainable livelihoods for all

Rather, it is a project for the appropriation of the valley's resources by outsiders for their own benefit. Irrigation and power from the project will benefit one set of people outside the valley, while the costs will be borne by another set of people for whom the valley has been for centuries their ancestral home.

Violence and exploitation

Such conflicts over the control and utilisation of natural resources are erupting all over the country. In the case of the Narmada valley, the resources in question are the river itself and the surrounding forests and cultivated lands, on which depends the livelihood of hundreds of thousands of tribals and peasants from the backward and weaker sections of our society. On the other hand, the commercially, economically and politically dominant classes from outside the valley want these resources for themselves and are pushing for the project.

It is an unequal contest. The terms of ex-

change are grossly unjust, just as they were under colonial exploitation. The colonisers possessed military might but lacked the resources; while the colonies had the resources but lacked the power to defend themselves and their interests. It ended with the growth of nationalist consciousness and struggles for independence.

Something very similar is going on in our own resource-rich but otherwise backward, tribal areas. The more developed and powerful parts of the country are dominating and exploiting the more backward and weaker parts. Once again, the unjust and exploitative interaction between the two is creating conditions for the emergence of separatist movements. Where ethnic differences between exploiter and exploited are also present, we have fertile ground for sub-nationalistic aspirations; and once this happens, it is very easy for things to take a violent turn, as we have seen in case after case. The Jharkhand movement is a classic example.

In the Narmada valley, there is already a strong protest movement with considerable mass support. The present leadership is committed to democratic and peaceful forms of resistance; but if a Subhash Ghising were to arise on the scene, the confrontation could easily take a more ugly turn. Violence and terrorism are never far away in such situations. The price of not heeding the activists and critics could turn out to be heavier than anyone imagined.

Green politics :

In contrast, the alternative development model — ecological restoration and sustainable livelihoods for all our people — offers the only strategy capable of spreading development more evenly and equitably among all classes and to all regions of the country. Coupled with decentralisation and democratisation at the grassroots, it constitutes a vision of ecological sanity and social justice that is extraordinarily powerful, having the potential to develop into a full-fledged political alternative.

Some such vision of a new Green politics — embryonic, dimly perceived and inadequately expressed — is what ultimately drives the activists and critics of Sardar Sarovar and other destructive mega-projects. To ignore them, or to quibble with them because their vision is not yet fully developed and lacks detail, would thus be foolish indeed.

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