

# Environmental Movements in India-A special approach on Narmada Bachao Andolan

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*Abstract*--- Environmental and ecological movements are among the important examples of the collective actions of several social groups. Protection and recognition of constitutional and democratic rights, which are not defined by law but form an important part of the day to day living of the subaltern masses like the control over their resources, the right of indigenous people to preserve their culture, protection of environment and maintenance of ecological balance are significant concerns of these movements, as they affect the human life to a great extent. In this paper a brief review on Narmada Bachao Andolan and failure of the dam project is discussed.

**Keywords:** Environmental movement, Narmada Bachao Andolan, Anti-dam movements.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The environmental movement, a term that includes conservation and green politics, is a diverse scientific, social, and political movement for addressing environmental issues. Environmentalists advocate the sustainable management of resources and stewardship of the environment through changes in public policy and individual behavior. In its recognition of humanity as a participant in (not enemy of) ecosystems, the movement is centered on ecology, health, and human rights

The environmental movement is an international movement, represented by a range of organizations, from the large to grassroots and varies from country to country. Due to its large membership, varying and strong beliefs, and occasionally speculative nature, the environmental movement is not always united in its goals. At its broadest, the movement includes private citizens, professionals, religious devotees, politicians, scientists, nonprofit organizations and individual advocates.

Environmental movements in India grew in the 1970s and 1980s building upon the work of thousands of civil society groups and individuals spread across the country. These groups responded to the weaknesses of democratic governance processes in the country. In the subsequent years, environmental movements have received considerable support both from the media and the judiciary. Its relationship with the political and bureaucratic systems, on the other hand, remains weak and often antagonistic. But given the availability of 'democratic space' within the country, the environmental movement has grown rapidly over the last three to four decades. It has played a key role in three areas: (i) in creating public awareness about the importance of bringing about a balance between environment and development; (ii) in opposing development projects that are inimical to social and environmental concerns; and (iii) in organizing model

projects that show the way forward towards non-bureaucratic and participatory, community-based natural resource management systems.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

P. P. Karan [1] worked on the topic "ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA" and his findings are: A main aspect of the environmental movements is their integrative social effect on the regions where they are active. They cut across social and cultural cleavages that might have been expected to be divisive. They unite people who differ by sex, age, religion, ethnicity, caste, class, and region by stressing shared interests in saving the environment. Women have been prominent as leaders and participants.

Smita Narula [2] worked on the topic "The Story of Narmada Bachao Andolan: Human Rights in the Global Economy and the Struggle Against the World Bank" and his findings are Though the NBA has yet to achieve the goals for which it has so tirelessly fought, its victories in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds have earned it the reputation of being one of the most dynamic social movements of our time and one that the government continues to expend considerable resources to fight against. Ultimately, the Sardar Sarovar dam is symbolic of a larger struggle over the discourse of human rights and development in India.

MJ Peterson [3] worked on the topic "Narmada Dams Controversy – Case Summary" and his findings are Transnational networking on issues of water management, dam design, and sustainable development provided opportunities for professionals concerned with the environment to advocate new models of water infrastructure – smaller in scale, lower in cost, more attuned to natural cycles. The World Commission on Dams made these discussions more visible to the general public, but they would have proceeded as new generations of technical experts trained to pay more attention to the environmental and social impacts of projects rose in their professions. How these new ideas play out depends very much on conditions in each area: small projects can help villages, individual farms, and households with enough land to build their own storage tanks. Cities and industrial complexes will still need larger-scale water infrastructure, though both can do more to use water more efficiently and lose less of it to leaky pipes, contamination by human or animal wastes, or pollution from industrial processes.

Rajiv Rawat [4] discussed on the topic Contemporary environmentalism in the Indian context and his findings are while working at the local level in both the rural and urban contexts, this united front could elaborate an alternative global order based on social inclusion, cultural

plurality, economic security, and ecological integrity. While this would boost the effectiveness of each movement, the future of India's impoverished majority and beleaguered environment might very well depend on it.

Madhav gadgil and Ramchandra Guha [5] worked on the topic "Ecological conflicts and the Environmental Movement in India" and their findings are that the environmentalism of the poor has a very different agenda from the environmentalism of the rich.

Thomas J. Burns [6] worked on the topic "How Environmental Movements Can Be More Effective: Prioritizing Environmental Themes in Political Discourse" and found that for the time being and foreseeable future, if environmental movements are to increase their successes, they need to keep their focus. It is tempting to use rhetorical strategies such as frame alignment to attempt to play to a wider audience, when to do so increases the stakes of prioritization. If that is to be done, environmentalists should understand more precisely how the process works.

### III. WHY ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT IN INDIA IS DIFFERENT FROM OTHER MOVEMENT?

- These movements are often direct manifestations of Gandhian non-violence and peace making.
- These movements are often led by the peasants and indigenous people, especially the women folk.
- Most of these movements relied on the Gandhian values of ecological prudence and frugality and followed the Gandhian model of decentralized democracy.
- Unlike the western environmental movements which represented the upper and middle class, Indian environmental movements

### IV. EFFECTS OF THE MOVEMENTS

A main aspect of the three movements is their integrative social effect on the regions where they are active. They cut across social and cultural cleavages that might have been expected to be divisive. They unite people who differ by sex, age, religion, ethnicity, caste, class, and region by stressing shared interests in saving the environment. Women have been prominent as leaders and participants. The high status of women in the Himalayan area and among the tribal groups of the Narmada valley, including unusual freedom of action and movement that accompany their role in the subsistence economy, is partially responsible for their prominence in the environmental movement. The women are accustomed to responsibility and leadership for community survival. Their work involves them directly and daily with forests and natural resources. They are alert to environmental changes, and they respond readily and knowledgeably to the need to protect the environment. Both young and old participate in the movement. Student participants come not only from Uttarakhand but also from the plains and have been among the most active Chipko workers. They bridge an often difficult gap of age, class, region, and social experiences as they join in a common cause. Likewise the Save the Narmada and Silent Valley movements have drawn grassroots support among urban

intelligentsia and through linkages with like-minded groups in India. The integrative nature of the movement cuts across ancient and powerful ethnic barriers. The two ethnic groups that populate Uttarakhand, the Paharis and the Bhotiyas, occupy land at different altitudes, but they joined forces to protect their forests. The movement also has integrative effects at the national level by bringing together people from various regions of a diverse country and by providing a prototype of method and organization for similar problems elsewhere in India. In 1983 the method pioneered in Uttarakhand was adopted in Karnataka, in the Western Ghats, by farming people to oppose reckless, illegal logging. Known there as Appiko, the movement encountered commercial exploitation and official apathy similar to those found in Uttarakhand. During the past century there has been a progressive encroachment by the state on the rights and privileges of the people to forest resources. The people have resisted it in various parts of India, mainly through the Gandhian non-cooperative method of protest, well known as forest satyagraha, that was initially applied to environmental concerns by the Chipko movement during the 1970s. This movement had its origin in the politics of the distribution of the benefits of resources, but it has expanded to include the distribution.

### V. WHAT IS NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN?

Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) is a social movement consisting of adivasis, farmers, environmentalists, and human rights activists against a number of large dams being built across the Narmada River. The river flows through the states of Gujarat, and Madhya Pradesh in India. Sardar Sarovar Dam in Gujarat is one of the biggest dams on the river and was one of the first focal points of the movement. Their mode of campaign includes hunger strikes and garnering support from film and art personalities. Narmada Bachao Andolan, with its leading spokespersons Medha Patkar and Baba Amte, received the Right Livelihood Award in 1991.

### VI. HISTORY OF THE DAM PROJECT

(1947-1979): Determining the Features of the Project

Between the first suggestions for dams on the Narmada made in 1947-48 and the Award of the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal in 1979, disputes about what to construct where, were arguments among three, and later four, state governments within India. The governments of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra, later joined by the government of Rajasthan, argued about which state could build what size dam where, how the waters made available for irrigation would be divided among them, and what share of electricity generated by hydroelectric power plants built in conjunction with the dams would flow to each.

Though the populations and economic situations of the states along the Narmada have changed over the decades, their primary concerns about the locations and sizes of dams and waterworks on the Narmada have remained constant

Disputes between the states have been so protracted because of competing ideas about the height of the dam to be built at Navagam. Gujarat favored a higher dam to

maximize water supply, but it would flood out a much larger area, extending further into Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, than the lower dam preferred by the latter two states. When it became involved later, Rajasthan also preferred building a higher dam because that was the only way it would get any Narmada water.

State	Concerns
Gujrat	primary: secure irrigation and drinking water to compensate for low rainfall secondary: hydroelectric supply
Madhya Pradesh	primary: limit amount of water others are allowed to take secondary: limit displacement of villages by downstream dam construction
Maharashtra	primary: secure hydroelectricity for its energy-short industrial districts secondary: limit displacement of villages by downstream dam construction
Rajasthan	secure irrigation waters for its dry southwestern districts

Table. 1: General Details

(1980-2000) Resettlement and Rehabilitation

The environmental issues were fought out under the terms of the Forest Conservation Act 1980, which gave the central government's Department of Environment (later the Ministry of Environment and Forests) authority to require environmental impact assessment of development projects and withhold clearance to begin construction until the terms of the Forest Conservation Act were satisfied. The Department used its authority to order both Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh to do four things before they could begin their respective dam projects on the Narmada. These are:

- Prepare alternate forest sites to compensate for forests that would be submerged behind the dams,
- Improve the terms of resettlement aid offered to people, who would be displaced from their homes,
- Create wildlife sanctuaries, and
- Prepare both the catchment and command areas of each dam for that dam's environmental effects

In 1983, when Gujarat submitted the Sardar Sarovar Dam plans and Madhya Pradesh submitted the Narmada Sagar Dam plans the ministry decided that neither state had met the requirements and refused to give clearance. The ministry did not budge until 1987, after several years of drought in Gujarat had created extremely strong pressure to let construction of Sardar Sarovar begin. By then, however, private nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) working with and advocating for the rural poor were well organized. They immediately recognized that the

central government's concern about environment and displacement would give them leverage to confront the state governments. The state governments were perceived, with good reason, as more concerned to get the projects built than with what happened to the oustees, many of who were poor and illiterate adivasi (members of Scheduled Tribes still living by their traditional culture).

During Resettlement and Rehabilitation scheme Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal Award (NWD T Award) was asked to given by the government and the NWD T Award specified that each resettled family in the dam project should get a housing plot as well as farmland, and monetary grants in aid to cover the cost of moving, buying farm implements and draft animals, and insurance. It also specified that resettlement villages should be provided with a primary school, a panchayat (village government council) meeting hall, a medical dispensary, a seed store, a children's playground, a drinking water well, a village pond, and a link road .

But the scheme did not last long because the Award did not make any distinction between adivasis and others among the oustees, even though several Indian laws do treat adivasis as a distinct category and provide them with certain legal protections for maintenance of their traditional communal ways of life. Some two thirds of the oustees from the Sardar Sarovar Dam were adivasis, and they became the centerpiece of the controversy over oustee resettlement.

## VII. PROJECT FAILURE

In June 1992 after 10 months of inquiry, it issued a 363-page report criticizing the project for failure to:

- include adequate assessment of the human impact of Sardar Sarovar Dam,
- involve any consultation with those who would be affected,
- consider the character of adivasi culture in working out resettlement plans,
- provide adequate additional resettlement when the height of the dam was increased,
- pay sufficient attention to environmental factors in the initial project design, and
- comply with the stipulations included in the conditional clearance issued by the Indian Ministry of Environment and Forests in 1987

## VIII. OUTCOME OF THE MOVEMENT

- The success of the movement opened a new paradigm of development which ensures environmental sustainability and rights of the non-human world.
- The movement created public awareness that the dam project which harms the environment is long-term, and hence it will adversely affect the social and economic life of the future generations.
- The movement also influenced the people to protest against the environmental injustices in their vicinity.
- The various debates on the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) keep the movement active throughout the period and forced people to think in favor of the environment.

## IX. CONCLUSION

These environmental movements are an expression of the socio ecological effects of narrowly conceived development based on short-term criteria of exploitation. The movements are revealing how the resource-intensive demands of development have built-in ecological destruction and economic deprivation. The members have activated micro action plans to safeguard natural processes and to provide the macro concept for ecological development at the national and regional levels. The environmental movements in India have emerged as a new type of social movement that has successfully linked the degradation of nature with the survival of the masses.

Summing up, it can be said that the study aimed at understanding the process and programmes for protection of environment by people's participation in Environmental movement. The study especially focused on the processes which enabled people's participation and identified the factors, which facilitated such participation. More studies are necessary for evolving suitable methodologies both for protection of the environment and for continuous participation of the people as a watchdog against pollution

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