



## **Retrospect and Prospects of Displacement due to Narmada Bachao Andolan**

**Dr. Ankur Pare\***

**\*Sociologist, Bhopal (M.P)**

### **ABSTRACT**

The Narmada Bachao Andolan, a rural mass movement fighting displacement because of dams along India's Narmada River, is the subject of this research. The truth is that the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) has long been a source of controversy among academics. As a result, one of the most effective civil disobedience movements since 1980 has been opposing the construction of a massive dam on the Narmada River right below its confluence with Gujarat state. In honor of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the emerging lake was named the Sardar Sarovar. The World Bank as well as the Japanese government provided funding for the dam's construction, as well as estimated 245 and 254 villages were buried as a result. To solve the problem of people's rehabilitation, several activists banded together to oppose the government's policies. But, in the end, this project was launched following Prime Minister Sh. Narendra Modi's recent official inauguration. The present research paper highlights the retrospect and prospects of NBA.

Keywords: Rural geography, social movements, agricultural livelihoods, environmentalism, displacement, India.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Development generally refers to “the progressive improvement in the social, economic well-being of people so that they live longer, healthier and fuller lives within any given political entity”. The term development carries a preconceived notion of having the ability to improve people’s livelihoods. As such it is labeled, interpreted, and believed to be globally desirable and beneficial by the actors involved. However, if development may contribute to the growth of a nation, economically and socially, it also has the potential to marginalize and violate the rights of a nation’s citizens. (Parasuraman & Balasubramanian, 2015)

Since 1991, India has entered a new phase in its development path, aided by the combined kindness of the World Bank-IMF-ADB-WTO and Western governments. The fundamentals of this new phase are liberalisation, globalisation, and privatisation. The alienation of the Adivasis from their lands, natural resources, as well as cultures has only intensified under such policies in India, according to all available data. Let us consider the most recent and well-known case

from India in this regard. The case of Adivasis affected by Sardar Sarovar dam under construction at Vadgam village in Gujarat in western part of India is studied here.

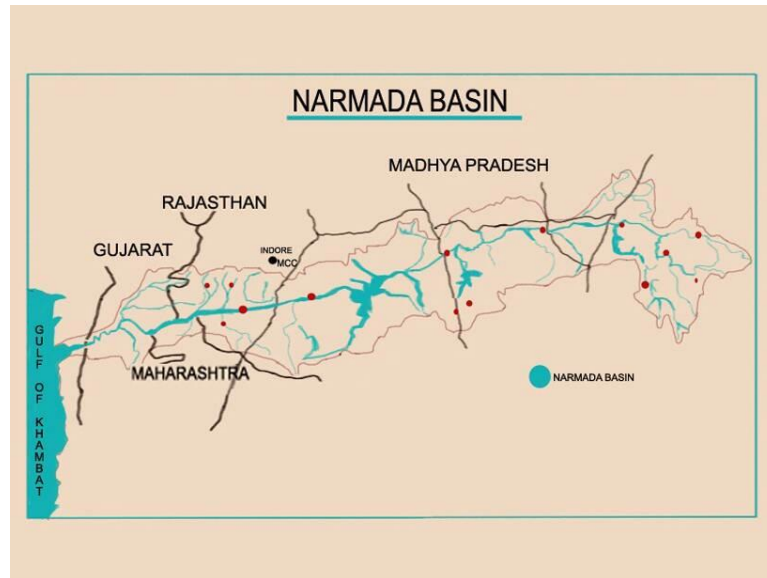


Figure 1: Narmada Basin

The dam alone displaces more than 41,000 families (over 200,000 people) in the three states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh. Adivasis make up over 56% of those injured by the dam. The project has undoubtedly the finest ever resettlement and rehabilitation programme in India because of several factors, the most significant of which is the efforts of the people affected by the work under the umbrella of Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA). But there are too many slips between the cup and the lips. (Mookerjee, 2003)

As a result, the Indian tribal minority does not only represent a large percentage of India's population, but they are also the most vulnerable population exposed to state-led development practices. Therefore, matters of how to lessen the negative consequences that state-led development practices can carry for tribals, such as the loss of land and the loss of community ties due to displacement, require particular attention. Moreover, it has been argued by many scholars against this project as under:

- Because of the dam's size, the probability of earthquakes would be greater.
- The accumulation of silt at the dam's base may allow massive amounts of water to flow again.
- The reservoir's sluggish waters would transmit waterborne diseases to nearby areas. It's possible that tribal and other people's rehabilitation is ineffective.



### **Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal**

The Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal (“Narmada Tribunal”) was set up in 1969 to resolve the river water sharing dispute between Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Maharashtra. Additionally, the Narmada Tribunal aimed to set out conditions regarding the resettlement and rehabilitation of those displaced by the dams. Chaired by then-sitting Supreme Court Justice V. Ram swami, the Tribunal was assisted by technical experts. (Sundar, 2016) Notably absent from this team of experts were any sociologists, anthropologists or environmental engineers.

Despite the Bank's lengthy interest in funding the Sardar Sarovar dam, it was unable to do so until the Narmada Tribunal's Final Order was issued. The Bank acted immediately when the order was issued. Collaborating with Indian officials, Bank personnel spent years re-configuring the Sardar Sarovar dam to reduce unwanted side effects while increasing institutional and economic feasibility. The Bank developed the first-stage proposal between 1979 and 1983. Activists in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, on the other hand, were completely opposed to the dams. In 1989, two such organisations, Madhya Pradesh's Narmada Ghati Navnirman Samiti as well as Maharashtra's Narmada Ghati Dharangrashtra Samiti, joined to establish the Narmada Bachao Andolan. Under the guidance of Medha Patkar, the movement's most prominent person, the NBA set out to verify the promises made about the advantages that would result from the dams' construction. It aimed on gaining access to information from the government and also the World Bank as part of the effort to promote more openness. (Wong, 2013)

The state reacted with force, undertaking a number of arrests, beatings and detentions in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh between 1992 and 1993. The image of Valley inhabitants, standing motionless and defiant in the face of rising waters ready to sacrifice their lives, is perhaps the most haunting of the movement.

The dispute sparked by the Sardar Sarovar project was a “historical watershed for the World Bank and a significant landmark in the fight for accountability”, according to the World Bank. In order to create an independent commission to assess a Bank-funded project, which was a first in the Bank's history, the Bank also formed a quasi-independent Inspection Panel to allow anyone affected by Bank policies to file complaints about policy infractions. (Feldes, 2017)

Ironically, the Bank’s withdrawal from the Sardor Saravor Project in 1993 reduced the accountability of the Indian government to the outside world. Consequently, while the NBA’s actions may have made the Bank more accountable, its withdrawal was a mixed blessing for



the NBA. Three important developments occurred in the wake of the Bank's withdrawal. First, the withdrawal itself greatly reduced the international dimension of the Narmada struggle. (Mcdonald-wilmsen & Webber, 2010) Second, the NBA decided to pursue an additional avenue for change—appeal to the Supreme Court of India. Third, the government's continued construction raised the stakes of the struggle for both sides—more and more villages faced submergence, and the government's commitment to the Narmada Project deepened as the project progressed, and continues to this day.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

(Parasuraman & Balasubramanian, 2015) The Sardar Sarovar Dam reached a height of 121.92 m in 2006 and at this height the dam has enough water to generate most of the promised benefits – irrigation, drinking water, and electricity. However, currently only 30% of the targeted villages receive regular water supplies, less than 20% of the canal network has been constructed and power generation remains well below the generation capacity reached. Even as the dam is nearing completion, the rehabilitation of thousands of families is substandard or non-existent. This, despite the fact that the project had clear legal obligations to reduce human and environmental expenses, as well as being under constant public inspection and Supreme Court oversight.

(Buelles, 2012) This thesis examines how minority and majority interests might be reconciled in state-led development processes, using the Indian tribals impacted by the Sardar Sarovar Dam Project (SSP) as a case study. The SSP poses a threat to the livelihoods of around 100,000 people, the majority of whom are Indian tribal minorities. Landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalisation, and food poverty are all problems connected with development-induced displacement, and the SSP makes tribals more exposed to them. When looking at the SSP, it becomes clear that the tribals are not receiving enough compensation, resettlement, or legal protection. This has prompted national and international discussions about human rights violations, highlighting worries about the protection of minority populations affected by state-led growth. The focus is on what it means to be a citizen of a country in terms of legal representation and state protection, as well as how sociological groups' under-representation can lead to the emergence of second-class citizens. By studying the position of minority rights in the framework of the SSP, the goal is to go beyond current concerns of human rights neglect in the context of the SSP.



(Peterson et al., 2010) The political leaders who make the final decision when, whether, and what to build; the technologists and other government staff who will provide or oversee design, installation, and maintenance; the private firms providing design, construction, or maintenance services; and the taxpayers whose money will fund the project are just a few of the stakeholders involved in the construction and maintenance of public facilities. The lenders who provide loan funding to allow the project to move forward ahead of tax or toll collections; the facility's users; and surrounding neighbours As government services have grown in size and impact, the topic of which stakeholders should have whatever roles and functions in their design, building, and upkeep has become more controversial.

(Basu, 2010) The Narmada Bachao Andolan, a rural social movement fighting displacement because of dams along India's Narmada River, is the subject of this research. This study uses a combination of various major anti-dam struggles within the Andolan, centred on the Sardar Sarovar as well as Maheshwar dams, to show that multi-sited social movements employ a variety of scale and place-based techniques, and that this diversity is critical to the progressive change possibilities that they entail. Three elements of the Andolan are highlighted in this paper. First, over the course of its battle, the Andolan has successfully merged environmental linkages and agricultural identities. When the World Bank withdrew finance for the Sardar Sarovar dam in 1993, the Andolan became internationally famous for its defiance. The Andolan's successful use of global environmental networks was seen as a key factor in their win. Furthermore, the Andolan has also interfered in Indian agrarian politics, and this function of the Andolan becomes apparent when considering the fight against the Maheshwar dam.

(Mcdonald-wilmsen & Webber, 2010) The World Commission on Dams provided an analytical overview of the cumulative effects of years of dam development. A 'managerialist' strategy to planning, in which solutions are explored internally and subservient to the finances that justify the project's existence, suffocates dam-induced development and displacement. The goal of successful resettlement is to eliminate poverty and allow displaced individuals to benefit from the operation. This is an ambitious goal rarely attained in the realm of dam-induced relocation. Furthermore, in other areas of resettlement, such as refugee studies and climate change adaptation, such an objective is considered a minimum level. We hope to widen the study agenda on dam-induced resettlement and increase the standards of development projects that include resettlement in this study. Developers accomplish this by translating some of the



thoughts and concerns from refugee research including responses to environmental change research and practice.

(Maitra, 2009) The study investigates the dynamics of the problem of Development Induced Displacement, as well as the theoretical, administrative, and policy issues that have stymied India's ability to implement development projects smoothly. Modern India has become entangled in a battle between the state's macro-development objectives and the unfavourable implications for the people directly affected by the project. Despite the fact that the demands of time and the logic of liberalisation policy need the continual articulation of development initiatives, it is also critical to overcome the disempowering impacts of displacement on its people. Despite recent government initiatives, formal policy declarations and regulations controlling compensation and resettlement issues have been found inadequate. The paper contends that the state must strike a balance between its efforts to promote development and those to make it sustainable, just, and equitable. The article focuses on the issues that arise in the allocation of compensation and resettlement in such projects. Dam-induced displacement experiences at the Sardar Sarovar Project in the Narmada River Valley Project in Gujarat, India, are emphasized as examples.

(Cullet, 2000) The Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) is part of a massive plan to create more than 3,000 dams on the Narmada River, which flows westwards from Amarkantak in Madhya Pradesh, through Maharashtra, and into Gujarat. The SSP is a multi-purpose dam as well as canal system with irrigation and drinking water as its primary goals. Another anticipated benefit is the creation of electricity. It is the second largest of the Narmada dams proposed, as well as its canal network is expected to be the world's largest. The dam is located in Gujarat, which will reap the most of the project's advantages, while the submergence – totaling 37,533 hectares – is predominantly hurting the state of MP (55%) and, to a lesser extent, the state of Maharashtra.

### **A Critical Appraisal**

Thus this movement can be termed as the Gandhian movement. Baba Amte was clearly Gandhian and Medha Patkar also makes no such claim. Yet all the activities saw themselves as fighting the battle against Nehru's version of development. Baba Amte and Medha Patkar were popularly regarded as true advocates of the people, as were Gandhi and J.P. Dutt. Like Gandhi, Patkar and Amte were able to unite rich landowners and Adivasis in one movement,



despite the fact that the two groups in this region have very little in common. However, in their struggle, they become the same. This Narmada Satyagrah was a resounding success.

On the other hand, the most powerful foundations for this conflict are not environmental or religious, but rather citizens' rights to a livelihood and freedom from state arbitrary acts. The Narmada project infringes on all of these fundamental rights. The battle began as a local demand for social justice, but it grew into a condemnation of a complete system of control that sought to ignore the needs of one segment of the population in favour of development schemes that enriched the already wealthy.

## CONCLUSION

As per one NBA partner, the movement against dam construction on the Narmada River is a beacon of hope for protest actions all over the world fighting for justice, equal society, and social change, while the NBA itself is a beacon of hope for people's movements all around the world fighting for just, fair and equal, and participatory advancement.

This paper has shown that the Andolan is a complex social movement which has reworked both place-based identities and relationships between the scales of power and resistance. Even as existing connections made by the Andolan between local communities and transnational activist organizations have the capacity to challenge the power of the state, the Andolan has also skillfully utilized national sites of resistance through taking its struggle to courts and building networks of social movements. By focusing a large part of its struggle at the national level, the Andolan continues to engage with the state, building a space for an alternative politics that is not bogged down in electoral battles.

In addition to ensuring greater transparency and accountability in World Bank projects, the NBA has contributed to an awareness of the need to approach environmental and human rights issues in tandem—a lesson long known to Indian activists and one that is increasingly apparent to actors on the international scene who urgently battle environmental degradation and its acute impact on marginalized populations.

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