

INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL STUDIES

Working Paper Series No. 242

**PEOPLE'S MOVEMENTS IN ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS: A CRITICAL  
ANALYSIS OF THE NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN IN INDIA**

Ranjit Dwivedi

March 1997

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# PEOPLE'S MOVEMENTS IN ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN IN INDIA.<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Social movements, activist groups and NGOs are major players in environmental politics. Social science research particularly social movement studies tend to consider the discourse of these forces as emancipatory. This paper analyses the making and politics of a people's movement in India. It traces the evolution of the movement from a NGO-led campaign for better rehabilitation to a social movement articulating interests and values of human rights, environment and alternative development. It critically analyses some of the practices and thinking within the movement and concludes that they severely limit its emancipatory potential.

*"In your (researcher's) ruthless pursuit of objectivity you fail to understand the imperatives of a social movement."*

Himanshu Thakar  
Narmada Bachao Andolan  
(personal communication)

*"The correct method lies in dialogue. The conviction of the oppressed that they must fight for their liberation is not a gift bestowed by the revolutionary leadership, but the result of their own conscientization."*

Paulo Freire (1972)

## 1.1 Introduction

This paper analyses the protest over the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) in Gujarat, western India, specifically focusing on the politics of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada Movement, hereafter NBA or the Andolan). Although, the Andolan is characterised as the epitome of the environmental movement in India (see Shiva and Bandopadhyaya 1989, Gadgil and Guha 1995), a comprehensive profile of it has not been drawn up. This paper is a step towards filling this empirical gap. Additionally, the paper stakes claim at levying a critical gaze on the operations and ideologies of the 'new' agents of social transformation - agents who construct, articulate and represent the discourse on alternative development, through forms of political practice that itself is considered 'new'. Much of the current literature on the environmental movement in India, whether considering it along with other social movements (Omvedt 1993, Sethi 1993, Seth 1983, Kothari 1984) or by itself (Gadgil and Guha 1995, Shiva and Bandopadhyaya 1989), sees it as reflecting a disenchantment with state-led development strategies in general, and development projects in particular, as well as creating political space for alternatives to the dominant development paradigm (Wignaraja 1993, Escobar 1992, Kothari 1990, Parajuli 1991). The NBA is a major player in Indian ecological politics and studying it enables us to explore the problems and prospects of new/alternative politics and to empirically situate the construction sites of alternative development discourse.

A second claim in the paper is related to the methods of analysing the new political actors. In social movement studies, that there is no one way of looking at these actors; moreover, the received wisdom on movements reveal a certain hesitancy in approaching 'ongoing' social movements. Viewed positively, there is ample flexibility in devising methods of analyses that can adequately handle one's research objectives. This paper claims no methodological innovativeness. It attempts to recast some 'tried and tested' methods in social movement studies by drawing upon tools and insights on network and discourse analyses. The methodological orientation rests on three simple premises, which in a sense, influence the paper's structure: (a) social movements are movements in time and not static entities; hence the need to view them as temporal processes (Das 1996:1511); (b) the valorisation of the transformation potential of 'new' agents tends to gloss over internal tensions and contradictions besieging social movements thereby hindering rather than fostering reflexivity; and derivatively (c) actors in ecological politics need to be characterised not through an a priori attribution of consciousness and cognition (thereby elevating them as historical projects) but through an interpretative understanding of their social practices and ideological formulations.

The paper consists of five sections. The first section takes a cursory glance at some conceptual issues related to environmental movements and elaborates on some methodological preferences and orientation. The second section is a narrative account of social movement formation, focusing on the temporal process through which a mobilising campaign evolves into a social movement. The third section delves into the internal dynamics of the Andolan and looks into issues of leadership, social capital accumulation and strategy. The fourth section delineates the Andolan's ideological formulations and characterises its mobilising discourse in terms of its transformatory (emancipatory) potential. Some concluding remarks are made in the final section.

## **1.2 Studying Social Movements: Some conceptual issues**

It is difficult to find a consensual definition of social movements. Different forms of collective action ranging from local vigils at one end of the spectrum to international revolutions at the other in various historical contexts have all been called social movements. The definition varies from time to time depending upon the nature of the collective action under study. As Diani and Eyerman (1992) argue, the concept of social movement has served primarily as an evocative label, identifying a series of empirical phenomena, which could perhaps be as easily analysed under the rubric of social conflict, collective action or political protest. Despite such indeterminate applications of the concept, one can in a minimalist sense define social movements as forms of collective action that are: (a) based on and express social and other conflicts (Lindberg 1995, Gadgil and Guha 1995); (b) based on large mobilisations (Cohen 1985); (c) anti-systemic in character (Arrighi et al. 1989) and therefore breaking the limits of the system in which action occurs (Melucci 1985).

### **1.2.1 New Social Movements: What is 'New'?**

In recent years, the literature on social movements has revealed a great deal of interest among scholars in what is called 'new social movements'. The concept, however, is as nebulous and volatile as the term social movements. Its origin can be traced to the work of Alain Touraine and the European school, the term denoting new structural conflicts in post-industrial or advanced capitalist societies (Touraine 1981 and 1985, Habermas 1981, Melucci 1989 and 1992). The list in this genre included movements linked to civil liberties and democratic rights, students, women and the environment. These new movements, according to

their exponents, were primarily over symbolic goods - meanings, lifestyles - rather than over material goods. Apart from the nature of the demands voiced in such movements, their newness was also attributed to social formations outside or beyond the working class/peasant movements - the subjects of class struggle in classical Marxism. Studies in Europe and elsewhere have shown that the core members of these movements were recruited largely from the middle class, who lived in material conditions that facilitated their relative neglect of material, economic and redistributive demands (see Offe 1985, Eder 1995).

The theoretical underpinning for new social movements in the developing countries were, however, more nuanced. In Latin America, a multiplicity of action groups - squatter movements and neighbourhood councils, self-help groups and coalitions for the defence of indigenous traditions and regional interests - constituted the core of the new social movements. Often engaged in struggles in opposition to the state and other political and socio-cultural institutions, rather than the economic ruling class, these movements were considered to be the result of the multi-layered structural crises faced by the modern Latin American societies (Laclau 1985, Evers 1985); since they were struggles over meanings as much as over resources, they were judged to be both economic and cultural (Castells 1983, Escobar 1992). As Fiske (1989:10) has argued, these struggles are to be understood as 'semiotic resistance' originating in the 'desire of the subordinate to exert control over the meanings of their lives'.

### 1.2.2 New Social Movements: The Indian Context

In the Indian context, the concept 'new social movement' has been used mainly to denote the women's movement emerging in the late 1970s, articulating cultural radicalism; the *dalit* movement and the *adivasi* movement for cultural and regional autonomy and identity; environmental action groups resisting development projects and farmers movements of the 1980s demanding remunerative prices for farm outputs and lower prices for inputs (Omvedt 1993, Brass 1995). The 'newness' in them is attributed to their being (a) non-party political formations (Kothari 1984, Seth 1983), outside the realm of institutionalised party-politics on the one hand and the trade-unions and lower class peasant politics on the other<sup>2</sup>; and (b) carriers of a new paradigm of social existence and development, 'redefining politics and articulating alternative forms of governance' (Sethi 1993). These new social movements are considered to emanate from the structural failure of the modernisation project largely practised and controlled by a developmentalist state that has so far exercised domination over knowledge and power (Parajuli 1991). While the modernisation project is viewed as being Eurocentric (Wignaraja 1993) and therefore essentially colonising ( see Shiva 1988, in the context of the ecological as well as the women's movement in India), the post-colonial state is theorised as a hegemonic formation, serving the interests and values of the dominant national elite in the process subjugating women, dalits, adivasis, minorities and the poor, and attempting 'to regulate both accumulation and legitimisation as well as capitalism and democracy' (Parajuli 1991:175). Within this scenario of domination and subordination, new social movements are counter-hegemonic formations resisting domination, albeit in differing forms and degrees, as well as 'providing some basis for a developmental and democratic alternative to the system as it now works' (Wignaraja 1993:5). Such movements straddle class borders rather than polarising around them and are therefore similar to their counterparts in the advanced countries.

### 1.3 Conceptualising the Environment Movement

The conceptualisation of new social movements in the developing countries as reflecting a developmental crisis, as struggles over resources and meanings and as manifestations of pluralistic paradigms of development and governance is clearly evident in the theorisation of the Indian environment movement. Unlike the environment movement in the advanced capitalist world, nature-related conflicts and struggles reflect a strong material basis, emanating from the monopoly of the state over such resources as water, forests and land which serve as resources of subsistence for the majority of the population. While some scholars view such movements primarily as resistance movements geared towards stopping economic activities that destroy the environment and impoverish local communities (Gadgil and Guha 1995:2), others emphasise their capabilities to redefine the concepts of development and economic values, of technological efficiency and scientific rationality (Shiva 1991:24). There is, however, a unanimity among scholars over the fact that such movements have occurred due to socio-ecological impact of a narrowly conceived development which is based only on short-term commercial criteria of control and exploitation of natural resources and which almost exclusively serves the needs and interests of the rich minority.

Resource-intensive industrial activities and major development projects are largely considered to be the sites of environmental struggles and movements. Exploitation of mineral resources, large river valley projects, mechanised fishing and state controlled commercial forestry are major arenas which generate resource conflicts and therefore environmental movements (Shiva 1991, Shiva and Bandopadhyaya 1988, Gadgil and Guha 1995, Sethi 1993). Along side large scale destruction and/or transfer of natural resources, these activities and projects frequently involve displacement of people imposing enormous social and environmental costs and affecting the survival and subsistence portfolio of local communities. In other words, such productive activities plant the seeds of conflict by their very nature. Environmental movements are mediations in these conditions of conflict. Depending on their nature and intensity they could denote a redefinition of usufruct and control rights over the resource in question, an environmental response seeking correctives through legal and policy shifts, or more radically, an ecological reaction, rejecting the dominant development paradigm and seeking to fundamentally alter existing conceptions on and modes of resource use (Sethi 1993).

Of the numerous environmental struggles that dot the Indian landscape, the best known and most studied movement is the Chipko Andolan (see Guha 1989, Weber 1987, Shiva 1991). In many ways the Chipko Movement marks a watershed in the Indian environmental movement. It was one of the first struggles launched in the post-independence era that drew world-wide attention to the damaging effects of commercial forestry and logging practices in the foothills of the Himalayas, both on the inhabitants as well as on the wider eco-system of the Garhwal-Kumaon belt in the Uttarakhand region. It took place at a time when not much was known in India and the world over about the significance of environmentally sustainable development. The movement derived its name from the collective action it espoused - the hugging of trees by local people, to prevent the forest officials and contractors from cutting them down.<sup>3</sup> It inspired several similar struggles in other parts of India, the Appiko Chaluvali struggle in the Uttara Kannada district in south India being one of them (Shiva 1991:117). But perhaps most importantly, the Chipko movement succeeded in achieving a fifteen year ban on commercial logging in the region.

The achievements of movements like the Chipko Andolan have drawn scholarly attention that has probed the nature and character of such movements.<sup>4</sup> Guha's study of the Chipko movement locates it as the

contemporary manifestation of a century old tradition of peoples' struggles over forest rights (Guha 1989). Although largely historical in orientation, the study explores the contemporary tensions existing among the different ideological and strategic orientations of the groups actively involved in the movement. However, Guha's study is, in some ways, an exception. Studies exploring ecological politics (few in number) tend to focus not so much on specific struggles and movements but on structural conditions/crises which generate them. We discuss the methodological implications for such preference below.

#### **1.4 Approaches to Movement Analyses**

The approaches to the study of social movements fall broadly under two categories. The first approach focuses on macro-level structural foundations underpinning the movements, usually factors of political economy and/or systemic crisis. It approaches social movements by explaining their links to these structural conditions, causes and influences. The critical point of inquiry is the 'why' of the social movement. As the focus remains on the contradictions of the larger system, this approach tends to attribute an emancipatory discourse to the movements valorising their transformation potential (see Salman 1990: 112). The second approach takes as its explanatory domain, the politics of the movement - the interests, mobilisation, relative power relations, role of leadership and organisation as well as issues of strategies and alliances. The accent is on organisational displays and material and ideological resources (on the 'how' of the movement), the assumption being that there has always been an autonomous dimension of politics that is not exclusively a reaction or response to structural conditions and crises. This approach is evident in 'micro-studies', where the focus is on the events and processes in a particular movement.

In this paper, the second approach is clearly discernible. The focus is on the discourse and practices of mobilisation in the NBA - on its actors, engaged in what Laclau and Mauffe (1985) call articulatory practice.<sup>5</sup> We call this the 'movement as an actor' approach where the movement's practices and the process of identity formation are critical issues of inquiry. We dwell on this approach latter in the paper. Yet, it needs reiteration that the inherently dialogical character of social movements - bringing together systems and actors - presents us a challenge of maintaining an analytical equilibrium between the two modes of analysis (See Eder 1995:11).

Social movements cannot be explained as mere manifestation of an aggregate of people organising resources to fight for their interests or as political reactions to (new) forms of (structural) domination and exploitation. Actors mediate through networks of social relationships (Melucci 1992:243), produce and shape collective identity and unity as well as construct (new) systems of meaning and knowledge (Diani and Eyerman 1992:9). These elements are integral processes in social movement formation and development and therefore demand the indulgence of the scholar. Thus, methodologically speaking, processes, interactions and meanings (apart from structures and actions) are important in movement analysis. While we simply cannot claim to have incorporated all these methodological variables in our analysis, our approach is informed by the need to focus on the interactions between different sets of actors and networks of relationships, the processes of resource mobilisation, agency mediation and identity formation and the meanings that get constructed in the movement.

## **2.1 The Coming of the Andolan**

### **2.1.1 The Sardar Sarovar Project: A Brief Overview**

The protest movement around the SSP on the Narmada river can be said to be a relatively contemporary chapter in a project that spans almost five decades. The idea of harnessing water from the Narmada dates back to the 1940s, when the first technical studies were conducted and sixteen sites identified for irrigation and hydro-electric projects. A terminal dam was proposed and sanctioned in Gora first with FRL (full reservoir level) 161 ft and subsequently raised to with FRL 320 ft in 1959.<sup>6</sup> The construction of project headquarters began in 1961 in Kevadia, for which over 5000 people from nearby villages were displaced. The site of the dam was shifted slightly upstream in 1962 to its present site and under the Bhopal agreement of 1963<sup>7</sup> between the chief ministers of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh it was further raised to FRL 425 ft. However as the M.P government did not ratify the agreement the matter was referred to a central government committee. The Khosla committee recommended a height of FRL 500 ft which drew sharp reactions from M.P and Maharashtra governments. With negotiations failing, Gujarat formerly registered a complaint under the Inter-state Water Disputes Act in 1968 and a year later the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal was constituted. The Tribunal Award came in 1978 and was binding on all the interested parties (Gujarat, M.P., Maharashtra and Rajasthan). It set the height of the SSP at FRL 455 ft. It also allocated water and hydro-power and distributed costs among the state governments and laid down principles and practices for resettlement and rehabilitation of those to be displaced.

The Sardar Sarovar Dam is the terminal dam in the Narmada Valley Development Project master plan that envisages the construction of 30 major dams, 135 medium dams and 3000 minor dams, which together would irrigate 4 to 5 million hectares of agricultural land, provide 2700 MW of hydro-electricity and supply water for domestic and industrial use. According to the latest official estimates the SSP alone over the next thirty years, is expected to irrigate 1.8 million hectares of land, supply drinking water to 40 million people and will have an installed capacity of 1450 MW of power. The planned reservoir when filled to its maximum water level will cover 410 sq.kms of land while its main irrigation canal will be approximately 440 kms in length. The project is to submerge 37590 ha of land and affect 245 villages in the reservoir area with an estimated population of 130,000. While the affected villages in Maharashtra and Gujarat have a near total adivasi population, in M.P., about 140 villages to be affected lie in the fertile Nimad plains; inhabiting among others in this area are class of rich cash-crop farmers with access to irrigation.

### **2.1.2 The Precursor Phase: 1979-1984**

The history of the anti-SSP movement can be divided into three distinct phases.<sup>8</sup> During the earliest phase, from 1979 to 1984, the protest with regards to the Sardar Sarovar project took several different forms involving different actors. The Nimad plains witnessed the first intense agitation against the Sardar Sarovar Project immediately after the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal (NWDT) presented its final award on August 16th 1979. The affected Nimad villages, largely from the districts of Western Nimad and Dhar, launched the 'Narmada Bachao-Nimad Bachao Sangharsh Samiti' (Save Narmada, Save Nimad Struggle Committee) which gained instant support from the Congress Party, the opposition in the Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly. Despite the clarification issued by the then chief minister of the state Mr. Virendra Kumar Sakhleja (Janata



Party), that the M.P. government had not accepted the NWDAT Award,<sup>9</sup> the Congress-backed agitation gathered momentum. Several rallies, *bandhs* and road blocks were organised, mainly in Bhopal, Indore, Badwani and Kukshi during the months of August and September. It needs to be mentioned here that while the agitation was intense in the Nimad plains, the adivasi areas subject to submergence, mostly in the Jhabua district were not represented in the struggle. Amidst the agitation, the M.P. government issued statements that it would make efforts to discuss the issue of the height of the Navagam Dam (FRL 455 ft.), although the Tribunal Award was binding on the four affected states: Gujarat, M.P., Maharashtra and Rajasthan.<sup>10</sup>

Although the first phase of the anti-dam struggle began spontaneously, the mediation of the M.P. Congress party gave it an organisational support. Several state-level functionaries participated in the agitation. Both the student wing and the youth wing of the M.P. Congress also actively participated in the struggle. While the agitation aroused a general feeling of M.P. being the loser in the Tribunal Award, the brunt of the struggle in this first phase was directed at renegotiating the height of the Navagam Dam (the name with which the terminal dam was known), in order to save some of the Nimad villages from being submerged. Madhya Pradesh was indeed a loser in many ways. Most of the submergence was to occur in M.P., including fertile agricultural land in the Nimad belt. Moreover, the proposed sites for two M.P. government projects, Harinfal<sup>11</sup> and Jalsindhi,<sup>12</sup> fell within the submergence area of SSP. The M.P. Congress party, therefore, projected the issue of the Navagam Dam as a conflict between the interests of Gujarat and M.P.<sup>13</sup> The agitation soon petered out, as the Congress party withdrew its support after coming to power in M.P. and elsewhere in the elections of 1980.

In the early 1980s, environmentalists and environmental groups were instrumental in initiating a campaign against large dams.<sup>14</sup> These groups had tasted some degree of success in the late 1970s, both in the Chipko movement and in the campaign to save the Silent Valley in Kerala and now took initiatives in research, documentation and raising general awareness on the impact of large dams. With regards to the SSP, a Delhi based group, called Kalpavriksh together with the Hindu College Nature Club, conducted a study in the months of July and August 1983 in the Narmada Valley and pointed out some 'serious inadequacies and distortions in the information base' (Kalpavriksh 1986:4).<sup>15</sup> This group was later to take a very active part in the struggle in the valley. In 1983, the World Bank had been approached by ARCH-Vahini - an NGO working on the issues of health and environment in Mangrol, Gujarat - drawing attention to the plight of those to be evicted by the project. That year, the World Bank commissioned Thayer Scudder, an international expert on displacement and resettlement, as part of a mission on the relocation component of the Sardar Sarovar project. Scudder's report pointing out several inadequacies in the rehabilitation proposals, was widely circulated among international NGOs such as Oxfam and Survival International in UK and the Environmental Defence Fund in USA; they started lobbying with the World Bank even as the latter was negotiating the loan proposal with the Government of India and the states for the SSP.<sup>16</sup> These NGO-led activities were later to play a crucial role in shaping the Narmada Bachao Andolan. However it was not until 1984 that the valley witnessed any mass mobilisation of the project affected people.

### **2.1.2 The Demand for Fair Rehabilitation: 1984-1987**

On March 8th 1984, the first public demonstration, consisting of fourteen tribal villages in Gujarat and nine tribal villages in Maharashtra, marched to the project headquarters at the Kevadia Colony from Vadagam village in Gujarat demanding a thorough revision of the Gujarat government's resettlement policy

outlined in its government resolution (GR) of June 11th 1979, to compensate only those with revenue land holding. Although the NWDT did not make any provisions for compensating 'encroachers' on waste land and forest land, it had at least spelt out the requirement that families and not land-holding should be treated as the compensation unit. In a memorandum submitted by the affected people and their representing NGOs - ARCH-Vahini and Rajpipla Social Service Society - to the government of Gujarat, the demand was put forward for landless, 'encroachers' and major sons to be treated at par with people holding land titles.

The demonstration marked the beginning of a new phase in the struggles in the valley. From 1984 onwards a series of collective actions ensued that involved the local affected population. In Gujarat, the ARCH-Vahini spearheaded the boycotting of project authorities with a '*rasta roko*' to stop work on the rock fill dykes,<sup>17</sup> a writ petition in the Gujarat High Court and later in the Supreme Court of India, and the intensification of the international campaign with the support of NGOs abroad. Later the *Narmada Asargrasta Samiti* (NAS) was formed as a platform for the 5000 or so people displaced during the construction of the SSP headquarters back in 1960. In Maharashtra, the demand for better rehabilitation was articulated by activist groups and NGOs. Activists from SETU,<sup>18</sup> an NGO based in Ahmedabad, had initiated work among the adivasi villages helping them to form village level committees.<sup>19</sup> In April 1986, the *Narmada Dharangrasta Samiti* (NDS) was formed in Dhulia, a committee comprising of activists from SETU and representatives of the affected villages under the leadership of Medha Patkar.<sup>20</sup> In a memorandum submitted to the government of Maharashtra that month, the NDS demanded the release of degraded forest land for the purpose of rehabilitation if large quantities of revenue land was unavailable (cited in ARCH-Vahini 1991). A few months later, Maharashtra witnessed its first major demonstration, in Bombay, organised by a left-led 'Committee of Dam and Project Evictees' with the slogan, 'first rehabilitation then the dam'. Two distinguishing features marked this phase of the struggle. Firstly, demands for better provisions for resettlement and rehabilitation were voiced in no uncertain terms. Secondly, it was for the first time that tribal villages in both Gujarat and Maharashtra were mobilised.

In M.P. the situation was more fluid. The initial stirrings focused more on the Narmada Sagar Project (NSP) which was to be constructed at Punasa in the Khandwa district in Central M.P., and less on the SSP. This project had been inaugurated by Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India on October 23rd 1984. According to official statistics, the NSP would irrigate a net cropped area of 1,41,000 hectares while submerging 91,348 hectares of land. The project would also generate power with an installed capacity of 1000 MW. The initial response to the NSP of the activist groups and environmentalists was one of total opposition.<sup>21</sup> This response was shaped not only by accumulated experiences with the Tawa and Bargi projects<sup>22</sup> in M.P., but also by the orientation of social activists and NGOs in the region (central M.P.) towards 'appropriate technology'.<sup>23</sup>

In western M.P., particularly in the Jhabua district, several organisations and activist groups had been working among the tribal villages. The Khedut Mazdoor Chetna Sangath was one such organisation. Working with over a hundred villages in the Alirajpur tehsil from which the Sangath draws its membership, it has, since its formation in 1983, launched several struggles against the state forest department over access and control of forest resources. The coming of the SSP affected twenty six villages of the Sangath area. In 1986, the Sangath facilitated a survey conducted by Multiple Action Research Group (MARG), an NGO for research and policy advocacy based in Delhi, in these villages.<sup>24</sup> The objective of the survey was to find out 'what kind of rehabilitation the affected people wanted, what rehabilitation they were offered and the extent to which it was

satisfactory' (MARG 1986:1).<sup>25</sup> Unlike its counterparts in central M.P., the Sangath focused on the problems of displacement and resettlement in the initial years, disseminating information on the likely impact of the SSP, the extent of forest loss, the number of villages facing submergence, resettlement provisions as per the Tribunal award, the World Bank credit agreements and the government resolutions and peoples entitlements as per these provisions.

The fluid situation in M.P notwithstanding, demands for a fair and acceptable rehabilitation package for SSP oustees were voiced by most of the activist groups. The demands voiced at this point of the agitation assume particular significance, since this marked the beginning of the project implementation phase.<sup>26</sup> Between 1984 and 1987, the loan deal with the Bank had been signed, financial clearance had been received from the Planning Commission, conditional environmental clearance for the project had been granted by the Ministry of Forests and Environment. The conditional environmental clearance accorded to the SSP and NSP in June 1987 activated a chain reaction. Environmentalists and NGOs outside the valley strongly protested the decision of the government to approve the projects when sufficient studies on the environmental and social impact of the project had not been initiated, and even those started had not yet been completed. In May, just one month earlier, Medha Patkar had written to the EDF, USA, that the environmental clearance to the SSP was expected despite incomplete studies but that the NDS would intensify its struggle for rehabilitation nonetheless. She also mentioned that she had persuaded NGOs in M.P who were arguing for a 'no dam' position to mobilise and organise tribals to put up joint rehabilitation demands (Patkar 1987 cited in Patel 1995). Patkar achieved some success in her endeavour. It was at her initiative that the Narmada Ghati Nav Nirman Samiti (NGNS) was revitalised in M.P. with the participation of the activists of the Khedut Mazdoor Chetna Sangath, and together with the Narmada Dharanagrasta Samiti (NDS), it made several demands on resettlement and rehabilitation in 1987. These demands included the right to information on the technical aspects of the dam, the extent and schedule of submergence, land availability including amount, place, quality and legal status of the land selected for compensation; fresh land surveys to include those areas excluded from earlier surveys, the extension of rehabilitation benefits to those affected by the project headquarters at Kevadia, the canal network in Gujarat and the compensatory afforestation programmes were also made; and assertion of the rights of those affected to settle in their own states as per guidelines laid down by the NWDT award.

### **2.1.3 The Split in the NGO Movement and the Birth of the Andolan: 1988**

On December 23rd 1987, the government of Gujarat announced substantial modifications to its Resettlement and Rehabilitation (R&R) package through government resolutions of December 4th, 14th and 17th 1987. This announcement followed pressure from the NGO movement for R&R in Gujarat, M.P. and Maharashtra and from a series of Bank missions, particularly in April and November/December that year. The major features of the new R&R policies were: (a) landed oustees were eligible to get a minimum of 2 hectares of land of their choice, and the difference between the compensation paid by the government and the market price of 2 hectares of land as per the choice of the displaced was to be borne by the government through ex-gratia payment; (b) cultivators of government waste land and forest land as well as the landless were to be accorded the same benefits as in (a). It needs to be mentioned here that the Government of India has no national policy on R&R till date and the approach of states towards relocation has been extremely ad-hoc and inconsistent. Under these circumstances, the government of Gujarat rightly claimed that its R&R policy in SSP was a 'revolutionary' step.

The policy announcements resulted in the split of the NGO movement that had so far spearheaded the agitation. NGOs in Gujarat, notably the ARCH-Vahini, endorsed the new policies and offered critical support to the government for implementing them, the Vahini claiming that the implementation of the R&R policies required 'objective, fair and continuous watch dogging' (ARCH Vahini 1991:14). The NGO movement in Maharashtra and M.P., however, took a completely different turn.

In November 1987, in a joint memorandum to the Narmada Control Authority the NGNS (M.P.) and the NDS (Maharashtra) had put forward a list of thirty eight demands related to rehabilitation. The memorandum had warned that if a clear decision was not taken on these demands by December 15th, then a movement would be launched to get the demands fulfilled. On December 5th a meeting of NGO activists, environmentalists, and intellectuals was convened in New Delhi. The meeting was organised to discuss 'social and environmental aspects of the Narmada Projects', and to 'produce relevant study material on the projects related to involuntary resettlement and environmental aspects which have been ignored by the government' and to 'widen the network and to help those groups already working' (Kochari T., proceedings of the Dec 5th 1987 meeting, IIPA New Delhi). Most of the NGOs active in the valley - the NDS, the ARCH-Vahini, the NGNS, as well as NGOs such as Oxfam, Participatory Research in Asia, and Bombay Natural History Society - were represented in the meeting. Although the viability of the project was questioned in the meeting by some participants the consensus was to study in depth the various dimensions of the SSP and to initiate such action plans - research, mobilisation, monitoring, documentation, media exposure and fund raising - so as to keep the 'pot boiling' (ibid). The meeting thus marked the formulation of what was called the Narmada Action Plan, largely governed by the feeling that 'it would be very difficult (but not impossible) to stop the SSP at that stage' (Kothari A. correspondence with Mehta A., Sept. 16th 1988), but that a demand for a complete, reliable appraisal of the project was justified and needed to be strongly pursued.

The December 23rd announcement, was not well received by the activist groups outside Gujarat. Doubts were raised about the government's capabilities and will to implement the policies,<sup>27</sup> as well as the availability of the large quantity of land required for rehabilitation. In M.P. and in Maharashtra mobilisation work by the activists continued among the affected villages. International NGOs stepped up their campaign against the project: in June 1988, two organisations, the EDF and Friends of the Earth, testified before the Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, Committee on Appropriations, US Senate (EDF 1988) regarding the inadequate environmental impact assessments and cost benefit analysis undertaken by the project authorities as well as the inadequacies in the R&R policies of the government of M.P. and Maharashtra and the unavailability of quality land for rehabilitation. In July 1988, the Gandhian social worker Baba Amte organised a meeting of social workers and environmentalists, the consequence of which was the adoption of the 'Anandwan Declaration against Large Dams'.<sup>28</sup> In August 1988, the NDS and NGNS announced total opposition to the SSP on environmental, social and economic grounds, preferring to 'be drowned by the rising water of the dam if the government insists on building the dam, rather than giving tacit approval to these destructive schemes by agreeing to shift' (NDS 1988, press release). Thus was born the slogan *Dubenge par Hatenge Nahin!* We shall drown, but not move! The rationale for opposing the entire project was, firstly, that proper rehabilitation of all those to be displaced was impossible since the governments had no real idea of the extent and impact of displacement; secondly, the extremely high environmental costs of the SSP had neither been assessed nor properly accounted for in the cost benefit analysis and the governments had no action plans to undertake mitigative measures in this regard. A radical environmental opposition to the project, later to be known as the Narmada Bachao Andolan, was being forged.

## 2.2 The Narmada Bachao Andolan: A Chronicle of Activities and Events

### 2.2.1 The Formative Years

The declaration of total opposition to the Sardar Sarovar Project divided the NGO movement for R&R in the valley. The ARCH-Vahini responded to the total opposition by dismissing it as a 'lofty ideal', and demanded to know 'if those who are making this radical shift will ...really ask the oustees to drown themselves in the rising water...' It called for delinking the issue of rehabilitation from 'the battle on the wider front'. It did not 'share the strategic perceptions of those who are wittingly and unwittingly using the issue of rehabilitation of oustees in the cause of the fight against the dam' as this was 'not responsible activism' (ARCH-Vahini 1988b:14). The perceptions of the ARCH-Vahini were clearly shaped by the conditions within which it was embedded. Its immediate struggle was for a fair degree of compensation to the Gujarati oustees in the remaining fourteen villages. The Gujarat government's policy announcements were therefore deemed to be a big achievement for the struggle, although the Vahini 'fully realised its responsibility to ensure the implementation of the policies' (Anil Patel:1996 interview). The next step in the scheme of things for the Vahini should have been to extract similar policies from the governments of M.P. and Maharashtra and to work towards their implementation (ARCH-Vahini 1988a). For the Vahini, the argument 'rehabilitation is impossible' was based on the 'alleged fact that enough land is not available' and that 'this argument of non-availability gets strengthened by taking up positions that oustees should not be asked or encouraged to identify the land they would prefer and that high prices of the land should not be given to the land sellers' (ARCH-Vahini 1988b:8).

However, such criticisms did not deter the NDS and the NGNS in their resolve to oppose the SSP, a resolve based on 'definite information and fundamental principles' (NDS undated:1) According to them 'even the most preliminary information regarding the number and families of villages affected, the extent of the areas to be submerged, the number of hamlets likely to be displaced ... was not available with the governments... leave aside the detailed plan for rehabilitation'. It was therefore argued that 'whatever promises the government may make on paper, the organisations of the oustees have come to the painful conclusion after full discussions, deliberations, studies and investigation that the government will never be in a position to give "land for land" for all 245 project affected villages' (ibid:3-4). In short, the shift in perspective was built upon the premise that an ecologically sustainable rehabilitation of all the oustees was an impossible task. Along with the question of rehabilitation, those opposed to the projects also stressed the wider questions - the cost benefit analysis, the environmental and social costs, the inadequate studies related to seismicity, impact on catchment area, command area and on community health. These wider questions involved the exercise of a democratic right to information with regards to all aspects of the SSP in particular and development projects in general, and the obligation of the government to establish clearly the 'public interest' of such projects. The total opposition therefore was not just on the question of inadequate R&R measures and impracticable policies but on a wider issue that involved a major sacrifice by some, for an ill-defined, unestablished 'national good'. These issues then became the rallying point for activist groups and organisations opposed to the project. By 1989, the NDS, the NGNS and the Narmada Asargrasta Samiti (NAS) in Gujarat had merged to form the Narmada Bachao Andolan. In the years to come the NBA was to tap a wide range of support from NGOs and activist groups, intellectuals and environmentalists in India and abroad.

The announcement of total opposition drew sharp reactions from the government of Gujarat. Throughout the 1980s, in conditions of persistent drought, the government had mobilised public support for the SSP by projecting it as the 'pride of Gujarat'. In this endeavour it received ample support from the industry and farmers' associations whose interests were linked to the availability of power and irrigation water from the SSP. The anti-dam mobilisation was soon dubbed anti-Gujarat and anti-development. In October 1988, the Gujarat government announced that the dam site, the project headquarters at Kevadia and twelve adjacent villages were subject to the Official Secrets Act, 1923. The district of Bharuch (falling in the command of the project) was also declared a 'prohibited area' under section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code. Activists who violated these codes were caned and arrested. Apart from these incidents of state violence, however, the government's handling of the situation focused on mobilising support for the project rather on repressive measures. Rallies, *melas*, exhibitions were organised throughout Gujarat during this period; political parties and NGOs, chambers of commerce and farmers' associations and even Gandhian social activists in Gujarat extended support to the project.

More problematic than the government response, the Narmada Bachao Andolan had to face criticisms from groups which it might have expected to be its 'natural allies' in the struggle. In Maharashtra, the Committee of Dam and Project Evictees (CDPE), a left outfit and the Shramik Mukti Dal (SMD), found the Andolan's total opposition couched in rhetoric and romanticism. Omvedt (1993), who is associated with the SMD, outlines the organisation's position which favoured the building of a wide coalition involving a sizeable section of the Gujarati peasantry, including the project's proposed 'beneficiaries' in the mobilisation process so as to confront the powerful interests behind the dam. At that point the Andolan could make few claims about its mobilising power: it was more of a coalition of activist groups and NGOs, and in Omvedt's words, '(had) a romantic image that could capture media attention, but little strategy to gain mass-backing' (ibid:269). While the dedicated involvement of social workers like Baba Amte at that stage of the movement gave it much needed credibility in the face of concerted opposition, the appeal to sentiments and idealism as a strategy for mobilisation could attract only a handful of middle-class youth and was considered no substitute for the strategy of mass-based politics. Omvedt also mentions that the Shetkari Sangathana, the powerful farmers' organisation in Maharashtra ignored the issue as it divided the peasantry into losers and beneficiaries. In the Sangathana's discourse the peasantry is one 'class' pitched against the urban-industrial complex that exploits rural India for its gains and the Andolan's division of the peasantry into rich cash crop farmers of Gujarat versus poor farmers and adivasis in M.P and Maharashtra did not cut much ice for the Sangathana.<sup>29</sup> In any case, among the people to be affected by the SSP, were a sizeable section of rich cash crop farmers from the Nimad plains in M.P. The only support that the Andolan could get was from the women's movement, in both the Patna and Calicut conferences (ibid:269).

### **2.2.2 Against 'Destructive' Development: The Making of a Movement**

A turning point for the anti-SSP struggle was reached on September 28th, with the rally at Harsud. Mooted by Baba Amte at a meeting of activists at Hemalkasa in April that year, the possibility of a rally was followed up at the NBA meeting in Bombay in May and then at a meeting of representatives of over sixty organisations at Itarsi in August 1989. The rally called for an end to all projects which devastate the environment and destroy people's livelihoods and for the adoption of a socially just and ecologically sustainable pattern of development. It marked the beginning of a political campaign by the NBA that was no longer restricted to the SSP alone. In its new lexicon, the SSP was simply a manifestation of a development

model that derives benefits for a few at the cost of enormous suffering to the affected population and massive overuse and degradation of the surrounding resources. The message of the Harsud Rally was clear. The campaign newsletter of the NBA described the rally in the following words: 'People struggling against past or proposed displacement and environmental degradation by massive irrigation and power projects such as Sardar Sarovar and Narmada Sagar, Bhopalpatnam-Inchampalli and Koel Karo, defence projects such as Baliapal, nuclear power projects such as Kaiga, came together in an unprecedented show of strength. (The) defiant message to the politicians and planners was that people are no longer prepared to watch in mute desperation as project after destructive project is heaped on them in the name of development and progress' (Narmada 1990a:4). The 20,000 who gathered at Harsud including affected people and representatives of NGOs and activist groups from different parts of the country put the Narmada Bachao Andolan at the centre stage of the environment movement in India. The rally received solidarity support from at least a hundred NGOs from abroad and the campaign against SSP received a tremendous boost in the country itself (see *ibid*:10-11).<sup>30</sup>

The Harsud rally brought several organisations and groups together on one platform for the first time in India. The direct outcome of the rally was the formation of the Jan Vikas Andolan (Movement for People's Development), a broad alliance of a 'wide range of movements, organisations and individuals, with its roots in a variety of struggles taking place in the country...' (Narmada 1990b:25). The JVA is a 'movement against the development paradigm being practised in post-independence India whereby a narrow elite primarily benefits at the cost of a very large population that continues to be marginalised, displaced, and pauperised along with large scale plundering of our natural resource base. The movement... maintains that what today goes in the name of development is not genuine development but it is in fact socially disruptive, biologically and genetically homogenising and environmentally destructive' (*ibid*). The formation of this broad front, in which NBA was the crucial constituent, proved of enormous help to the movement in seeking support for its stand of total opposition to the SSP. Its focus on a 'wider set of issues' instead of only resettlement and rehabilitation - the non-participatory nature of planning and implementation processes as well as the social and environmental costs of development projects - became a more legitimate set of demands than a year before. But perhaps most importantly, Harsud marked a shift in the strategy of the Andolan. Hitherto, although the Andolan had support from those to be displaced in the valley, its strategy was geared towards appealing to and impressing the citizenry at large, and specifically the middle class intelligentsia. In the post-Harsud phase, the Andolan began to invest substantial resources in building a mass-base in the Narmada valley.

### **2.2.3 Mass-mobilisation and Dramatic Gains: 1990-1993**

The period between 1990 and 1993 was extremely important in the NBA history as it marked the intensification of the no-dam struggle and resulted in significant achievements for the Andolan. During this phase the Andolan mobilised significant international support, intensifying its campaign against the World Bank's support to the project. International support gathered momentum after the testimony of three activists of the Andolan at a special hearing of the U.S Congress Sub-Committee on Natural Resources, Agricultural Resources and Environment.<sup>31</sup> The Sub-committee followed up the hearing by urging the Bank to reconsider its involvement with the SSP. In May 1990, 120 members of the Finnish Parliament wrote to the Bank stating that the Narmada Projects 'should not receive any Bank funding before alternatives have been thoroughly considered and before the R&R problems have either been solved or at least re-evaluated'.<sup>32</sup> In June, the Japanese government that had earlier sanctioned soft loans under OECF (Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund) for turbines for the riverbed power house of the SSP (the Japanese companies Sumitomo, Hitachi and

Toshiba had bagged the orders for supply of turbine generators), announced the cancellation of a \$150 million loan, in the meeting of Bank donors in Paris, citing the World Bank's assessment of the social and environmental costs as grossly inadequate.<sup>33</sup> International support continued to grow and the pressure on the Bank intensified: in June 1991, the Bank took the unprecedented step of appointing an Independent Review Mission 'to assess the implementation of the resettlement and rehabilitation of the population displaced/affected and the amelioration of the environmental impact of all aspects of the projects' (IRC 1992:359). Although the Andolan was only a couple of years old, this was just the beginning of the gains that it would achieve in this period.

In terms of the valley politics, the post-Harsud phase witnessed an intensification of agitation. The organisational structure of the NBA was established with the formation of a *Samanvaya Samiti* (Coordinating Committee), which co-ordinated several protest activities - obstructing the construction of bridges across the Narmada, setting up road blocks at strategic points, organising demonstrations and rallies, *gherao* of officials of the Narmada Control Authority and the World Bank and politicians of different political parties and uprooting stone markers from the proposed submergence areas and dumping them outside the Vidhan Sabha in Bhopal. *Dharnas* and hunger strikes were the two most important tools of protest for the Andolan. These activities in the valley spurred similar reactions from other parts in the country. The Jan Vikas Andolan and the support groups of the Andolan, by now swelling in number, played important roles in taking the Narmada message outside the valley. Protests around other projects - Tehri, Subarnarekha, Bargi - were supported. However, the most dramatic of all these activities was the month-long Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra (Struggle March for People's Development) from December 25th, 1990 to January 31st, 1991.

Considered to be 'the first move in the "final phase" of the anti-SSP movement ... its stated objective was to physically stop work on the dam, by offering peaceful *satyagraha* at the dam site and thereby pressurise the government to comprehensively review the SSP' (Narmada 1991:3). The Sangharsh Yatra was a test case for the Andolan's support base both in the valley and outside and the participation of more than 8000 people in the six day march bolstered its claim of steadily increasing support. The march (by foot) covered a distance of about 200 kms before it was stopped at the M.P. Gujarat border by the Gujarat government.<sup>34</sup> The Sangharsh Yatra pitched camp at the border where it stayed for a month. To pressurise the Gujarat government seven marchers including the Andolan leader Medha Patkar, went on an indefinite hunger strike. However, with the Gujarat government not relenting, the Andolan decided to withdraw from the border twenty two days into the strike. Baba Amte, who had been allowed to camp on the Gujarat side of the border, returned to the Sangharsh Gaon<sup>35</sup> on January 30th to declare: 'Gandhism has died in Gujarat, and on the day Gandhi died, I return to the valley where Gandhi's ideal still lives' (Narmada 1991:15). On January 31st the Yatra withdrew from the border with a pledge to take the struggle back to the villages under the slogan 'Hamara Gaon mein Hamara Raj' (Our Village, Our Rule). Translated into policies and actions, the slogan implied non-cooperation with an unresponsive government and the development of self-reliant institutions and actions in the villages. The resolve was that villages would henceforth boycott government activities like census operations and oppose all survey work related to R&R. They would also take up reconstruction activities such as soil conservation, irrigation works, health training and adult education. The Andolan newsletter described this as a 'gigantic social experiment... (that) can offer crucial insights into exploring alternative systems of governance and development' (Narmada 1991:24).



After the Sangharsh Yatra, the NBA shifted its attention to Manibeli, the first village in Maharashtra to be submerged, and launched a satyagraha from there in the monsoon months of 1991. Groups of *Samarpit Dal* were formed who would let themselves drown in the rising water of the river. '*Dubenge par hatenge nahin*' (we will drown but not move) was the new cry of the Andolan. Amidst criticism, that they were promoting collective suicide, the Andolan reasoned that the people in the valley were only honouring their pledge '*Koi Nahin Hatega Bandh Nahin Banega*' (No one will move, the dam will not be built). Although the rise in the water table was not high enough to engulf the Narmadayi (a hut constructed to house the Samarpit Dal), the Manibeli Satyagraha resulted in impressive press coverage for the Andolan and a wave of 'solidarity' support from different parts of the country and abroad.<sup>36</sup> In October that year the 'Narmada Bachao Andolan led by Medha Patkar and Baba Amte' received the Right Livelihood Award 'for their steadfast opposition to the ecologically and socially disastrous Narmada Dams - the largest river development project in the world - and their clear articulation of an alternative water and energy strategy that would benefit both the rural poor and the natural environment' (RLA 1991 press release).<sup>37</sup> That very month the Andolan met the Independent Review Commission and decided to extend to it, all necessary support and co-operation.<sup>38</sup>

In June 1992, the IRC completed its review of the SSP. In a communication to the World Bank president Lewis Preston the Commission wrote: 'We think that the Sardar Sarovar Projects as they stand are flawed, that resettlement and rehabilitation of all those displaced by the projects is not possible under prevailing circumstances and that the environmental impacts of the projects have not been properly considered or adequately addressed. Moreover we believe that the Bank shares the responsibility with the borrower for the situation that has developed...If essential data were available, if impacts were known, if basic steps had been taken, it would be possible to know what recommendations to make. But we cannot put together a list of recommendations... when in so many areas no adequate measures are being taken on the ground or are even under consideration. Important assumptions upon which the projects are based are questionable or known to be unfounded... Assertions have been substituted for analysis... (T)he wisest course would be for the Bank to step back from the Projects and consider them afresh' (IRC 1992:xii-xxv). The report of the IRC was an important victory for the Andolan; the NBA newsletter termed it a 'blockbuster report which laid bare all the pretences which either the Bank or the Indian authorities had regarding the SSP.' The Andolan considered the report an independent validation of its standpoint and a corroboration of 'everything that those opposed to the project have been saying' (Narmada 1992b:9) and demanded that the Bank announce its withdrawal from the project by July 15th 1992 or face intensified opposition to its very presence in India.

The 1992 monsoon satyagraha at Manibeli and Vadagam in Gujarat were less dramatic than those of the previous year,<sup>39</sup> but the Andolan intensified its international campaign by sending representatives to the U.S and Japan to meet with international NGOs and the media, as well as members of the Japanese Diet. In July 1992 the European Parliament passed a resolution on the 'Narmada Dam' calling 'on all member states to ... urge their executive directors to vote against further World Bank support for the project' and calling 'on the World Bank to withdraw from the project, pay compensation to those who have suffered as a result of the SSPs and write off the US\$ 250 million spent on building the dam if it is not completed' (EP 1992: resolution B3-1012/92). To 'prevent and document' state violation of human rights, the Narmada International Human Rights Panel was formed consisting of fourty three environmental and human rights organisations from sixteen countries.<sup>40</sup> In April that year, Medha Patkar received the 1992 Goldman Environmental Prize 'in recognition of outstanding environmental achievement in Asia'. Activities back at home were varied. A national convention was organised by the NBA on 'Development, Planning and Mega Projects' the focus of which was

the Andolan's critique of development projects: 'the human rights violation entailed in forcible displacement, the unsustainability of large-scale environmental disruption, the lack of public accountability of decision makers, the absence of any genuine peoples' participation in development planning and the neo-imperialism of multi-lateral financial agencies' (NBA 1992).<sup>41</sup> In the valley, demonstrations were organised in protest against the visit of the Cox mission from the World Bank, which was sent 'to re-examine the R&R, environmental and health related aspects in light of the findings and recommendations of the Independent Review Commission' (WB 1992). The Andolan termed the mission a 'white washing effort' on the part of the Bank to blunt the critical remarks of the IRC. There were similar rallies at the World Bank office in Delhi and before the visiting Bank president in Bombay. In January 1993, the tehsil town of Badwani witnessed a 1500 strong all-women's rally, demonstrating the Andolan's ability to mobilise women in the submergence zone.

On March 29th 1993 the Indian government announced the decision to terminate its contract with the World Bank, just two days before the six-month extension granted by the Bank was to expire. For the Andolan the 'withdrawal' of the Bank was a major victory and caused widespread celebrations in the valley. It now pressed for a comprehensive review of the SSP by the Indian Government. When this demand was not met the call was issued for the 1993 Manibeli Satyagraha. By this time, the increase in dam height meant the inevitable submergence of 294 households in eighteen villages in Maharashtra and Gujarat. On June 2nd, Medha Patkar and Deoram Bhai, a resident of Kaparkheda village in Kukshi tehsil (M.P) and an activist of the Andolan, began a hunger strike in Bombay demanding a complete review of the SSP. On the fourteenth day the hunger strikers were arrested. The government promised a review of the project and the hunger strike was called off. On June 29th and 30th a meeting of representatives of the governments of India, M.P, Maharashtra and the Andolan discussed wide ranging issues related to the SSP.<sup>42</sup> However, with no follow-up action forthcoming from the government, the Andolan resumed its the call for the satyagraha at Manibeli and formed it Samarpit Dal that included Medha Patkar and other activists of the Andolan. As Manibeli and adjacent villages were declared a prohibited area, the Andolan decided that its Samarpit Dal would drown on August 6th. In the face of a state-wide crackdown on Andolan activists, the Samarpit Dal went underground.

On August 3rd the Ministry of Water Resources, of the Government of India constituted a 'five member group' (FMG)<sup>43</sup> to continue discussions initiated at the end of June 1993 on 'all issues related to the SSP'. On August 5th, in its preliminary meeting, the FMG, expressed deep concern 'to hear that the NBA proposes to proceed with its plan of *jal samarpan* ... anxious to prevent such an unfortunate occurrence which may have incalculable consequence' (FMG 1993). It appealed to the NBA to defer their *jal samarpan* as it was 'prepared to give careful consideration to any points or issues that the NBA may wish to raise' (ibid). The government had finally agreed for a review and the *jal samarpan* was called off.

#### 2.2.4 1994-1996: The Impasse

Compared to the success achieved by the Andolan in its earlier phases, the events and the activities of the Andolan in the last couple of years indicate a loss of momentum. From a majority of villages in Maharashtra and few in M.P, there has been a steady flow of people to R&R sites with the perception gaining ground among a large section of the population that (despite their struggle) the dam could not be stopped. In M.P, people from the Nimad plains (usually those having large holdings) have even started accepting compensation in cash. The Andolan, as a result has had to face a steady decline in its mass-base which in turn

has affected its political activities in the valley. The events and activities undertaken by the NBA in this period demonstrates its effort to circumvent this problem of an eroding mass-base.

The Gujarat government had opposed the formation of the FMG and refused to participate in the group's proceedings. In December 1993, the Ministry of Environment and Forests as well as the Narmada Control Authority asked for construction work to be stopped, citing failure to meet conditionalities regarding the environmental work and resettlement. On February 21st 1994, the new Congress government in M.P., headed by Digvijay Singh, convened an all party meeting. The meeting concluded that in view of the insurmountable problems of resettlement and environmental amelioration measures the height of the dam should be reduced by 19 ft., which would not alter the irrigation and water benefits for Gujarat.<sup>44</sup> The Gujarat government responded to these developments by ordering the closure of the sluice gates of the dam, two days later, marking the beginning of permanent submergence in the valley.

In April 1994, the Andolan filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court of India challenging the construction of the Sardar Sarovar Project on 'social, environmental, technical, economic and financial grounds' and arguing that the project as conceived was 'not in the national interest'.<sup>45</sup> The legal battle was justified by stating that 'it was one of the many strategies that the Andolan has adopted in its struggle'.<sup>46</sup> However, conflicting views existed within the Andolan, regarding the efficacy and the rationale of adopting such a strategy. As a consequence the Andolan underplayed this development: compared to all its earlier activities which sought and in most cases received wide publicity, the filing of the writ petition was a low key affair. In July that year, it stepped up its international campaign by issuing the Manibeli Declaration, calling for a moratorium on World Bank funding of large dam projects all over the world. By September 1st, 2152 NGOs in forty three countries had signed the Declaration.<sup>47</sup>

But in the valley, protest activities were at a very low ebb. The monsoon satyagraha in 1994 had about thirty five activists spread over several villages and were swiftly removed by the administration from the submerging areas (Narmada Samachar 1994 June-July). The fervour of the previous year - the police frantically searching for the Samarpit Dal that had gone underground, ready to drown in the river - was missing. Two major rallies were held, however. One, in Bombay, continued for eighteen days during July; its demands included immediate compensation for those affected by submergence and the public release of the FMG review report. (Although the FMG had submitted its report that month, an order from the Gujarat High Court had kept the report sealed.) The second, held in Bhopal in November 1994, was to protest against the decision to restart the construction of the dam and the proposal of the Gujarat government to raise its height from 80.3 meters to 110 meters.<sup>48</sup> The direct consequence of the Bhopal agitation was the formation of two committees: one comprising members of the M.P. Legislative Assembly, to look into the problems of M.P. oustees resettled in Gujarat; and the other comprising members of Parliament from M.P. headed by Dilip Singh Bhuria to recommend measures to tackle the problems of Scheduled Tribes in the state.<sup>49</sup> Both the committees recommended that the M.P. government should stall further work on the SSP and seek a reduction in the height of the dam.

On December 13th 1994, the Supreme Court ordered the FMG report to be made public. It also asked the state governments to submit their responses to the report 'uninhibited by any legal implications'. The implications of this order was that the NWDT Award on the Narmada Projects, originally considered final and binding on all the riparian states, could be renegotiated. This enabled the M.P. government to submit an

affidavit to the Supreme Court seeking a reduction in the height of the Navagam dam. The Supreme Court, in a subsequent hearing, asked the FMG to further submit its views on four specific areas - hydrology,<sup>50</sup> height of the dam, resettlement, and environmental aspects. In January 1995, further construction of the dam was stopped at 80.3 metres, due to the opposition of M.P. government. Project authorities in Gujarat however cited resource crunch to be one of the reasons (D.T Buch, personal communication).

In 1995, the monsoon satyagraha was simultaneously resumed in Jalsindhi, M.P., and Domkhedi, Maharashtra. As in the previous year, the satyagraha evoked no great momentum. Manibeli had been a symbol of resistance for the Andolan in the earlier year, but by 1995, the few households that remained in Manibeli as part of the Andolan, were showing signs of battle weariness. Some of them even evinced interest in accepting the rehabilitation package (Himanshu Thakkar, personal communication).<sup>51</sup> The groundwork required for mass mobilisation was no longer being undertaken; the NBA's efforts during this period were largely concentrated on the Supreme Court petition which required time and resources, filing of affidavits and affidavits-in-rejoinder. However, the proceedings in the Court were not very favourable for the Andolan either. The hearings were regularly adjourned and the state governments filed affidavits that were 'distorted and not factual' (Narmada Samachar 1996 Feb.). Furthermore the Supreme Court expressed displeasure over the fact that the Andolan had filed a petition in the National Human Rights Commission, while the matter was still before the apex court. Taking strong exception to the duplication of adjudication, the three-member bench in one of the hearings of the Court observed: 'The petitioners are ... enamoured to see their names (in the media) every day... The initial enthusiasm and the genuine feeling are no more there' (The Telegraph, 1995, 6th May).

Despite the problems that the Andolan was besieged with, it could forge wider alliances and network activities. In western M.P., the NBA became a part of the Jan Mukti Morcha (Peoples Liberation Alliance) along with the Khedut Mazdoor Chetna Sangath in Alirajpur, the Adivasi Mukti Sangathan in Sendhwa and the Ekta Parishad in Dahi. The Morcha's campaign revolves around liquor trade, the exploitation of the adivasis and a demand for self rule (swaraj) for the adivasis. At a national level, the NBA became a part of the National Alliance for Peoples Movement (NAPM), a new formation different from the Jan Vikas Andolan which was formed in the post-Harsud phase. The NAPM (as is evident from its nomenclature), is a sort of consortium, that includes a number of local peoples' movements across the country, functioning under a common minimum programme. Although its inception dates back to 1992, it is only in the last couple of years that the Alliance has gained some credibility and publicity. The rallying call of the Alliance is to 'challenge the current paradigm of development, oppose globalisation, privatisation and liberalisation' and to work towards 'a just, egalitarian, secular, non-violent and ecologically sustainable society' (NAPM 1996). The NBA is one of the leading actors in the Alliance.

Few recent political developments around the SSP have also been encouraging for the Andolan. The first is the withdrawal of the ARCH-Vahini from the Gujarat government Committee on Resettlement in June 1995. The Vahini expressed dissatisfaction over the inadequate facilities accorded to large number of project oustees from M.P. who came to resettle in Gujarat. For the Andolan this withdrawal 'was the realisation of the mistakes of organisations like the Arch Vahini who had made the displacement as a *fait accompli* (sic) while accepting all the claims of the government on the dam benefits and resettlement' (Narmada Samachar 1996:9). The change in the ARCH-Vahini's position is justified thus: 'the policy promises made to us by the Gujarat government have not been kept. We accept that it was a failure on our part not to have managed to keep up the

pressure. But we have not changed our fundamental position. We said no dam without proper rehabilitation then, we say it now' (A. Patel, interview, dt. 14.3.96). Secondly, the incidence of resettled households in Gujarat, 'returning back' to their original villages in recent years has bolstered the Andolan's claim of the 'impossibility of fair and just resettlement' of such a large population.<sup>52</sup> The NBA has recently started espousing the cause of the resettled population of Gujarat who have formed the 'Gujarat Narmada Vishthapit Sangharsh Samiti'.<sup>53</sup> Finally, the World Bank's Project Completion Report on the SSP published in March 1995 has also contributed to the revelry. The Report was a 'lesson learning exercise' for the Bank and acknowledged major performance shortfalls. While maintaining that the 'basic rationale for the project is sound' (p2) the report stated that the Bank had violated its own operational guidelines on R&R and environmental aspects and that the robustness of economic rate of return calculations is clouded by many uncertainties (WB 1995:pp4-5). For the Andolan the report 'vindicate(d) almost all of the criticisms made by the NBA and the NGOs, criticisms that the Bank (had) deliberately ignored' (NBA 1995, Letter to the EDs, May 5).

The Andolan is faced with a paradoxical situation. On one hand, it has achieved success in temporarily halting the dam. On the other, there has been a decline in its mass following in the valley. In turn, both these factors have together brought a lull to the activities of the Andolan in the valley. Such has been the loss of political momentum, that for one of its most recent rally held in the valley (in December 1996), the Andolan had to rely on the service of an extremely popular film personality to attract crowd. The turn out in the rally was impressive, but only to see the film star; the crowd quickly disappeared, the moment the star finished his address. The Andolan was left with a faithful hundred who took the pledge opposing displacement which was the main purpose of the rally (J. Sen, personal communication).

The Andolan's self-description of this phase, however, is nothing short of a saturnalia. In the Andolan's own words, issued during the monsoon satyagraha of 1996:

Now the people of the valley want to assert their right to live in the valley and the satyagraha will be an expression of this right. This will be done by the launching of many different programmes of construction and development (*nav nirman*) in the valley. It will be a celebration of living in the valley. Tree planting on a massive scale, housing, bio-gas, soil and water conservation, small irrigation schemes, libraries, schools and so on. This is the people's way of asserting that they are determined to stay in the valley and will work to make this stay better, prosperous and bountiful (NBA 1996, International Update, June).

What the Andolan has actually achieved during the satyagraha, is a question that can be pondered over. In itself, the rallying call for *nav nirman* ('new construction' if literally translated) is a positive development. Movements such as the NBA have been at the receiving end of much criticism that view them as nothing more than 'holding operations' (Gadgil and Guha 1995); their 'alternative' visions are totally absent at worst and blurred at best. For the NBA, the call for *Nav Nirman* may be viewed as much-awaited response to such criticisms. Yet, it would come as no surprise if the Andolan's call, translated into practice achieved absolutely nothing. Here, one is referring to participatory schemes with regards to housing, soil and water conservation, irrigation and so on. Few crucial questions emerge in this context. Can an 'alternative development' discourse be imposed on a set of people who live in an acute state of uncertainty in the valley given the reality of displacement that looms large on their heads? Has the Andolan understood the probable dilemmas that confront people in the valley? What explanations can be put forth for a decline in its mass base in the valley,

while being so popular in the national and international arena?<sup>54</sup> These questions call for self-reflexivity on the part of the Andolan and may beg for radical rethinking on the strategic choices, and reviewing the modes by which organisational and ideological resources are mobilised.

In the following section, we analyse the organisational resources and strategic initiatives of the Andolan - the internal dynamics of the movement. The practices through which the power is generated to 'move' a movement are somewhat like a 'black box'. In one sense, they are hidden from public gaze; strategic decision-making processes are almost always closed-door and activists tend to reveal little about dilemmas they face in running the movement. We could call this the 'black box syndrome'. Yet, the black box stores significant data that can be interpreted to explain causes and conditions of success and crises. In this section, an attempt is made to interpret movement practices but at places the analysis is may seem impressionistic (the black box syndrome). Its purpose is discern how agency in 'alternative politics' operates as well as to induce reflexivity on such operations.

### 3.1 Analysing Organisational Resources

We have stated earlier that, in this paper, we adopt a 'movement as an actor' approach. But social movements are not empirical entities with clear cut boundaries. Movement actors could be highly heterogeneous, ranging from single individuals to loosely structured grassroots groups to highly organised entities. The multiplicity of actors also entails a multiplicity of relationships (see Diani and Eyerman 1992). Hence, the attribution of any definitive boundary to a movement is nominalist. Of course, the movement's self-definition is indicative of its boundary, i.e what it considers to be internal to it. But given its heterogeneous composition, the crucial question of 'whose definition' poses analytical problems. It is by observing the movement's practice that one can discern its underlying layers of relationships. Even then, the boundary may still seem volatile and could expand and contract (a) over a period of time (b) during particular activities and events and (c) depending on political opportunity structures or its external environment. Therefore, in approaching the internal dynamics of the movement, a certain degree of archaeology (static and structural), can not be avoided. The movement would need to be some what frozen in time for deconstructing its black box.

What we call the 'movement as an actor' approach, attempts to synthesise these problems. Its homogenous implication reflects the importance it accords to the movement's self-definition. But it certainly does not imply a unity of purpose and interests among *different* actors within the movement. On the contrary, through an archaeology of the movement we discern its various layers and the relationships between them that get established in practice.

#### 3.1.1 Organisational Structure: Centralised Protest

The organisations of the NBA clearly demonstrate a 'core-periphery' structure. As will be apparent, the unity of purposes and interests is strongest in the core, tending to get more and more diluted as we move towards the movement's periphery. The Andolan consists of a core group, support groups spread across the country and abroad, village level committees, as well as organisations that have been formed around other projects on the Narmada (see Fig-1). In the lexicon of social movement studies, these groups considered together constitute what Tarrow (1988) calls the social movement sector. The core group of the Andolan is a

close-knit organisation. The group consists of some fifteen to twenty people, operating from two 'offices' situated in Vadodara in Gujarat and Badwani in M.P. The core group, for all practical purposes, takes major decisions related to the resources, strategies and politics of the Andolan. The activists in the core group work full-time for the Andolan: the core group constitutes the Andolan's leadership.

Although the exact composition of the core group has kept changing over time - as old activists move out and new ones come in - a striking feature of this group is that it is almost exclusively composed of middle-class activists from outside the Narmada valley. With few exceptions, the majority of the members of the core group have little or no grassroots links with the villages in the submergence zone. Most of them operate from the offices at Baroda or Badwani. Their movements and operations are directed towards the wider society outside the valley (both national and global) rather than to the valley itself. The links with the villages in the valley are maintained through a group of local young followers from the affected villages who also double up as 'office boys'.<sup>55</sup> Villagers who frequently visit the Andolan's offices also serve as links with the core group. On few occasions meetings are held in villages. Members of the core group are highly educated and some of them are qualified professionals with backgrounds in engineering and social work. The activities of the core group are wide ranging but include liaising with NGOs and activist groups, national and international; research, documentation and dissemination; lobbying with government departments, international organisations and the media; mobilisation and co-ordination of protest activities in the valley; raising funds; planning and co-ordinating strategies and programmes.

The support groups of the Andolan are comprised mainly of activist groups and registered NGOs who back the cause espoused by the Andolan. One can classify them into three main groups - those with interests in human rights, the environment, and alternative development.<sup>56</sup> The range of activities undertaken by the support groups are extremely varied and the degree of support each extends to the core group is also varied. Activities of the support groups generally involve offering logistic support to the NBA in terms of funds and other resources, research, documentation and dissemination as well as lobbying, and also participating directly in the protest activities of the Andolan. In fact, the participation of the support groups in the protest events of the NBA has been so crucial and visible that at times they have tended to overshadow the participation of the affected people in the valley.<sup>57</sup> The support groups are crucial resources of the Andolan as they serve as links between the struggle against the SSP and other struggles and experiences outside the valley.

The NBA also has a Coordinating Committee that includes members of the core group, selected members drawn from the support groups as well as some representatives of the project-affected villages. The Coordinating Committee is therefore a wider forum compared to the core group but seems to be largely an advisory body on ideological and strategic issues. Although in the initial years the Committee met regularly, the frequency of such meetings has gradually declined.

The local-level committees constitute small informal groups of local people, who lend logistic support to the Andolan. In the Nimad plains, these groups constitute of largely rich and influential farmers; in the adivasi areas, those influencing community power structures play an important role in forming and running such groups. Their activities involve overseeing participation from villages during demonstrations and rallies as well as mobilising funds for the Andolan. These groups serve a dual purpose. On the one hand, they form the Andolan's local moorings, its 'grassroots'. On the other, they represent local interests in the Andolan. However, villages in which it has representation as such informal groups outnumber those where the Andolan

is totally absent. The limited number of such local committees in the valley is a clear testimony to the constricted reach of the Andolan in the valley.

The 'project-centric' activist groups are those formed to look into the specificity of struggles around other projects on the Narmada. Two groups, the *Narmada Sagar Virodhi Sangharsh Samiti* (Narmada Sagar Dam) and the *Bargi Bandh Visthapit Prabhavit Sangh* (Bargi Dam) are active associates in the NBA. While these are independent struggles in themselves, their association with the NBA symbolise its struggle for holistic river basin planning and development. The groups exchange ideas and resources with the core group and the support groups.

### 3.1.2 Social Capital Accumulation: Cooperation versus Trust

Issue-based campaigns and movements tend to invest considerable resources in building alliances and networks. These are social capital accumulation strategies - the building of trust, cooperation, networks - to enhance organisational efficiency and mutual benefits. According to Putnam (1995:67), 'networks facilitate co-ordination and communication, amplify reputations and thus allow dilemmas of collective action to be resolved.' For Diani (1992:9) '(movement) networks are said to perform a plurality of functions, ranging from activation of plurality of participation, the exchange of information and resources and so on.' Given the current trends among movements to accumulate social capital, the need to conceptualise them as networks of interaction between individuals, informal groups and formal organisations seem to be an understatement.

While networks facilitate resource mobilisation and cooperation, alliances suggest that the actors involved do not merely share concern on specific issues. They also share ideas and beliefs as well as solidarity and belongingness (see *ibid*:111), which allow them to construct a collective identity. The Andolan's efforts at alliance and network building has been a successful one. The Manibeli Declaration of 1994, to which more than 2000 international NGOs were signatories, offers some indication of its successful networking. In India, the Andolan has formally entered into three alliances at the regional and national level and draws upon the resources of a wide range of NGOs. Below, we explore the implication of such networking and alliance building for the Andolan.

In the anti-SSP struggle, the core group of the Andolan is the nucleus of the network. It establishes direct, independent relationships with the other organisations and groups. Given the issue-based nature of the campaign, it is rather obvious that the core group becomes the axis of the network. But the implication of this 'wheel-model' of networking is that the core group controls flow of communication and exchange. To Diani (1992:120) this pattern is typical of a movement where instrumental orientations are dominant over solidarity, and actors tend to have a rather weak identification with the movement as such.

Let us consider one important link in the Andolan's network - between the core group and the village-level groups. Communication flows are mostly in the form of directives from the centre to the villages. A local activist explained the role of the village-based committees: 'we decide on the number of people to be mobilised from each village, which vehicles to take, how much of funds could be collected. We also send information to each village on demonstrations and rallies' (Nirmal Patodi, interview dt.27.2.96). Dialogue and negotiation as forms of communication are exceptions, occurring only in such eventualities of an interest clash. Under circumstances where interests and perceptions seem to clash between the core group and a local populace,<sup>58</sup>



negotiations have resulted in either the core group prevailing or simply distancing itself from the local group. This tendency is also noticeable in the core group's relationship with its support groups.<sup>59</sup> The 'wheel-model' neither fosters nor tolerates dissidence and factionalism. By controlling communication flows in the wheel model, the core group gains speech and information manoeuvrability within the network. In a movement like the NBA, this may facilitate the representation of a diverse set of interests, but only through a very loose articulation. In the Andolan's network, having many links means loose links and that include the link of the core group with the villages in the valley. It also raises questions regarding the Andolan's embeddedness in the valley and its claim of representing predominantly local interests. As Shankar Tadwala, a local activist explained,

when the (outside) activists come to the villages, they say that their major concern is to ensure just and proper rehabilitation. When they are in city centres they talk of cost-benefit analysis, environmental hazards, growing foreign debt, earthquakes, etc. and seek support to stop the dam. To me, this is one reason why a feeling has gained among people that the Andolan is not serving their interests; many have simply left it. (interview dt. 4.3.96).

The network links at national and international levels pervade activist and advocacy groups, NGOs, academic and research institutes, professional bodies, print and audio-visual media. Within the network, some links are more strong than the others. A few groups represent the Andolan exclusively outside the valley in cities such as Bombay, Delhi and Calcutta.<sup>60</sup> Others, mostly registered NGOs, consider the Andolan an important part of their agenda, while still others form part of the Andolan network in solidarity campaign. One can draw a distinction between these links with support groups and those with villages in the valley. The role of the former in contributing to the Andolan's national and international popularity is immense. Considering the debates generated over 'facts and figures' on the SSP and those pertaining to the environment, human rights and alternative development, these links in the network have been of crucial importance. The core group has certainly realised their strategic importance as resources for research, documentation, lobbying and campaign and directs its campaign accordingly. An extract from Medha Patkar's speech is illustrative:

Appealing directly to the masses was a mobilisation strategy open to us. The Shetkari Sangathana's direct appeal to the farmer demonstrates the strength of this strategy. For us this would have implied ignoring earlier works of organisations and groups involved in the struggle in the Narmada Valley and outside. We have built on the strengths of these organisations. Harsud rally was a beginning, where environmentalists, human rights activists, organisations of displaced people and those constructively involved with grassroots alternative development got together for the first time. (Extract from speech, plenary session, Narmada Sameelan, Pune, dt. 2.4.95).

What Patkar does not convey is that over the years, the 'lateral' tangents in the Andolan have strengthened at the cost of the local of which it claims representation. It has built networks of cooperation spreading laterally among the educated middle class outside but at the cost of losing trust in the valley. The wheel-model of networking amplifies its reputation in the national and internal arena but devoid's it of a mass-base in the valley.

The NBA has formalised some of its network activities by forging broader alliances with organisations and social movements on the issues of alternative development and adivasi autonomy in India (see Figure-2). Recently, it has formed the *Jan Mukti Morcha* (Peoples Liberation Alliance) with three other organisations in western M.P. - the Khedut Mazdoor Chetna Sangh in Alirajpur, the Adivasi Mukti Sangathan

based in Sendhwa, the Ekta Parishad in Dahi. The Chetna Sangath and the Mukti Sangathan are adivasi organisations.<sup>61</sup> The former is almost a decade old and latter is relatively new. Both organisations have sizeable mass-base and are led by adivasis themselves; outside activists operate as facilitators and catalysts.

The *Morcha* is a recognition of the mutual benefits that have accrued to the groups involved. The Chetna Sangh has always been a close associate in the Andolan. Sangh activists have worked in the Andolan resulting in membership overlapping. Their involvement in the Andolan and latter as part of the Morcha has enabled them to (a) transcend their locality and (b) utilise the Andolan's reputation to achieve local demands. For the Mukti Sangathan, the Andolan's popularity in the region offered a more favourable political opportunity structure. State repression was far too less which partly explains its rapid spread in a few years. For the Andolan, the *Morcha* is a forum for going beyond the specificity of the SSP, to wider issues of identity and autonomy, decentralisation and participation. What is more important, the *Morcha* enables it to reclaim its mass-base and lost trust at the local level (albeit through proxy). The Morcha is in its formative years and can serve as a template for future collaboration only if cooperation and negotiation are embedded in dense networks of social interaction in the region.

The National Alliance for Peoples' Movements (NAPM) of which the Andolan is a part, opposes the dominant paradigm of development in its recent neo-liberal form, the resultant liberalisation and privatisation policies of the state, and development projects that are unsustainable and unviable. Hence in some ways it questions both market-led and state-led development strategies. The alliance includes representatives from NGOs and peoples movements as well as 'sympathetic individuals' from past struggles, academia and so on. Few of the 'movements' involved can hardly claim a mass-base. The alliance is one of 'declassed leaders' and 'deprofessionalized intellectuals', and their cooperation fosters the mobilisation of ideological resources for the constituents of the alliance. The Andolan plays a leading role in the Alliance; its leader Medha Patkar is currently one of the three convenors. We shall elaborate on the National Alliance later in the paper.

### **3.1.3 Charisma as a Resource: Dilemmas on Leadership**

We have mentioned earlier that the Andolan's leadership rests with its core group, which largely consists of professional outsiders working as full-time activists. Here we discuss the predominance of charismatic leadership in NBA, its convertibility into resources and the questions that it raises for the Andolan. During the early phase of the struggle, when rehabilitation was an important agenda for activism, the leadership comprised mostly NGO activists spread over the states of Gujarat, M.P and Maharashtra. The split in the NGO movement and the coming into being of the Andolan opened space for its leadership. In the early years of the Andolan, Baba Amte was its leading light - the architect of the Anandwan declaration of total opposition to large dams, one who had successfully led the movement against the Ichampalli-Bhopalpatnam projects. A staunch Gandhian and noted for his work among leprosy-affected people, Amte's charisma lent much-needed credibility to the Andolan's cause of totally opposing the SSP. As the Andolan crystallised into shape, the leadership passed to the hands of Medha Patkar of the Narmada Dharangrasta Samiti. Patkar was instrumental in shaping the core group, drawing into it a group of committed middle-class youth. Her approach was grassroots oriented, involving mobilising work among the affected villages. The success that the Andolan achieved in this regard and in its networking can be attributed, partly but most definitely, to her charisma. Others in the core group were effective in their respective roles. Patkar herself, invested considerable

time and resources in mobilisation work. Yet, the 'collective leadership' is less noticeable in the Andolan; instead, Patkar's name and fame characterise its leadership.

Leadership involves a relationship of power and domination. For Weber charismatic domination is 'highly creative and capable of initiating innovative social processes of substantial magnitude ... (I)t usually motivates the leader's followers from the inside out. They are supposed not only to lend full support to the leader but also to rationalise their own conduct in accordance with the ideals spelt out by the leader' (see Momsen 1989:116). In the NBA, as with the some other anti-dam (and environmental) movements in India, the charisma and - in a positive sense - demagogic capabilities of leaders like Patkar, Amte and Sundarlal Bahuguna (of Chipko fame), have been a source of motivation and drive.<sup>62</sup> Unlike in the Weberian sense where such leaders procure a following 'to achieve their own personal ends' (ibid: 33), the charisma of Patkar and the likes, constitute an important resource for the affected people as well as for other groups and interests in the movements.<sup>63</sup>

The capability of the 'led' to use the leadership as a resource should not obliterate the fact that the structures that charismatic leadership establishes are neither democratic nor participatory. Activist groups have complained about the Andolan's banking on charisma and the authoritarian leadership.<sup>64</sup> The leadership is also exclusionist; affected people who either seek or have sought rehabilitation run the risk of being totally marginalised. Until recently, the Andolan ignored the plight of the people in the resettlement sites. 'For the Andolan leadership, it was like saying that the problems at the resettlement site were something that the people deserved as they had opted for resettlement and not worked according to the ideals of the Andolan.' (Vasudha Dhagamwar, personal communication). For those who are seeking land for rehabilitation in the valley, the Andolan leadership has made little efforts to facilitate this process. Many villagers in the valley interested in resettlement have instead approached the ARCH-Vahini in Gujarat for helping them acquire land (Rajesh Mishra, personal communication).

One further note concerning the Andolan leadership. The centralisation of decision-making power in the Andolan also accrue because of an overbearing objective of halting the SSP. This has entailed a struggle over 'facts and figures' on the project between activists and project authorities. In their critique of the dam local representatives (leaders) tend to obscurely represent the figures, provided to them. In her study of the Andolan, Baviskar (1995:227) points out that the local people (particularly in Nimad plains) despite being conversant with political action against the state, *prefer* to delegate the responsibility of running the Andolan to outside activists. Our analysis suggests that the Andolan's centralised command structure inhibits the fostering of local level leadership.

### **3.1.4 Strategies: Gandhian, Globalising and Jury Politics**

The strategies adopted in the NBA are wide-ranging. We have discussed some of them related to networking and mass-mobilisation. Assessing opportunity costs of adopted strategies in social movements is not only feasible but may be required to facilitate reflexivity. For instance, the costs and benefits of international networking can be compared to the costs and benefits that would have accrued from a more intensive mass mobilisation in the valley. However, this would be a hind-sighted exercise. Moreover, not all strategies are exactly matters of choice. They are dialectically linked to the objectives, interests and values that

a movement privilege. Here we elaborate on three distinct strategies of the Andolan - Gandhian satyagraha, legal battles in courts and the international campaign - and analyse their implications for the identity that the Andolan seeks for itself.

It bears reiteration that the 'No-Dam' slogan clearly reflects the single most important objective of the Andolan. Notwithstanding the fact that other slogans such as *Vikash Chaihye Vinash Nahin!* (We need development not destruction!), *Hamara Gaon Hamara Raj!* (Our village, our rule!) reflected the broader vision of the Andolan, the slogan *Koi Nahin Hatega Bandh Nahin Banega!* (No one shall move, the dam shall not be allowed to be built) was central in the Andolan's political lexicon. The strategies of the Andolan manifest this fact.

The Gandhian tactics of resistance are reflected in the non-violent monsoon satyagrahas, the call of non-cooperation with state agencies, the undertaking of hunger strikes and fasts, and the threat of *jal samarpan*.<sup>65</sup> In India, these tactics feature prominently in 'alternative politics' practices, particularly in environmental movements.<sup>66</sup> For some scholars of social movements, the orientation of Gandhian strategies is largely reformative, restorative and revivalistic. In characterising non-violent protests, Dhanagare (1983: 214) argues that it 'does not question the very structure of the legitimate authority nor does it aim at any fundamental transformation in social relations'.<sup>67</sup> This proposition is arguable, but it does raise a crucial question. Why is environmental activism non-violent? In the context of the NBA, Baviskar (1995:224) answers this question. 'The non-violent plank has been *deliberately* chosen by the activists to ward off police action that could completely crush the movement.' She also notes 'the continuous debate within the Andolan about the merits of satyagraha versus more militant struggle' (ibid:225). Are non-violent strategies then a matter of choice? Or more fundamentally, following Dhanagare, are not strategies borne out of a movement's orientation and interests? Consider the nomenclature of few actors in 'alternative politics' - Narmada Bachao Andolan (*save* the Narmada movement), Chilka Bachao Andolan (*save* Chilka movement), Azadi Bachao Andolan (*save* independence movement), Bachapan Bachao Andolan (*save* childhood movement), Miti Bachao Abhiyan (*save* the soil campaign), Himalaya Bachao Andolan (*save* the Himalaya movement), Ganga Mukti Andolan (*release* the Ganga Movement). Notwithstanding their diverse objectives, interests, opportunity structures and their achievements, the inclination and propensity of these actors is a pointer to their restorative and reformative character. In characterising actors in the environment movement as 'little more than a holding operation', Gadgil and Guha (1995:2), suggest their defensive orientation. The debate within the Andolan over satyagraha and militancy does not necessarily imply the options before the activists as Baviskar suggests. Strategic options need to be contextualised within a larger discourse of identity and predisposition of movement actors which, according to Evers (1985) constitute their 'hidden side'. The range of strategic options would then appear as far more constricted, than what Baviskar would have us think. We elaborate on this a bit further.

How can one explain strategies of *rasta roko* (blocking of roads) and *gaonbandi* (refusing state officials' entry into villages) adopted in the valley? The former suggests a symbolic delinking from centres of power and the latter, non-cooperation with state agencies. Both can be said to be more militant forms of struggle. They are non-violent in character although the risks of state violence are higher. Neither of these are proactively pursued in the Andolan. The *rasta roko* has been very sparingly used and the *gaonbandi* has been more of a local initiative than that of the leadership; when called, it has met with an ambivalent response in the valley.<sup>68</sup> Both these strategies have been actively pursued in the farmers movement in India (see Brass

1995). In the Andolan, both these 'options', have got eclipsed by the satyagraha. We argue that together with the international campaign and the legal means, the satyagraha formed a strategic set aimed at mobilising the opinion of the citizenry at large. These strategies result from and sustain an identity that the Andolan has inadvertently built for itself - a movement of educated middle-class activists with a charismatic leader at the helm of affairs, committed to the cause of environment and human rights, urgently seeking to halt the construction of the dam. They are also reflective of a predisposition of the movement to foreclose structural impediments emanating from *within* the valley itself - different interest groups, with different risk perceptions and resources with different propensities to collectively act. The strategies may have strengthened the movement by bringing it recognition and support and even instant results. Their efficacy may have even aroused hopes in the minds of the local population. However, gains from them (whether in material terms or in terms of political empowerment) at the local realm have accrued only as by-products.<sup>69</sup>

In order to highlight suffering and pain - to paraphrase social costs of development projects - the satyagraha has enormous public appeal. Its very execution involves pain, suffering and loss as in fasts or *jal samarpan* and therefore becomes a symbolic representation of the wider loss and suffering that people face due to development projects. This strategy has been most frequent in the Andolan to mobilise public opinion against the SSP and in some instance state authorities have yielded to its demands.<sup>70</sup>

Apart from focusing on the social and environmental costs, the Andolan has also questioned the benefits that are to accrue from the SSP and the financial implications of undertaking such a project. The SSP then takes on the appearance of a sunk investment - a project involving the squandering of resources that come largely from national and international tax-payers. Hence the Andolan appeal to the national and global citizenry at large. Activists of the Andolan in general, and Medha Patkar in particular, have with equal zest addressed NGOs, activist groups, parliamentarians, trade unions, student and professional bodies, academic conferences and Rotary and Lions Clubs. Liaison with academia and the press has been actively pursued, ensuring on the one hand critical inputs towards reviewing the project components, and on the other publicity for the Andolan at an unprecedented scale.

The appeal to the global citizenry has been a carefully constructed strategy of the Andolan. The involvement of the World Bank and other multilateral lending agencies in infrastructure projects on a world-wide scale, particularly in the developing world,<sup>71</sup> was strong enough reason to globalise the resistance against the SSP.<sup>72</sup> The impetus for such a move was ironically provided by the Bank. Ever since the loan agreement was reached between the Bank and central and state governments in India, international NGOs had expressed their concerns at the social and environmental costs of the SSP, leading the Bank to constantly revise its policies and operational guidelines on these aspects and to ensure their implementation in the SSP. The Bank's own consultants on R&R had expressed apprehension that proper resettlement and rehabilitation of the displaced would not be possible unless there were substantial policy modifications and implementation mechanisms.<sup>73</sup> This was fertile ground for the Andolan's international campaign seeking withdrawal of the Bank from the project. The outcome of this campaign was the formation of the Narmada Action Committee - representing organisations from fifteen countries, that lend active support to NBA both politically (lobbying, advocacy and occasional solidarity demonstrations abroad) and financially.<sup>74</sup> The communication links, established through fax, phones and Internet as well as visits and exchange of activists, ensured that information flows on the project and protest reached a wide global network. Recognition of the Andolan came through international awards for NBA and for Medha Patkar. The withdrawal of the Bank has however,

dampened the international campaign, while successive governments in Gujarat seem greatly inclined to mobilise financial resources for the project.

The Andolan has made use of the judicial system at the regional and national level. At different stages, it has backed the filing of petitions in the local courts in Maharashtra and Gujarat, the High Court in Gujarat. The issues raised in these petitions are wide ranging - the inclusion of those left out as project-affected, change in land titles of oustees given the unsuitability of land, requests for a stay on survey work undertaken by the project authorities, furnishing of detailed schedules of construction, submergence and rehabilitation and issues of forcible evictions and police excess. The legal framework governing the SSP has formed the backdrop for the battle in the courts with the petitions drawing attention to violations of the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal Award of 1979, non-compliance with government legislation, policies and resolutions,<sup>75</sup> as well as non-compliance with guidelines and decisions of various government and parastatal agencies such as the National Commission on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Central Water Commission, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Narmada Control Authority and its sub-groups on Resettlement and Environment.

In the years of intense mass-action, the fight in the courts pertained to specific cases of legal violations by the project authorities,<sup>76</sup> concern for the rule of law,<sup>77</sup> and adequate participation and access to information.<sup>78</sup> However, in 1994, the Andolan moved to the Supreme Court of India through a writ petition challenging the construction of the project on the grounds that the project was 'unviable from social, environmental, technical, economic and financial point of view ... (and was) not in the national interest.'<sup>79</sup> The petition sought to halt any further construction on the project, and ensure the completion of all necessary studies on the project, as well as a comprehensive review of the project; in addition it sought to place a restriction on the height of the dam at FRL 310 ft. Although the movement leadership has down-played the significance of this move, claiming that mass mobilisation continues to be its main strategic plank, it has invested considerable time and resources in pursuing the case in the Supreme Court. The move coincided with the tacit support for the Andolan from the government of M.P., itself seeking a reduction in the height of the dam.<sup>80</sup> As Shripad Dharamadhikari explained: 'The Supreme Court's verdict is the law of the land. It carries more power and therefore for us almost a compulsion to take up issues with them. Our future actions and strategies depend a lot on the verdict of the Supreme Court' (personal communication, 11.2.96).

The legal redress sought from the highest court of the land reinforces the Andolan's civic identity. By calling into question, the claims that the SSP serves the national interest in the highest court of the land, the Andolan fulfils its responsibility towards the citizenry and the nation. In the process, it creates opportunity for another 'public evaluation' of the project. Can one characterise this as a form of legal activism that coexists and reinforces social activism? In mass movements in India, the seeking of democratic rights and civil liberties or what is called 'rule of law' offers ample scope for legal activism. It is however, both, incidental in nature and functions as an appendage, primarily for limiting state repression and police excesses. In case of the Andolan, asking the Supreme Court to evaluate the SSP is the latest act in a long engagement in jury politics. Whether offering support to the Morse Commission, seeking the establishment of the Five Member Group (FMG), forming a committee of 'sympathetic experts' (from the support group) in the event of the 'inconclusive' FMG report, filing a case in the National Human Rights Commission or moving to the Supreme Court, jury politics has been a critical component in the Andolan's praxis. It has been increasingly replaced the strategy of mass politics (though within the Gandhian genre; non-violent and non-democratic). The voice of

experts and specialists get privileged as they plough through the facts and figures surrounding the SSP. The voices and interests of a large segment of the local people get lost.

While the move to the Supreme Court is indeed a 'compulsion' for the Andolan it runs the risk of an unfavourable verdict from the Court. As a representative jury of the citizenry, the Court's unfavourable ruling could be extremely damaging for the Andolan's image and reputation. It would erode further what ever little mass base is left in the valley, particularly among the landed gentry in Nimad. The risk involved are articulated in following terms: 'The Supreme Court is a part of the state machinery. Its thinking reflects more or less the same conditions and logic. Three people,<sup>81</sup> who are not experts (of project evaluation), who have other tasks and who have no first hand information will dictate the fate of millions. This is unlike the Morse Commission of the World Bank who had enough time to visit the field, who were experts and who were exclusively looking at the SSP.' (Shripad Dharamadhikari, personal communication). The question of course is then why the Supreme Court? We have attempted to explain the Andolan's compulsions. A favourable verdict would be a victory for the Andolan. An unfavourable verdict would make the Supreme Court part of the 'establishment'.

What happens to the Andolan's civic identity in the event of an unfavourable verdict needs critical reflection. However, the important fact is that, up until now, the local realm stands eclipsed in the Andolan's civic identity. The Andolan's claims of representation notwithstanding, the local appears detached from it. Following Laclau and Mouffe (1985), the practice of articulating different elements in a social movement leads to a modified identity. We argue that the organisational operations and resource accumulation, strategic choices and leadership orientation of the Andolan tends to dislodge the local realm, for a wider constituency of citizens and a cosmopolitan identity. Of course, the articulatory practice generates a discourse on localism and alternative development. Below, we analyse some of the ideological underpinnings of this discourse, their implications for development rethinking and the possibilities they offer for emancipation. An analysis of this nature should incorporate other major actors in articulatory practice as the Andolan ceases to be the sole actor; it becomes a part of the structured totality. We, however, accord a centrality to the Andolan's ideological resources and situate other actors as contributing to these resources.

#### **4.1 Analysing Ideological Resources**

Conceptually speaking, ideologies evolve and operate through discursive practices (Therborn 1980:16). Methodologically, they can be observed in the activities and artefacts of their producers. They influence what coalitions are permissible and structure the opportunities available for building intellectual justifications for actions (Moaddel 1995:249). In ecology movements (see Scott 1990, Guha 1988, 1989) scholars have discerned diverse ideological trends; from deep-ecologists and Gandhians to 'left' leaning activist groups, the terrain of ecological politics comprises of a mosaic of ideologies. Issue-based campaigns of course by definition have an ambiguous ideological armoury. There is hardly anything in their activities and artefacts that would entail a strong sense of ideological identification. But their crystallisation into social movements runs parallel to the mobilisation and gaining of ideological resources. Put simply, they generate ideas, meanings and consciousness of the reality around and construct principles and ideals governing action and practice. We apply this understanding in our analysis. In the following two sections we outline issues and ideas in the Andolan as it understands itself. Later, we critically look at this understanding and its producers and draw some conclusions for a more inclusive agenda for social activism.





#### 4.1.1 'Why Do We Oppose': Andolan's Evaluation of SSP

As an issue-based campaign against the SSP, the central questions that the Andolan raised are as follows: (a) Whose development? (b) At whose cost? (c) What are the quantifiable and non-quantifiable costs and do they outweigh the benefits? (d) Is this development sustainable and just? (e) Is the project in the national interest? (f) Who are the people being asked to make sacrifices in the national interest? (g) Can their community life and resource base ever be compensated? (h) Are the decisions taken only after complete and comprehensive investigations? (i) Are the rights of those dependent on the natural resources being affected by the projects to decide on harnessing and utilisation of such resources being recognised?<sup>82</sup>

These questions bring to the fore issues related to distributional effects of development projects, issues related to their planning, execution and scale, their environmental costs, the financial implications of such investments as well as issues of democratic governance and human rights. In the Andolan's understanding the SSP implies 'unprecedented displacement,<sup>83</sup> violation of right to life and livelihood of people, the degradation of land, water and forest resources,<sup>84</sup> the untenability of benefits,<sup>85</sup> the staggering financial burden<sup>86</sup> and the consequent international debt trap...' (NBA 1992:4).<sup>87</sup> The displacement has been planned without the affected population being informed (as per the requirements in law) and without any scope for their meaningful participation in the project denying them the right to information and participation. The SSP thus stands for a 'faulty, non-viable, unjust and destructive project' (NBA, Campaign Letter, Nov 10: 1994).

In any evaluation of development projects, these issues are of crucial importance. It is to the credit of the Andolan that the ground work for such a comprehensive evaluation of the SSP was laid. Not only did it spur the governments and the World Bank to periodically review their evaluation parameters of development projects; it also drew specific attention to the impact of all large dams (see Dhawan 1990, Singh 1990), the impact of development-induced displacement (see Fernandes and Ganguli-Thukral 1988, Ganguli-Thukral 1992), as well as on resettlement and rehabilitation (see Menezes 1991, TISS 1993). This is not to suggest that these issues had not been raised earlier (see for instance Sharma and Sharma 1981, CSE 1982, 1985). They have periodically drawn attention of both scholars and activists and have spurred local-level protest campaigns and resistance movements long before the SSP and the NBA.

Let us pause for a moment to take a brief look at the *Mulshi Satyagraha*.<sup>88</sup> This campaign in 1921 was against the Mulshi Peta dam, proposed on the Sahyadri hills by the industrial house of Tatas, to supply hydro-power to the city of Bombay. Project authorities justified the construction because it would replace fossil fuel power that was expensive (do not read 'environmentally destructive') for the mill industry, create irrigation potential, and generate employment opportunities in the cotton mills. The campaign against the project was led by Senapati Bapat, an activist of the congress-led freedom movement, in the city of Poona. The issues raised were as follows: (a) procedure of acquisition without prior information, consultation and consent of the affected people (b) the seriousness of authorities to offer full and fair compensation (c) extreme productivity of the affected land, with natural irrigation facilities (d) loss of ancestral home and uncertainties of social disarticulation. The rallying slogans during the two-year movement were *Vikas Chahiye, Vinash Nahin* (We want development not destruction), *Hamara Gaon Hamara Raj* (Our village our rule) and *Koi Nahin Hatega Bandh Nahin Banega* (No one shall move, the dam will not be built). The movement collapsed in its third year

as the large number of absentee landlords in the Mulshi Valley accepted the compensation package, resulting in the displacement of peasant tenants.

What is striking is the continuity that reflected in the NBA's evaluation and protest, almost 70 years after the *Mulshi Satyagraha*. The urban-industrial interests vis a vis the rural sector's struggles for resources, the demands for information and consent, the issues of loss of cultural heritage and a way of life, inadequate compensation and even the strategies of protest seem to accord validity to the phrase 'history repeats itself'. The change, however is the critical discourse on development within which the Andolan situates its evaluation and action, a discourse from which it draws inputs and to which it contributes. In its content, the Narmada struggle may share similarities with the Mulshi Satyagraha; however, it generates very different meanings.

#### 4.1.2 New Meanings of New Actors: Against 'Development'

Below is an extract from a campaign letter entitled 'We want Development not Destruction', issued before the Harsud Rally of 1989.

Since independence a preference for gigantism has come to dominate our development paradigm. Our planners, politicians and experts have opted wholesale for large dams and gigantic industrial units, and have dug mines and exploited forests in pursuit of their elitist vision of progress and development. The cumulative ill-effects of all this 'development' are now assuming disastrous proportions for a large section of the population, particularly for its most depressed strata - the tribals, the peasants and labourers - along with the already depleting natural resource base and our scarce financial resources (Action Committee for National Rally Against Destructive Development 1989:1).

The extract summarises the critical discourse on state-led development projects with regards to their social, ecological and economic costs. The 'elitist vision of gigantism' in practice implies 'large dams, the green revolution package, the unmindful industrial-urban package' the edifice of which rests on 'capital intensive technology and western indicators of development'. On the one hand such developmental practices have resulted in 'increasing centralisation, capitalistic tendencies and vulgar consumerism'. On the other they have caused 'degradation of land, water and forests, increasing socio-economical deprivation and inequality and erosion of basic human rights' (NBA 1992:1-2).

The Narmada Bachao Andolan constitutes a challenge to this 'larger reality'. It views itself as 'one of the major struggles in post-independence era to save the land, forest, the people and their resources, which are being inequitably consumed and destroyed by a few in the name of public purpose (and) development' (NBA 1992:1). As Kothari notes, 'movement leaders argue that what they are doing is 'nothing short of challenging the fundamental structures of power and patronage, received categories and ideologies as well as representative processes that discriminate against the primary victims of economic development (1995:428).

We discern two strands in the Andolan's understanding that are analytically distinct but interrelated in practice. First is the mobilising, and to a certain degree, institutionalising a challenge to mainstream development practices. This struggle over meanings ensues from the felt need to establish the political status, the validity of the Andolan's claims regarding the adverse impacts of development in general and development projects in particular. Its sustained challenge to the SSP, brings on to the fore the need for procedural and institutional reforms, i.e more democratisation and participation, and makes them into matters of legitimate

political concern. The struggle is for participatory and people-centred *means* through which development goals can be achieved. Secondly, in its opposition to the dominant developmental discourse, the Andolan seeks a systemic transformation. The critique of gigantism and centralisation, global economic structures, capital intensive technology simultaneously becomes a proactive agenda for localism, micro-projects and ecologically and humanly benign technology. An 'alternative model for development' is sought, implying fundamental transformations in ideals and *values* governing what we understand to be 'development'. For the Andolan, it is within this model that the issues it raises get resolved. The alternative model is both a means and an end. Development goals in the model are achieved by 'putting people first' through decentralised and participatory decision-making processes. As an end, the model seeks reformulation of hitherto development objectives by putting limits to economic growth and consumer culture and highlighting basic needs, local access and control of resources; sustainability and equity are paramount developmental goals in this model. Invested with the burden of operationalising the model in its struggle against the SSP, the Andolan proposes 'alternatives' in decentralised water harvesting, management and use systems, with 'optimum utilisation of rain water and ground water' (NBA 1992:32). As against the current practice of treating the amount of power consumed as development yard stick, the Andolan's emphasises on energy conservation, effective demand management and decentralised power generation through renewable resources.<sup>89</sup>

In recent years, with the formation of the NAPM, the ideological focus has somewhat shifted from being predominantly anti-state to 'strengthening the struggle against globalisation'. For the NAPM, while local communities are losing control over land, forests and water, the globalised control over technology, fertilisers, seeds and water is rapidly destroying the self-sufficiency of agricultural communities and 'alienating them from their natural habitat and resource base'. Hence the need to widen the struggle frontier to oppose the 'intrusion of foreign multi-nationals and their increasing grip over the economy and polity' (NAPM 1995).<sup>90</sup> At one level, the ideologues of the NAPM view the trend towards globalisation as part and parcel of the present development model. In this sense globalisation strategies are extensions of state-led development strategies. However it is being argued that given the current 'economic reforms' pursued by the Indian state, the priorities of the government are rapidly changing:

Earlier the government used to plan projects for drinking water, irrigation, roads, education, health etc. The focus of government today is on projects like national highways, airports, modern sophisticated sea-ports, telecommunications and electricity for big industries. In other words, (these are facilities) that foreign MNCs demand.<sup>91</sup>

How the Andolan situates state-led development and what role it envisages of the state in this shifting ideological terrain are difficult questions that need not be pursued here. However, the struggle against globalism and the penetration of major players in the global markets on the one hand and for alternative development on the other have a direct bearing on the Andolan's politics of representation and its discourse on localism. We discuss these issues below.

#### **4.1.3 Localism as a Discourse and the Politics of Representation**

The hallmarks of any discourse on localism are its populist explanatory categories that privilege homogeneity and consonance with regards to local political economy and culture, interests and values. The self-sufficient peasantry, the local community, the rural people, are few such categories strongly enabling the suppression of contradictions within the local while sharpening contradictions with their *Other* - industry,

urban community or national/global elite. In the mobilising discourse of resistance movements,<sup>92</sup> these categories are deployed for obvious strategic reasons. Their populist overture could be explained as strategic exigency and not as ideological naiveté or indigence. Rather, Dhanagare (1995) and Brass (1995) would argue that neo-populism, as a mobilising discourse bears an ideology of conservatism. Brass delineates the features of populism as expressing 'antagonism towards large scale and more particularly towards politics, class, capitalism, socialism and state; ... it endorses the small scale, and especially the idea of common interests operating on the basis of grassroots/local initiatives... (and) advocates micro-level empowerment of non-class identities on the basis of a romantic anti-capitalist ideology ...' (1995:251). With some qualifications, these characteristics apply to the Andolan's discourse on localism and alternative development.

The discourse on localism is a derivative of a critique of industrialisation and urbanisation as development strategies. Whether in Gandhi's village republics or in Schumacher's Buddhist economics, localism offers a powerful critique of the costs of industrialisation. But mere advocacy on grassroots and micro-level empowerment, *sans* class configurations and power relationships, reduces localism only to a discourse-against. It serves as a powerful mobilising discourse for those whose interests get represented in the discourse. Most often, an essentially construed localism, ignores the plight of those oppressed within the local - wage labourers, marginal farmers, women, ethnic minorities, in short, the subaltern. For the rich peasantry in the valley, localism directly protects their interest. For NGOs articulating environmental interests, human rights and alternative development, and to some extent activist groups, localism appears as a rediscovered mantra. On the one hand it directs their critical gaze at the state and the market and on the other it establishes them as 'progressive' forces of the civil society who speak on behalf of the 'local'. Representation hence has to be understood and explained in terms of interests and social relations, not in terms ideas and ideals on the local. The claim of the Andolan as representing the 'people in the valley' is to be understood in this light. In the discourse of the 'cosmopolitan locals' who constitute it and who define it, the local realm is construed as a victim, for whose emancipation they work. The 'local' in the Andolan's localism is the 'Other' about whom the Andolan can pontificate. What results in this discourse is only a representation of those with relative power. It reinforces prevalent power relationships in the valley and establishes new relationships of dependency between the local realm and the cosmopolitan locals.

The eulogising of local lifestyles, livelihood strategies and indigenous knowledge and culture, the projection of an image of self-contained village communities living in harmonious ecological utopias, or for that matter, the privileging of popular myths on rivers and cultures around them - values of localism that the Andolan has inherited and which it reinforces - distort the real world of the local, its differentiation and poverty, the every day struggles of the poor. The reactionary nature of this localism results from the development dystopia that it constructs. In the last instance, it operates only as a middle-class cosmopolitan hegemony, whose local appropriation of representation and speech, inevitably makes it a form of universal ethos to which local cultures could and should aspire. The imposition of the Andolan's utopia of alternative development on a local population threatened with displacement needs to be seen in this light. Beyond this, the interests of adivasi villages, who could benefit from local access and control of forest resources; of the agriculture labourers and marginal farmers who stand to benefit from the rehabilitation package; of the children and the young who could gain access to modern health and educational resources in new resettlement sites; of women who could gain ownership of land under a progressive R&R policy - interests that emerge from resource conflicts within the local - find no representation in the Andolan's localism.

#### 4.1.4 Cosmopolitan Localism: The Making of a Green Party?

In this section, we assess briefly the future course the Andolan may take given the current trends. It is quite plausible that the SSP, as it stands today may not change shape at all. The time taken to complete the project will, however, be considerably longer than earlier propounded. The recent agreement between the chief ministers of the three states (M.P., Gujarat and Maharashtra) and the Prime Minister (see endnote 79), over the height of the dam, has removed a major hurdle for project authorities. It was the Supreme Court, which had specifically asked the state governments to resolve their contentions through dialogue, before it would resume any further hearing. The Andolan has condemned the agreement. A verdict from the Supreme Court that would endorse the agreement and allow construction work on the project would be unfavourable to the Andolan; court stricture on rehabilitation standards and environmental mitigation measures on the SSP, if passed, can be considered an indulgence to rather than an endorsement of the Andolan's position on the project. Under such circumstances, the Andolan will have to radically reformulate its future agenda forced as it will be to delink from the SSP.

Among the issues discussed by the constituents of the National Alliance for Peoples Movement, one that is perhaps most relevant for the Andolan's future is the felt need for institutionalising the discourse on alternative development and localism. At the preparatory meeting of the NAPM held at Kasravad, for the Wardha Conference of March 1996, substantial deliberation was over the need to 'positively intervene in the electoral process of the country'. It was felt that the parliamentary elections of May 1996, could be used by the NAPM to put up candidates on its behalf or lend support to candidates that it considers 'eligible'. The need for more formal mechanisms 'to usher in the new polity' that the Alliance has been working for was also underscored. These deliberations are rough indicators of a discourse institutionalisation process, to borrow a phrase from Hajer (1995:27), that could culminate in a new political party in the years to come.

Social movements crystallising into political parties are by no means a new phenomenon. In India, movements for regional autonomy,<sup>93</sup> 'backward caste' and *dalit* movements<sup>94</sup> have resulted in party formations. More recently, the 'new' farmers movements - the Shetkari Sangathana in Maharashtra and the Bharatiya Kissan Union in Uttar Pradesh - have entered 'mainstream politics' by contesting elections. In other countries, particularly in Europe, the new social movements were precursors to the formation of the Green Parties. The current theorisation on new social movements does not seem to anticipate or acknowledge this trend and incorporate it in theorisation. The trend suggests the need of new actors (as with the old) to directly engage in existing power structures, rather than 'reclaiming politics as a constant element within social life' (Evers 1990:51) and reversing the conquest of the society by economy (market) and polity (state). Yet to institutionalise the discourse on democratic renewal and an ecologically responsible society, would imply a radical restructuring of existing power structures. If serious attention is accorded to both normative and strategic agendas for such a formation, one can anticipate some sort of an Indian Green Party in the near future.

Having stated that, we need a note of caution, for possibly having over-interpreted the current trends. The NAPM, is a formation that whose constituents have very little mass-base. Organisations with mass-base such as Chhatisgarh Mukti Morcha, Adivasi Mukti Sangathana and even the Khedut Mazdoor Chetna Sangath in M.P have kept out of the NAPM. An alliance of 'peoples movement' with out people can not be a right beginning. Gadgil and Guha (1995) estimate that about 50% of India's population constitutes of 'ecosystem

people' living in subsistence economies and another 35% are 'ecological refugees' - forced migrants uprooted from local ecosystems because of adverse impacts of development. These people directly form the constituency for any mobilisation towards a eco-political formation. The NAPM however is dominated by cosmopolitan activists who could be, following Gadgil and Guha, called eco-sensitive 'omnivores'.

### 5.1 Concluding Comments

The NBA has been characterised as a campaign with which the environmental movement in India 'took a giant leap onto a political terrain posing a new vision of development at the level of popular consciousness'(Omvedt 1993:272). The campaign is credited with formulating concretely the nature of exploitation and environmental destruction ensuing from projects such as the SSP as well as 'asserting popular power from below as opposed to enlightened state intervention from above' (ibid). In this paper, we plotted the development of the Andolan through a narrative account and critically analysed its prevalent characterisation. In attempting to understand, the 'new ways of doing politics',<sup>95</sup> the characteristic feature of New Social Movements,<sup>96</sup> we raised a few rather obvious questions. How do these 'new ways' organise in forms and what do they express in content and meaning? What new identities do these new ways create (or for that matter, invigorate old/lost identities) at different levels? Can we attribute a potential emancipatory discourse to these new ways of doing politics? This paper attempts an interpretative understanding of some of these questions in the context of the NBA.

The politics of the Andolan reveal undemocratic structures and practices, although it itself demands democratic governance and participation. We explain this phenomena partly by looking into the Andolan's political predisposition for effecting resistance to the SSP, and partly by analysing the organisational and ideological resources that it has mobilised in this regard. Its organisational resources do not suggest an orientation towards the local but towards 'cosmopolitan locals' and its claim of embeddedness in the Narmada Valley seems greatly suspect. Its politics has fostered an identity of middle-class radicalism, which influences and gets reinforced by the strategic choices it has so far made. To this extent, the empirical evidence from the NBA, corroborates some elements attributed to new social movements in theory. The spread of the NBA is more noticeable among the middle-class and the struggle occurs more at a symbolic terrain - the dystopia of development versus the utopia of alternative development. However, the meanings with which alternative development is attributed is more of an imposition from outside the local terrain that on the one hand fails to incorporate the risks and uncertainties facing the local people and on the other ignores differentiation and resource conflicts within the local.

This paper in no way circumvents the achievements of the Andolan so far. Rather it is an attempt to understand the limits of such movements in their to operate as agents of social transformation given their current practices. To transcend these limits, the need for creating dense networks within the local and for fostering the building of a discourse on critical localism can hardly be ignored. For the Andolan, the difficulty involved in creating such networks in the valley is insurmountable, given both the reality of the dam and the probable displacement. However, the lessons drawn from its struggle against the SSP, both with regards to its praxis as well as ideological understanding could be usefully deployed in any future agenda for environmental politics in India.

## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented at the State Society Relations Research Seminars in November 1996 at the ISS, The Hague. I thank the participants of the seminar for useful comments. I am also thankful to Martin Doornbos, Thayer Scudder, Shanti George, Jan Nederveen Pieterse, Mohamad Salih, A.Haroon Akram Lodhi and an anonymous reader for their comments on the paper. To Ashwani Saith and D.N Dhanagare, I owe a special word of gratitude for making me rethink on some ideas I held on ecological politics and social movements. The usual disclaimer applies.

<sup>2</sup>While Kothari (1987) and Sethi (1993a) include the NGO sector in non-party political formations, Omvedt (1993) prefers to exclude them from her definition of new social movement.

<sup>3</sup> The word Chipko in Garhwali language means 'to adhere'.

<sup>4</sup> For a critical reading of the Chipko Movement see Rangan (1993).

<sup>5</sup>Laclau and Mouffè define articulation as a practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulating practice. The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice is called discourse (1985:105).

<sup>6</sup>The height was raised, as it appeared plausible that the water could be sent all the way up to Kutch, a perpetually water-scarce region in north-west Gujarat.

<sup>7</sup>The site and height of the proposed dam had inter-state ramifications. While almost 98% of the project's command area was to be in Gujarat, the submergence zone for the reservoir was largely in M.P.

<sup>8</sup>Parasuraman (1993) makes a similar classification of the Andolan. The first phase, the early 1980s he calls the period of confusion; the second, 1985-92, the period of tension; and finally, 1989-92 the period of confrontation.

<sup>9</sup>See Nayi Duniya dt. 24.8.78. The clarification was issued at an all-party meeting called at the behest of the chief minister to discuss the award and arrive at a consensus regarding the Award. The meeting appointed an expert committee to look into the Award and resolved to make efforts to reduce the height of the dam.

<sup>10</sup>The Tribunal had admitted Rajasthan as an interested party, along with the three riparian states on the ground that the possibility of it receiving water from the Narmada by canal existed. Politically the admission of Rajasthan was a victory for Gujarat, as both were interested in having the highest possible terminal dam. M.P. and Maharashtra were interested in a lower dam height to limit their submergence area (Wood 1993).

<sup>11</sup>In the M.P. government Master Plan prepared in 1965 for the Harinfal Dam, the FRL was fixed at 465 ft. In 1972, in the revised Master Plan, the height was reduced to FRL 455 ft.. Considering the representations of people from the submergence area that consisted of 'land thickly populated and very fertile', the height of the Harinfal Dam was further reduced to FRL 420 ft. in December 1972 (GOMP 1975).

<sup>12</sup>In April 1965, the government of M.P. and Maharashtra had entered an agreement to co-operate in the development of hydro-electric power at Jalsindhi on the Narmada River. The detailed project report in which the height of the Dam was fixed at FRL 355 ft. was submitted to the Central Water and Power Commission in July 1970 for clearance.

<sup>13</sup>In Gujarat, the Congress unit welcomed the decision of the Tribunal. The Gujarati press at that time argued that most of the area coming under submergence due to the Navagam Dam was in any case earmarked for submergence as a result of the now aborted Harinfal and Jalsindhi projects, so that M.P. had no right to claim foul play over the decision of the Tribunal.

<sup>14</sup>In 1982, the Centre for Science and Environment published the First Citizens Report on the State of India's Environment. Discussing large dams, the report read 'Despite the impressive achievements the expected benefits in terms of the actual generation of electricity, irrigation and flood control have fallen short of the planned targets. If the costs of environmental degradation such as deforestation in the catchment areas are included the price paid for these modern temples becomes truly staggering' (CSE 1982:58). On the question of displacement and resettlement, the report said, the 'government's rehabilitation programme generally offers inadequate financial compensations. They fail to preserve and create the community life of the displaced population'.

<sup>15</sup>The study pointed out several inadequacies in the Resettlement and Rehabilitation plan, cost-benefit analysis as well as the magnitude of the project's impact on forests and wildlife in the valley.

<sup>16</sup>Some international NGOs lobbied hard with their respective executive directors (EDs) pointing out the environmental impact of the project and requesting them not to finance the project. (see for instance Probe International 1985).

<sup>17</sup>Part of the construction process of the water way system which would lead from the reservoir to the main channel. Five villages in Gujarat were displaced from the area to make way for the construction in the early 1980s.

<sup>18</sup>The activists were Achyut Yagnik and his then colleague and employee Medha Patkar.

<sup>19</sup>These committees would prepare comprehensive household data on land possessed, location and extent of submergence, quantum of produce from land, forest and river, data on the size of the house and amount of bamboo used, with the intention of helping the government to include complete details while estimating compensation and resettlement entitlements (Parasuraman 1993).

<sup>20</sup>The activists of the Narmada Dharanagrasta Samiti were employees of the SETU. It was not until the end of 1987 that Medha Patkar parted ways from Yagnik, citing differences of perspectives on resettlement and the 'need to break free from the bondage of foreign donations' (speech at Support Group Conference at Pune, April 1995).

<sup>21</sup>Avinash Deshpande, personal communication. Deshpande was then actively involved with *Vidushak Karkhana*, an activist group based in Shadol. He also produced the first documentary film on displacement titled '*Narmada Puran*'.

<sup>22</sup>The environmental and social consequences of Tawa and Bargi projects were extremely adverse. The Tawa project resulted in acute water-logging in the command area resulting in a decline in crop yields after irrigation, and sparked off the Miti Bachao Abhiyan (Save Soil Campaign). The displacement that occurred due to the Bargi project was much more than what was initially claimed by the government. The compensation package offered was also extremely inadequate.

<sup>23</sup>A noted social activist and Gandhian, Kasi Nath Trivedi, who was instrumental in forming the Narmada Ghati Navnirman Samiti (NGNS) back in 1967, opposed the Narmada Projects on the grounds that big dams are dangerous and destructive and that they radically affect the *dharma* of the river (which is) to flow. The NGNS was formed in 1967 to take up issues with the then M.P government headed by Govind Narayan Singh regarding the displacement of boat people with the building of road bridges across the Narmada (Anil Trivedi, interview dt. 22nd Feb'96).

<sup>24</sup>The Sangath had been made aware of the project's possible impact by the ARCH-Vahini in 1983-84 (Amit Bhatnagar, personal communication).

<sup>25</sup>In later years, MARG conducted similar surveys in some villages in the districts of Khargone and Dhar (MARG: Vol 2-5).

<sup>26</sup>Although the project work started in 1961, with the construction of the infrastructure at Kevadia, it was only after 1985 that the work on the headway of the canal was initiated.

<sup>27</sup>While city based environmental groups dismissed the policies as a 'mere piece of paper', some scholars argued that the policies of the Gujarat government were primarily aimed at dividing the NGO movement around the SSP (see for instance Parsuraman 1993).

<sup>28</sup>The declaration was signed among others by noted activists like Sunderlal Bahuguna of the Chipko Movement and the anti-Tehri Dam movement, Anil Agarwal, the founder of the Centre for Science and Environment and the publisher of the Citizens Report on India's Environment and B.D Sharma the then Commissioner of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and now the leader of the Bharat Jan Andolan (Bharat Peoples Movement). A portion of the declaration is worth noting: 'We... (are) all united by a common resolve to ensure that people are no longer denied their basic rights over natural resources. We affirm that the nation's rivers are the cradle of our civilisation and that they cannot be strangled to meet the needs of the exploiting class within the society. The issues raised by the construction of big dams challenge the very concept of the pattern of the economic growth, unquestionably adopted by our planners. We appeal to the nation to halt all big dams here and now' (as reproduced in Social Action Vol-38, 1988:297).

<sup>29</sup>For an excellent analysis on the Shetkari Sangathana see Brass (1995).

<sup>30</sup>Anticipating the events at Harsud, the Gujarat Legislative Assembly passed a unanimous resolution in support of the SSP, three days before the rally.



<sup>31</sup>The activists were Medha Patkar of the NDS, Girish Patel of the Lok Adhikar Samiti in Gujarat and Vijay Paranjpye, an economist who had undertaken a 'holistic' cost-benefit analysis of the SSP and the NSP. The testimony drew sharp reactions from various quarters and even sparked a debate within the Andolan as to the validity and correctness of appealing to a foreign state in a matter which is internal to India. However it resulted in several Congressmen writing to the World Bank urging it to reconsider its support to the project. The letter concluded with the following words, 'The continued World Bank involvement in the SSP sends a clear signal to borrower countries that the environmental and social conditions in the loan agreements are not enforced and bona fide established. In the light of the overwhelming evidence of the unsoundness of this project and its broader implications of the Bank, we believe it would be a gross misuse of public funds to consider an increased replenishment for an institution which has demonstrated its disregard for human rights and environmental concerns' (US Congress sub-committee, Letter dated 2nd November 1990 to the World Bank).

<sup>32</sup>The letter was signed by members belonging to different political parties, Social Democrats, Conservatives, Centre Party, Democratic League, Swedish People's Party, Rural Party, Christian League, Greens and Liberals (see letter to Barber B Conable dt. 31st May 1990).

<sup>33</sup>This was achieved through active lobbying by Japanese NGOs, notably Friends of Earth Japan.

<sup>34</sup>The Gujarat government had organised a pro-dam rally in Chhota-Udaipur, in Gujarat, on December 29th to demonstrate support for the project. This rally marched to the Gujarat side of the border and was used to prevent the anti-dam march from entering Gujarat.

<sup>35</sup>The name given to the camp on the M.P side of the border, where the people stayed for a month.

<sup>36</sup>Bombay, Delhi, Bhopal, Delhi and Baroda witnessed rallies and dharnas in support of the satyagraha.

<sup>37</sup>Extracts from the detailed text are suggestive of the international opinion on the project and the movement: '... The movement has succeeded in generating a debate across the subcontinent which has encapsulated the conflict between two opposing styles of development: one massively destructive of people and the environment in quest for large scale industrialisation; the other consisting of replaceable small-scale activities harmoniously integrated with both local communities and nature... The Narmada projects are the epitome of unsustainable development. NBA, under the inspiring leadership of Patkar and Amte, has ignited a historic debate of world-wide relevance especially in this year leading up to the Earth Summit. The victory of the NBA over the Narmada dams, Sardar Sarovar and Narmada Sagar would be a great symbolic victory for sustainability and a reprieve from homelessness and refugee status for several hundred thousand people' (RLA 1991 Background information on recipients).

<sup>38</sup>Although the NBA expressed total dissatisfaction with the terms of references of the IRC which was limited to suggesting mitigative measures for environmental impact and improvement for R&R, 'the Mission members assured the Andolan that the former President of the World Bank had sent them a letter in which he agreed that the terms of reference could be expanded. The members also said that they would not hesitate to say whatever logically came into their findings. Following this it was decided to extend the Andolan's cooperation to the Mission' (Narmada 1992a:14 emphasis in original).

<sup>39</sup>In the months of March and April there were reports of police excess and harassment at Manibeli. Different sets of 'Fact finding teams' arrived at different conclusions. While the team for the Peoples Union for Democratic Rights reported violations of human rights, a team from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (the official monitoring and evaluation agency for R&R appointed by Maharashtra government) reported that there was no such violation.

<sup>40</sup>The terms of reference of the Panel required members to reside in villages in the submergence zone of the Sardar Sarovar Dam and to be present at demonstrations and protests. They were however expected to restrict their activities to observation, writing, interviews and photography (See NIHRP 1992 Interim Report). The panel prepared two reports in 1992 and 1993.

<sup>41</sup>The convention was attended by eminent academicians, womens groups, trade unionists, NGOs and legal experts.

<sup>42</sup>The issues discussed pertained to R&R, environment, hydrology, drinking water supply to Saurashtra and Kutch, irrigation efficiency, distributive justice, benefits and costs, alternatives, information, human rights violation and project review.

<sup>43</sup>The FMG was headed by Jayant Patil, Member (irrigation) Planning Commission.

<sup>44</sup>The M.P. Chief Minister raised the matter of height reduction with the Prime Minister of India, requesting his intervention by calling a Chief Ministers' meeting for this purpose.

<sup>45</sup>Supreme Court of India, Original Jurisdiction, Writ Petition (Civil) 319 of 1994, affidavit of written submissions on behalf of the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

<sup>46</sup> Medha Patkar has argued along these lines in most of her public speeches.

<sup>47</sup>It is interesting to note that the 18th Congress of the International Committee on Large Dams (ICOLD) held that year in Durban strongly voiced the necessity for more large dams in developing countries to provide energy, water for domestic and industrial use, irrigation to improve agricultural productivity and flood control measures. In his inaugural address to the Congress, President Mandela said that 'no modern developing economy would be possible without large dams. There is opposition to the building of large dams, some valid. But in South Africa, we have no choice if we have to develop industry and feed our people' (International Water Power and Dam Construction 1994: 14).

<sup>48</sup>The Bhopal Action was an indefinite fast by Medha Patkar and three representatives from the submerging villages.

<sup>49</sup>The committee submitted its report in August 1995, recommending that the adivasi gram sabha, the body representing the individuals in a tribal village or hamlet, should have wide-ranging powers over the natural resources used by the adivasis. This included powers to safeguard rights relating to land, water, forest, minor forest produce; enforcement of customary rights over grazing and biomass collection; management, regulation and use of common property resources and maintenance of community assets.

<sup>50</sup>The NBA has been arguing quoting the studies undertaken by the Central Water Commission that the water flow in the Narmada river at 75% dependability is not 28 MAF as observed by the NWDT, but 23 MAF.

<sup>51</sup>This necessitated a special meeting of the Andolan leadership with the people of Manibeli to convince them of the need to stay on. Manibeli, however, ceased to be a satyagraha site.

<sup>52</sup> In most cases, the people have leased out land that they received as compensation to local farmers. So the 'return' of the oustees should not be wholly construed as an act resulting from dissatisfaction with the conditions of resettled villages. Given the fact the submergence in large parts of the valley is yet to occur, families who have received compensation have divided time and household labour between their original land in the submergence zone and the compensatory land in the resettlement site.

<sup>53</sup>The Gujarat Narmada Displaced Struggle Committee. It may be of interest to note that until recently the NBA had shunned any activism among the resettled as they were considered traitors to the Andolan, having weakened it by accepting R&R.

<sup>54</sup> The interests and risk perceptions of the people in the valley with regards to the SSP and the NBA are issues in their own right. The ideas related to these issues are being developed separately in a forthcoming paper.

<sup>55</sup> One hastens to add that most of these local 'activists' enjoy what they do, escorting guests of the Andolan to the villages (I myself had this privilege during my field visits), organising and participating in Andolan's activities, preparing food (functioning as domestic servants) and so on. Some of them have developed specialised knowledge of particular areas in the valley and claim a particular area to be their routine beat. But resentment among some of the local adivasi activists has been brewing on the role that is allocated to them in the movement. Shankar Tadwal (ex-President of the Khedut Mazdoor Chetna Sangath and an activist of the NBA) articulates this resentment as follows: 'to say yes to everything that is said, to participate in activities, fill water in tubs, sweep the floor, cook food, wash utensils, carry news about Andolan activities to villages, wash other peoples clothes; are these the main task for adivasi activists? Is this the adivasi leadership?' (*Adivasi Asmita se Jude Kucch Prasna*: Disha Sambad, Newsletter, ud.)

<sup>56</sup>Needless to say, the overlapping of these interests is too striking for such a classification to be of much use. It does however serve to identify the three major themes that get articulated in the Andolan's discourse.

<sup>57</sup>This has lead the government authorities to project the movement as consisting largely of outsiders with no real support from the people to be affected by the SSP (See for instance the press statements issued by the Chief Minister of Gujarat during the Sangharsh Yatra.)

<sup>58</sup> This has happened mostly when a particular group of people in the valley have evinced interest in resettlement and rehabilitation.

<sup>59</sup> Of course here unlike in case of the local-level link, the negotiations are over strategic and ideological issues. We have elaborated on this issue later in the paper.

<sup>60</sup> Notable among these are the NBA 'support groups' in Bombay and Delhi that are conglomerates of NGO representatives, activist and advocacy group representatives and individuals from professional bodies, media and the academia. In Calcutta, an outfit of similar nature is called the 'Friends of the Narmada'.

<sup>61</sup> We do not have adequate information to characterise the Ekta Parishad.

<sup>62</sup> This characterisation also finds support in Baviskar's work on the Andolan. 'To the people of the valley who are dedicated to the Andolan, Medhajiji (sister) as she is called, is not just a leader but a little bit of a goddess, in whose power they have faith. Her charisma - part magic, part engineering - mobilises people, transforming the equation between resources and collective action. People's allegiance is as much to her personally as to the changed ideology or collective consciousness of the need to fight (sic) that she has brought about' (1995:214).

<sup>63</sup> For instance in many villages in the valley the unquestionable support to Patkar is extended with the hope that she will ensure a better rehabilitation package for them.

<sup>64</sup> See for instance Omvedt (1993:269), Das (1996:1511)

<sup>65</sup> Roy Burman (1994) has attempted to demonstrate that the Andolan on occasions has resorted to violent means to achieve its purpose. However stray incidents of violence, resulting from the non-responsive and at times down-right hostile attitude of state agencies in no way make the movement less non-violent, as he seems to suggest. Further, a movement cannot be characterised as being non-Gandhian because it resorts to legal redress for grievances. Roy Burman's arguments are fraught with inconsistencies and his conclusions are therefore highly dubious. For instance, one wonders on what basis he comes to the conclusion that the NBA assumes the State (sic) as a trustee. The author seems to be acquainted neither with the politics of the Andolan, nor with the basic tenets of Gandhian political action.

<sup>66</sup> Although Guha (1988) discerns three strands in Indian environmentalism - Gandhian, Alternative Technologists and Ecological Marxists, each strand adopting a concomitant set of strategies - he does not explain the predominance of the former strand in Indian ecological politics.

<sup>67</sup> In his later work Dhanagare (1995) explains that such strategies of protests aimed at securing constitutional or reformist changes can serve as indicators of understanding the class character of a movement. In the context of agrarian mobilisation, 'historically, participation by rich land owning classes in agrarian movements has taken the form of non-violent protest' as upper echelons of the rural society have a vested interest in preserving the existing agrarian order and property relations and therefore have more to lose than to gain from a violent mass upsurge and destructive agitation (Dhanagare 1995:73).

<sup>68</sup> In 1992, the Narmada Control Authority classified access of government personnel to villages as follows: Gujarat - no resistance, free access to all work; Maharashtra - no access to all 33 villages; M.P - hard core resistance and no access 34 villages, moderate resistance but difficult access 99 villages, no resistance 60 villages (NCA 1992).

<sup>69</sup> One of the important by-products have been the changed attitude of the police in the affected adivasi villages. As one adivasi activist put it, 'Earlier we had to salute to the police, these days they salute us'. Others corroborate this fact, 'the police have stopped asking us for chicken and liquor which they used to do periodically' (names of respondents withheld).

<sup>70</sup> For instance, the immediate effect of the threat of Jal Samarpan was the formation of the five member group (FMG) to review the SSP.

<sup>71</sup> By 1992, the World Bank had provided more than US\$ 50 billion, for construction of more than 500 large dams in 92 countries. The projects thus funded have displaced an estimated 10 million people world-wide.

<sup>72</sup> Under constant pressure multi-lateral donor agencies such as World Bank and OECD have periodically reformulated and revised their operational guidelines on various aspects such as displacement, resettlement and environment (see OECD 1991, WB 1990, 1994).

<sup>73</sup> See the several reports on the relocation component of the SSP by Thayer Scudder for the Bank and his letter to Paul Airman, Executive Director to the World Bank dt. 11th April 1990 in which he mentions that 'the Bank disbursements to SSP should stop until the Government of Gujarat corrects - within a specified period of time - the

various deficiencies relating to its own relocatees and to M.P. and Maharashtra relocatees. Should the required action not occur the World Bank should withdraw from the project.'

<sup>74</sup>The Andolan has been extremely careful to create an image of local-reliance in terms of funding as it has been constantly accused by those forces supporting the project of having foreign sources of funding. In several of her speeches Medha Patkar has made it a point to refute such allegations of relying on foreign funding. As the issue is considered extremely sensitive, the Andolan has made it a point to create a public disposition distancing itself from foreign funding. For instance, the Goldman Prize money awarded to Medha Patkar was not brought into the country but was to be used for an 'international campaign against destructive, anti-people projects in India' (Narmada 1992:25 Sept). It is, however, common knowledge that the Andolan regularly receives solidarity money from foreign funded NGOs. Recently, as part of the National Alliance for Peoples Movement, the Andolan has welcomed foreign funding with the expected caveat that such funding should not have any conditionalities attached (proceedings of the NAPM, Narmada Lok Biradari, Kasravat). Local industrialists in Bombay have also become a major source of funding for the NAPM.

<sup>75</sup>These include the policies and government resolutions on Resettlement and Rehabilitation and legislation such as the Land Acquisition Act, Environment Protection Act and the Forest Conservation Act.

<sup>76</sup>Civil application No. 522, 1994 before the Gujarat High Court.

<sup>77</sup>Application of Sept 1993 before the Civil Judge, Sr. Division, Nandurbar: Pukharaj Bora vs State of Maharashtra.

<sup>78</sup>Writ petition of June 1991 before the Delhi High Court: Kisan Mehta and Arvind Adarkar vs State of Maharashtra, NCA, SSNNL, State of Gujarat and the Union of India.

<sup>79</sup>The petition was filed 'on behalf of the tribal and other oustees of the SSP, ... other directly and indirectly affected persons from this project ... (and) on behalf of the people of India in general whose money is going to be spent in excess of Rs 40,000 crores'. Writ Petition (Civil) No. 319 of 1994, Supreme Court of India: NBA vs Union of India and Others.

<sup>80</sup>The new government of M.P in an affidavit-in-reply filed in the Supreme Court, had asked for a reduction in the dam height from FRL 455 ft. to FRL 439 ft. In August 1996, on the intervention of the Prime Minister of India, the three riparian states have come to an agreement that the dam height shall be 439 ft. after which hydrological data shall be collected for five years before raising the height to 455 ft. The NBA has condemned this decision of the government and vowed to intensify the movement (The Hindu dt.7. 8. 1996).

<sup>81</sup> The division bench of the Supreme Court hearing the case of the NBA consists of three judges.

<sup>82</sup>See NBA (1992:3).

<sup>83</sup>According to the estimates of the Andolan, the total number of affected people would amount to about four hundred thousand (NBA writ petition 319 of 1994 before the Supreme Court). However, it has been claimed elsewhere that the figure could be as high as one million (see *ibid*: 1, Ram 1993:1). The figure of one million includes those affected by the reservoir, the canal network in the command and downstream, those affected by compensatory afforestation and catchment area treatment, tenants and labourers dependent on land that is being acquired by project authorities for compensation.

<sup>84</sup>Land degradation would be in the form of water logging in the command area, salinity ingress near the coastal areas of the command and downstream in the district of Bharuch as well as resulting from catchment area treatment upstream. The project also submerges an estimated 13500 ha of forest land (dense as well as degraded) in the reservoir.

<sup>85</sup>According to the Andolan the major beneficiaries of irrigation and power from SSP would be the already developed districts of Baroda and Ahmedabad, which consist of rich cash crop farmers and industrial interests. Further, Andolan claims, irrigation, power and drinking water benefits as claimed by the project authorities are grossly exaggerated; there would be significant shortfall due to wrong initial estimates, the project design and inadequate financial resource allocation (NBA 1992:14).

<sup>86</sup>From an earlier estimated project cost of Rs 4240 crores undertaken by the Tata Economic Consultancy Service in 1983 at 1981-82 prices, the project cost had gone up to Rs 21518 crores in 1995 at 1991-92 prices as per the estimate of the Sardar Patel Institute of Economic and Social Research. NBA activists have argued that the Gujarat government can neither mobilise the required resources on a year to year basis, nor spend the mobilised amount in a timely manner.

Also given the lion's share of SSP in the annual budget of Gujarat, it has resulted in the crowding out of resources from other small projects that could possibly have been more beneficial to the drought affected region in Gujarat.

<sup>87</sup>For a more detailed review of Andolan's critique of the SSP see NBA (1992).

<sup>88</sup> This section is based on the works of Gadgil and Guha (1994, 1995) and from field interviews with Amit Bhatnagar and Jayshree of the Khedut Mazdoor Chetna Sangath (interview dt. 5.3.96).

<sup>89</sup>See Dharamadhikari (1993).

<sup>90</sup>The rallying call of the NAPM is 'Jhute Vikas Se Mila Hey Vinash, Visthapan, Visamta Aur Gulami, Hamey Chahiye Swadeshi, Swavlambhan, Dharmnirapekhta aur Azadi'. Translated it means 'The so-called development process has given us destruction, displacement, destitution and dependency, We want self reliance, secularism and independence'. Further in the context of opposition to the forces of globalisation the NAPM's call for self reliance is articulated in the following slogan - Hamara Beej, Hamara Bhumi, Hamara Khad, Hamara Pani! (Our seeds, our land, our fertilisers, our water).

<sup>91</sup>Declaration of the NAPM at Sewagram meeting held on March 16th 1995. The NBA is a signatory to the declaration.

<sup>92</sup> For an explicit account of the deployment of these categories in the farmers movement in India see Brass (1995: 12-17, 27-48, 251-257).

<sup>93</sup>The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, Assam Gana Parishad, Gorkhaland Party are a few examples.

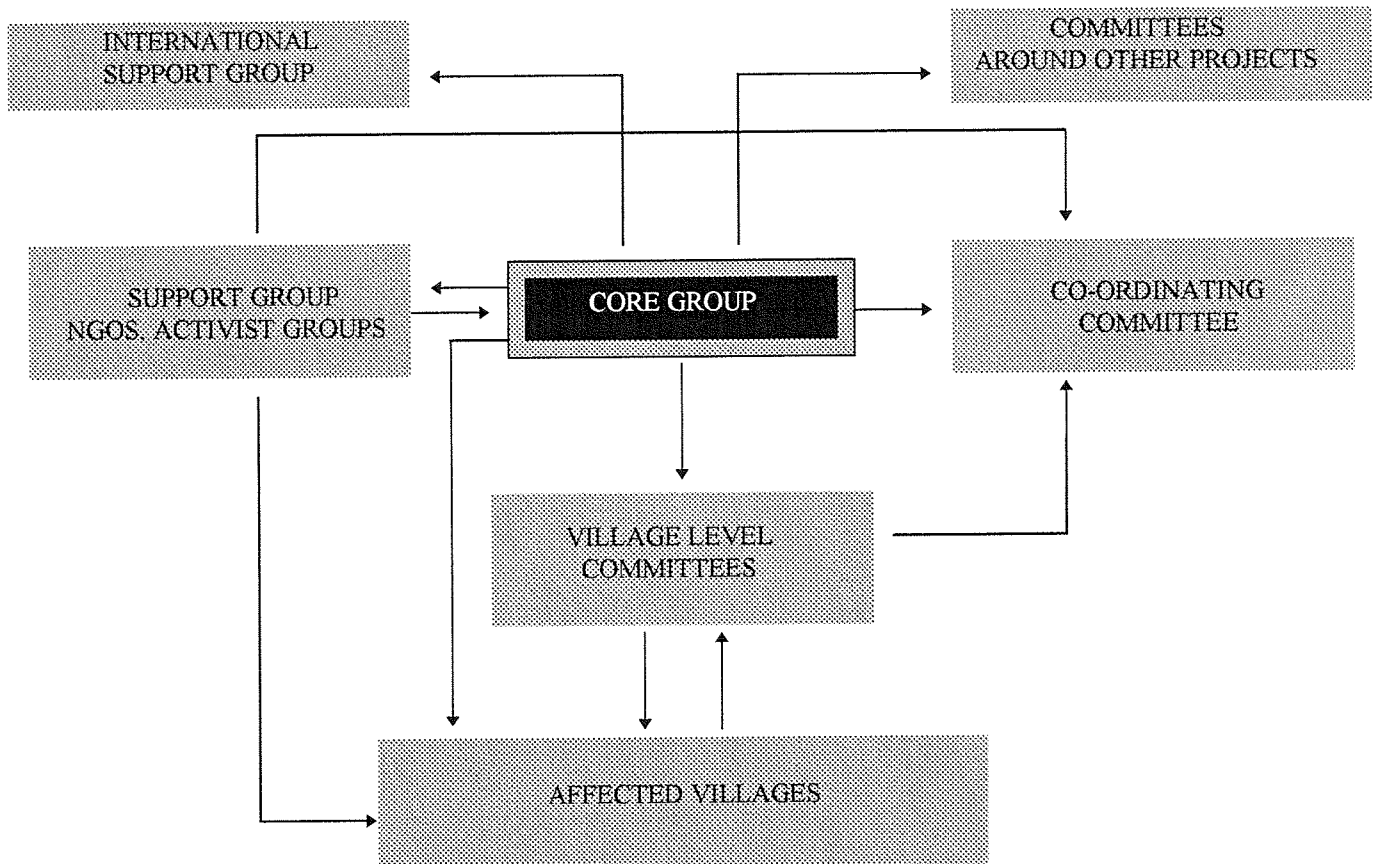
<sup>94</sup>In south India both the DMK and the AIDMK are parties emerging from the backward class movements. A recent example of the dalit movement crystallising into a political party is the formation of the Bahujan Samaj Party in North India.

<sup>95</sup>There are several variations of this idea found in the literature of new social movements - 'rethinking politics', 'broadening the political realm' 'taking politics into ones own hands' and so on.

<sup>96</sup>Scholars such as Evers express dissatisfaction with the centrality accorded to politics in such a characterisation. The argument is that in such a characterisation the universal measure continues to be power whereas a more analytically correct characterisation would be to view NSMs as new ways of doing society (1985:47). However, power is a central component in the New Movements, although it can by no means be the only indicator to understand the social transformation potential of the new social movements.



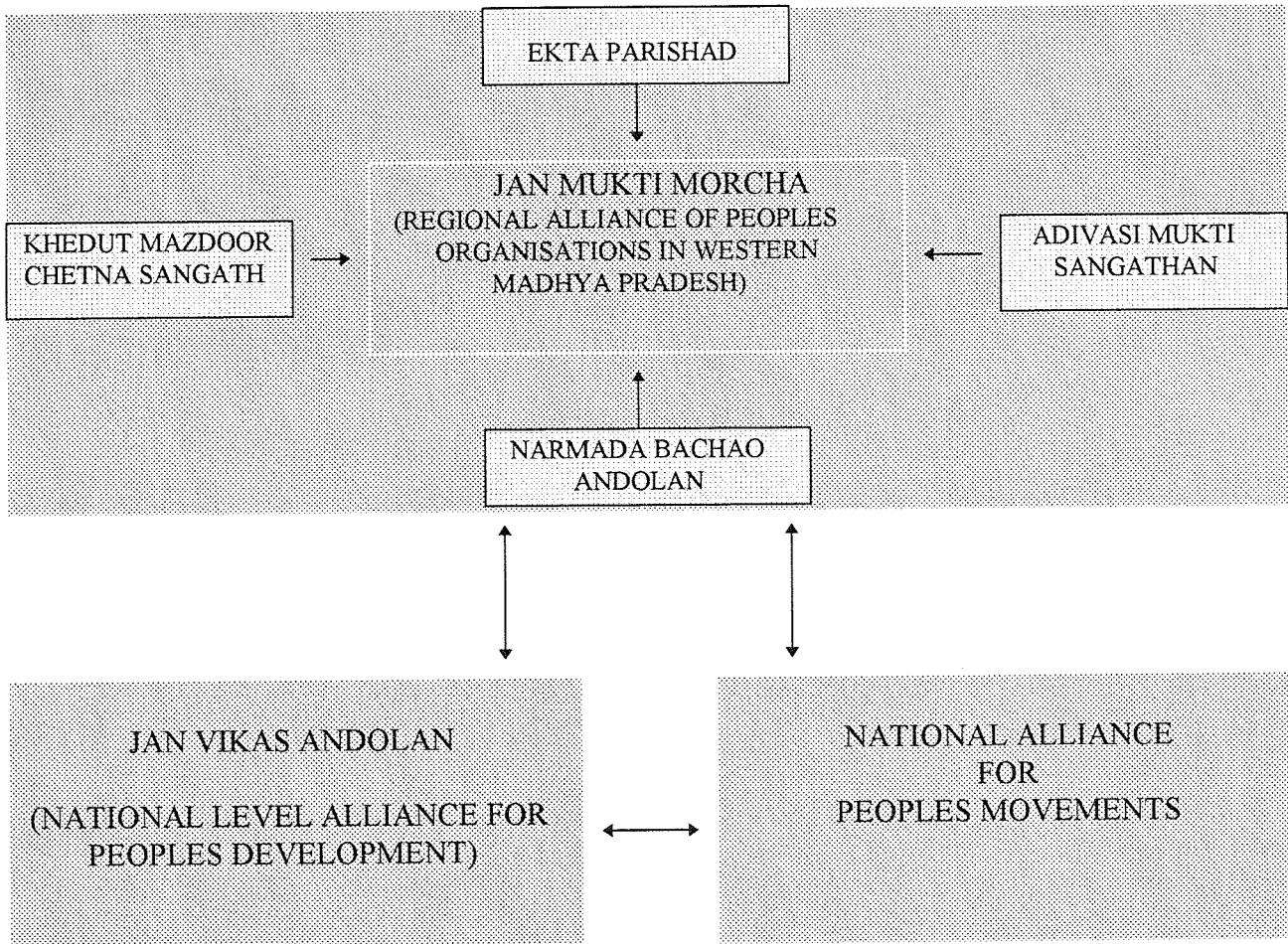
**Figure-1**  
**Organisational Network of NBA**







**Figure-2**  
**Regional and National Alliances**





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