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Narmada Bachao Andolan

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Abstract: My paper is all about the all-time controversial social issue "The Narmada Bachao Andolan". It contains the whole analysis of the issue and what all happened from the beginning to the end. It has an introduction, important happenings in the Narmada Valley, the writ petition filed in court, the decision of the court, current status, achievements, and a conclusion on Narmada Bachao Andolan.

Keywords: Introduction, History and Evolution, Role of World Bank, Narmada Bachao Andolan Union of India, Achievements, Status, Conclusion.

INTRODUCTION

We all have heard about Narmada Bachao Andolan in some or the other way. I have been hearing about this from a very young age itself. I used to wonder what this is all about, and now I have a much clearer picture as to what is Narmada Bachao Andolan.

As per various sources, Narmada Bachao Andolan can be defined as a social movement that had Adivasis, farmers, environmentalists against the large dams that have been built on the Narmada River that flows through the Gujrat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra districts that created widespread aggression. The great Sardar Sarovar Dam is one of the greatest dams that and to be built under the Narmada Dam Project and it also was one of the focal points of the movement.

These dams were mainly built for the purpose of providing electricity and irrigation and other water supplies to the people living in these areas. If the project had served these purposes or not, we can see in this article itself.

The main modes of campaigns used in the Narmada Bachao Andolan include court actions, hunger strikes, rallies, and garnering support from notable film and art personalities.

The most eminent personalities who can even be called as the head or the leaders of the whole movement are Medha Patkar and Baba Amte who gave their full life and all the energy towards this whole issue. These people are so much recognized and are recipients of various awards including the Right Livelihood Award of 1991.

HISTORY AND EVOLUTION OF NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN

We all know that India got independence on August 15th, 1947. After getting independence India saw a new era emerging under the guidance and control of Jawaharlal Nehru who was decided to be the then Prime minister of India. Various investigations were carried out to get a conclusion on how to manage water from the Narmada river that flowed through the states of Gujrat, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra and finally into the Arabian Sea. Disputes were going on between the states regarding the sharing of water. On October 6th, 1969 Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal was formed to adjudicate on the disputes that were going on. As per

the orders of the Government of India, the tribunal investigated on the issues and after a long time of ten years responded back to the government with their valuable findings. As per the tribunal's decision, approval was given for the construction of 30 major, 135 medium, and 3000 small dams which also included the increase of the height of the Sardar Sarovar Dam. The decision was motivated by the assumption that by the end of the completion of all these projects forty million people will get better irrigation facilities and more electricity.

In 1985, after hearing about the Sardar Sarovar dam, Medha Patkar, and her colleagues, visited the construction area of the dam. After the visiting Medha Patkar and her colleagues got a clear picture of what was happening in the name of construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam. People, mostly the Adivasis were said that they only need to relocate from where they presently are, and they will be given proper facilities in the place where they are relocated to, but the reality was something different. The people or whom we call Adivasis were asked to relocate or resettle even when the procedures of resettlement were not completed by the officials. The people initially relocated, even came back to the river banks as some of them got less fertile land or they were facing problems regarding fodder. And thus, on April 2nd, 1992 all these protests were formalized, and people together started to protest in Manibeli village, 8 kilometers away from the Sardar Sarovar Dam and they took an oath that even if the waters come after us we are ready to battle even against the water. Embarrassed with the people's attitude to drown rather than settle down, Operation Manibeli was organized. Hundreds of policemen were sent down to Manibeli village to move the people from the flood zone. With threats and giving more incentives, they managed to shift 13 families out of the flood zone. But the majority of the village vowed to stay back in the village.

FORMATION OF NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN

Narmada Bachao Andolan had various groups in it. Some of the prominent groups were Gujrat based Narmada Asargrastha Samithi (Committee of the affected people), Madhya Pradesh based Narmada Ghati Nav Nirman Samithi (Committee for a new life in Narmada Valley) and Maharashtra based Narmada Dharangrastha Samithi (Committee for Narmada dam-affected people).

Narmada Bachao Andolan was also supported by various other NGO's and other famous personalities.

NBA's slogans include - Vikas Chahiye, Vinash Nahin! (Development wanted, not destruction) and "Koi nahi hatega, bandh nahi banega!" (We won't move, the dam won't be constructed).

ROLE OF WORLD BANK

November 1992, World Bank President visits Bombay

Louis Preston, the then World Bank president visited Bombay during that time. The World Bank has invested 450 million dollars in the Sardar Sarovar Dam. The anti-dam movement was rising to such an extent that pressure was too high on the World Bank. Thus, they finally decided to conduct a separate survey on the dam regarding the economic and technical terms. But the problem was that they forgot to analyze on the main concept that is social or environmental terms. Then also the committee found serious flaws in the project and recommended that the bank pull out.

When Mr. Preston visited Bombay, Medha Patkar and some of her colleagues who are closely associated with the Narmada Bachao Andolan, decided to have a meeting with Mr. Louis Preston, but they were made disappointed. Instead of him, he sent his assistant to talk with Medha Patkar and informed then that Mr. Preston has a busy schedule and is not able to meet them. Their main issue was that the Indian Government itself was against the adivasis as the government was funded by the World Bank itself. Therefore, these people wanted the World Bank to withdraw its funds. Later, the people found out that Mr. Louis Preston was engaged in attending a fashion show and he was least interested in talking to Medha Patkar and her associates. Outside the hotel, the policemen who were in charge took advantage of the absence of cameras and a brutal cane assault was done against the people and two of the activists were brutally murdered.

After all the chaos, finally, the World Bank decided to withdraw from the project.

A Victory Rally was organized in Kapadia, Gujarat on March 1993 as the news of the withdrawal of the bank reached the people.

Despite all the criticism, the dam was continued to be built. The drought-prone area of Kucch which was to be benefited from the project will receive only 2% of water; 30 years from now. Meanwhile, excess irrigation in the Command area will cause salinity and waterlog that will seriously affect the agriculture. Drastic deforestation led to siltation causing the lifespan of most of the dams to be reduced to small years. The siltation rate in the Narmada River is 365 times higher than the project was initially designed.

We all know that electricity is the backbone of Industrial Revolution. Electricity is everything for us in today's life. But it is not like that for the Adivasis or the early men. For them, electricity is something that is irrelevant and unnecessary. According to them, electricity is needed by the government to run large factories. People can't drink or eat electricity and if you must access electricity then you must pay money. Electricity and the dam have destroyed the adivasis. But the State blames the adivasis. For building dams,

the state gives the forest to big contractors to clear them down, but the state again blames the adivasis for cutting down the trees. But the adivasis use only a part of the forest. They can't cut down the whole of trees and transport it to anywhere because they lack such facilities. Before the coming up of Sardar Sarovar Dam, there were no roads in the hills. For the construction of roads, the officials were the ones who cleared the forests. Because the forests are cut down, hotness has increased rapidly and so diseases have started to spread a lot. It's considered a minimum sign of health when 33% of nation's land mass is covered by forests. Two decades ago, India's forest cover stood at 20%, today it is less than 10%.

MONSOONS 1993

DAM HEIGHT 61 CENTIMETERS

Monsoons were harsh. Monsoons were creating floods in the Narmada River. When we go deeper into the lives of the people living there, we can see that due to the flooding, police have forcefully evicted the people who were living there. They were forced to leave in the clothes they were wearing, and they couldn't even take any vessels or the things that they had.

Most of the people took an oath that they will not relocate themselves even if the floods drown them. But the government thought that the people will fly off like rats when the real floods come. But their expectations were doomed. When the real floods came, people stood by their word and didn't move. But the government was not ready to accept their defeat. The policemen forcefully threw the people out of their homes during the night. It is like the people donated their homes to the government even though they didn't want it.

Sulpaneshwar temple was drowned in the flood. It was the most important temple for the people living there. They still hoisted the flag over the top parts of the temple and showed their determination and strength.

Bombay, June 1993

The adivasis from the Narmada Valley marched in Bombay streets, claiming that the fodder, flowers, crops, cattle, wood, and grass all belong to them not the government. The village of Kutch is not getting any water. What will be the benefit of the project if the dam is going to give water to Kutch in 2025 and not now? People need water for their basic amenities and day to day need not only for future purposes. And by the end of construction of the dam, from the fishermen to normal people will be affected to the core and who will be responsible for their loss; nobody, not even the Indian Government. This is not only the problem of the people living in the Manibeli village or the Narmada Valley, this is the problem of all the people who are oppressed and those who are not given their fundamental right to life and liberty. This fight will bring those who are still silent and will realize that they must protest and revolt if their rights are violated. Right to life guaranteed by the Indian Constitution is equally applicable for all the people irrespective of their caste creed and color or the status in the society. As the officials acted as if they are least bothered about what is happening with the adivasis and the farmers, Medha Patkar and Deorambhai, decided to go on an indefinite hunger strike.

On the 14th day, the hunger strikers were arrested, and the government promised that there will be a complete revision of the project and thus the hunger strike ended. A month later also no comprehensive steps were taken to revise the project and homes of 40 adivasi families were washed away. After realizing the fact that their hunger strike went in vain, several activists including Medha Patkar challenged the government that until and unless they bring in a revision to the plan they will drown themselves in the Narmada River on the 6th of August and titled the challenge as "Jal Samarpan" – Sacrifice by Drowning. The government invoked the "Official Secrets Act" restricting the media from the site. The police then launched a hunt for Medha Patkar and others. Thousands of the activists were arrested but the key activists avoided the police arrest.

5th August 1993

When only 24 hours were only left for the Jal Samarpan, the Central Government agreed for a revision bit for the Gujarat ministers and businessmen the dam was bread and butter

Manibeli, August 1993

Medha Patkar made the people understand that now they had to submit their facts and figures related to the Sardar Sarovar Dam in front of the Review Committee through her motivational and strong speeches.

The villagers of Akhrani village resisted the Government's efforts to survey the land there suspecting that it may be a mere plan of the government to bring on evacuation. The police were so heartless that they fired on the people who opposed the movement of the police.

Dhule, November 1993

They marched and protested in Dhule stating about the brutality of the police towards adivasis. The policemen again proved how brutal they can become. The activists including Medha Patkar were brutally beaten up and were called a lot of unparliamentary words. Rehamal Vasave, 16-year-old boy was killed in the police firing.

January 1994

The sluices of the Sardar Sarovar Dam were closed, and the government ordered that none of the homes of the adivasis should be submerged unless and until proper resettlement is done.

Delhi, March 1994

The Narmada Bachao Andolan activists visited the Union minister for Environment, Mr. Kamal Nath. They raised the issue that closing the sluices is not the solution for the problem faced by the people since the water in the Narmada is still rising. Medha Patkar clearly stated that the sluices must be opened, further construction must be stopped, and the Union Minister should appoint a committee to inquire into the whole issue. But Mr. Kamal Nath went away from the discussion hall halfway through the discussion. Next was the attack on the Congress and BJP party members on the Narmada Bachao Andolan office.

Gujarat, March 1994

The chief minister Mr. Chimanbhai Patel passed away. He was a sole supporter of the Sardar Sarovar Dam. During his funeral ceremony, all the other officials swore that the construction of the dam must be completed within the planned time.

Narmada Bachao Andolan v. The Union of India

WRIT PETITION

The Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), a Non-Governmental Organization which has been in the forefront of agitation against the construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam filed a writ petition before this Court raising several issues including relief and rehabilitation. Before this Court, a grievance was raised as regards the attitude on the part of the State of Madhya Pradesh as it tried to wriggle out of its responsibilities to provide rehabilitation facilities to the ousters by offering them cash compensation. A contention was further raised that since offers to ousters affected at 90 meters of the height of the dam to be settled in the State of Madhya Pradesh had not been made, further construction should not be permitted till one year after the resettlement of these project-affected families (PAF) at 90 meters.

DECISION OF THIS COURT

A three-judge Bench of this court by a judgment and order dated 18.10.2000 in Narmada Bachao Andolan Vs Union of India and Others [(2000) 10 SCC 664] disposed of the said writ petition upon issuing various directions. The court inter alia opined that: (i) displacement of the tribal and other persons would not per se result in violation of their fundamental or other rights; (ii) on their rehabilitation at new locations they would be better off than what they were; (iii) at the rehabilitation sites they will have more and better amenities than those they enjoyed in their hamlets; and (iv) the gradual assimilation in the mainstream of the society would lead to betterment and progress.

Achievements of Narmada Bachao Andolan

The Narmada Bachao Andolan has gained a world-wide support. They have succeeded in getting rehabilitation for the people who were forced to relocate themselves. They were successful in getting the World Bank out of the project in 1993. The Narmada Bachao Andolan could halt the building of the Sardar Sarovar Dam from 1994 to 1999. The National Alliance for people's movement was formed.

STATUS OF NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN AT PRESENT

On October 2000, the Supreme Court gave the approval for the construction of Sardar Sarovar Dam. The court decided that the height of the dam be raised to 90 m. This height is much higher than the 88 m which anti-dam activists demanded, but it is lower than the proposed height of 130 m. after the Supreme Court Judgement, the Gujarat Government has taken up the construction of the dam. As the World Bank withdrew its financing in 1993, the project is now largely financed by the state governments and market borrowings. Now the project is expected to be fully completed by 2025.

CONCLUSION

The campaign done by the Narmada Bachao Andolan is a symbol of the global struggle for social and environmental justice. The activists, main people like Medha Patkar and Baba Amte taught us that when any of our rights are violated, none of the people should be silent and all the oppressed ones should raise their voices and protest for making their lives better. Even though they were suppressed to the maximum they never lost their determination to fight and they became successful in many of their objectives. As quoted by Medha Patkar on her release from jail on 7th August 2005, “It is obvious that the Government of Madhya Pradesh is all out to kill our right to land and even our right to agitate, but we still are not ready to give up”