DAMS AND DISPLACEMENT

THE NARMADA

BACHAO ANDOLAN
Narmada means „ever delightful one of the holiest rivers in the country of India“

„they say that even the site of the river will cleanse all of your sins“
Sardar Sarovar Project

- Conceived in the mid-1960s under Nehru
- Building postponed due to disagreement between three states impacted by project:
  - Madhya Pradesh
  - Gujarat
  - Maharashtra
The Narmada river - The people

- It is home to over a million people, mainly tribal people, Adivasi (original dwellers) whose grandparents lived on and farmed the land.

- Local farmers, wage labourers, crafts people and fishermen live along the river and rely on it for their livelihood.
Currently in India:

- 1/5 of pop. (200 million people) are without safe drinking water
- 2/3 of pop. (600 million people) lack basic sanitation
- 2/5 of pop. (350 million people) live below the poverty line
- With rain being sporadic because of rainy seasons and variations between different parts of the country, the idea of storing river water in reservoirs behind dams seemed to be a great solution
THE NARMADA PROJECT

- The first of the dams to be built is the Sardar Sarovar. It is considered to be one of the most important dams in the project and the biggest water development project in India.
- According to the government, the Sardar Sarovar Dam will do the following:
  - Provide safe drinking water to 30 million people
  - Irrigate 4.8 million hectares of land
  - Produce 550 megawatts of power
  - Provide 1,300 cubic-meters of water per year for municipal and industrial purposes
  - Provide a drainage system to carry away floodwaters
  - It will also take the land of 320,000 people
THE SAROVAR DAM

- Initial Budget (1986-87) **Rs 6,400 cr**
- Investors are the World Bank until 1993 (when they withdrew), Govt. of Gujarat (state where the Sardar Sarovar dam is located) and S.Kumars (India’s leading textile companies)
- Expenditure so far **Rs 14,000 cr**
- Projected Total cost **Rs 24,000 cr** Cost of main canal **Rs 4,000 cr**
- Villages submerged **14**
- Families displaced **4,600**
- Irrigation for **1.91 million hectares**
- Drinking water for **8,200 villages, 135 towns**
• It will displace **180,000** people more than projected and affect **700,000** livelihoods.
• **3,200** dams to be built along 1,200km Narmada river.
• Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan were likely to benefit from this project.

• Opponents says the DAM will displace **200,000** people and damage ecology.

• It is estimated that the project would be fully complete by **2025**.
**SUPPORTERS**

- **Indian Government** supports the building of dams.

- The **World Bank** supported the Sardar Sarovar Dam Project and loaned India $450 million. They withdrew from the project after an independent review confirmed social and environmental impacts were increasing.

- **Supreme court** gave stay order & directed the states to complete rehabilitation process.

- In 2000, Supreme court gave the final verdict of completion of construction according to its original scale.
Dalits and Adivasi (indigenous people). In accordance to their caste system they are often referred to as „untouchables“.

Many of these people are uneducated and very few can read and write.

Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), Save the Narmada Movement. The movement started in 1986 when the World Bank lent India $450 million for the Sardar project. It was started by a social worker named Medha Patkar. She is the representative for the NBA movement.

Baba Amte; a social worker whose work with leprosy has earned him much respect in the country among the tribal people and government officials.

Arundhati Roy; Booker Prize-winning author supporter of the „Save the Narmada Movement”
THEIR PRINCIPAL GROUND OF OPPOSITION

• Non fulfillment of basic environmental conditions
• Insufficient plans & studies
• Local inhabitants not being taken into confidence
• Insufficient compensation
Scope of Project

- Has increased at various points during the period b/w 1970s through now
- Consists of a complex project to build 3000 dams, including 3 major dams, along with a network of canals
- Is justified on the grounds of eliminating water scarcity in Gujarat and Maharashtra
- Madhya Pradesh most likely to face costs of submergence
- In theory, all three states will benefit from “clean” hydro-electric project
Resistance to Project

- The NBA or Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada Movement) has become the primary organization resisting the Dam
- Strategies include legal challenges, demonstration, civil-disobedience and other non-violent tactics
- Prominent help from well-known figures such as Arundhati Roy

Medha Patekar, NBA activist
Factors behind NBA challenges

- Will displace 3 million peasants and adivasis whose villages and farms will be submerged
- Will not fix water scarcity in Gujarat—only a small portion of drought-impacted lands would benefit
- No just compensation has been offered to people already displaced by project, those who will be displaced as project continues will face similar issues
- Cultural impact of re-settlement is a form of supression of adivasi cultural practices
- Government disputes these figures
Analyzing the issue of displacement statistics

- Govt. relies of figures gathered in 1979 that showed 6,147 families would be displaced.
- By 2001 this number had grown to 41,000 families (roughly 205,000 people).
- Neither set of figures includes people who would be displaced by canals (157,000) or whose livelihoods would be permanently altered by 3000 dams—fishermen, peasants, tribals who earn a living from forest produce, etc.
- No attempt to keep numbers current as legal challenges drag on.
Water use in India

- India has freshwater reserves—but two caveats important to remember
  - Only Northern river systems are perennial, rest are rain-fed
  - These data include groundwater that is disappearing in agricultural areas
- 32.5% of renewable freshwater is being used annually, this percentage continues to grow year by year
- Agricultural sector is the primary user—92%
- Domestic usage is only 5%, while Industry uses 3% of water sources
Developments in 1990s

- By the 1990s the NBA won a series of important victories.
- The World Bank which had funded $450 million for the SS project agreed to investigate the NBA and Govt. claims.
- In 1992 the Morse report commissioned by the WB indicted the Indian Govt. for a poorly conceived resettlement strategy and concluded that the NBA claims about the permanent negative impact of resettlement were valid.
- The World bank pulled out of the project and in 1995 work on the major dam was suspended.
Govt. Response

- The Indian Government found other sources of funding and re-started the project
- The height of the main reservoir was now raised by 80-85 m.
- NBA challenged the govt. again leading to a court battle in the Supreme Court
- 2001 judgment was a stunning blow to NBA
Supreme Court Judgment

• The recent decision of the Supreme Court to allow the construction of the Sardar Sarovar dam, even as thousands of families are yet to be rehabilitated and 35000 more face displacement. The Supreme Court and Government of India have turned a blind eye to this grave injustice.