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THE RIVER AND THE RAGE:

DISPOSSESSION AND RESISTANCE IN THE NARMADA VALLEY, INDIA

Alf Gunvald Nilsen

INTRODUCTION

On December 31, 2006 the concrete work on the Sardar Sarovar dam, built across the Narmada River in eastern Gujarat, was completed, with the dam standing at 120 metres (Bavadam, 2007). The following day, the Narmada Bachao Andolan – the movement which represents the dam-affected communities of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat and which has been campaigning for the cancellation of the project since the late 1980s – issued a press statement decrying the event as 'a total betrayal and a clear message for all adivasis, farmers, Fishworkers, labourers and urban poor to traders: all who are being promised rehabilitation only to be ousted, forcibly evicted in the name of development' (NBA, 2007). On January 19, the dam-builders held a ceremony in Gujarat, attended by the BJP Chief Ministers of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, in which the Sardar Sarovar dam is dedicated to the Indian nation (Bavadam, 2007). And in the Narmada Valley, 127.000 people face imminent submergence without an adequate scheme for resettlement and rehabilitation in place (NBA, 2007).

The events that unfolded in late December 2006 and early January 2007 arguably constitute the endgame of a process of dispossession and resistance that has played itself out over two decades and which bears the imprint of the master change processes, the animating social forces, and the hegemonic ideologies that have been imperative in shaping and representing the trajectory of capitalist development in postcolonial India, namely the conflict over dam building on the Narmada River. The Narmada Valley Development Project (NVDP) is a multi-purpose river valley development project which envisions the construction of more than 3.000 dams of varying sizes on the Narmada River, which winds its way from the Maikal ranges in Amarkantak in Shahol district of Northern Madhya Pradesh to the Arabian Sea at Bharuch, Gujarat[1]. Like any large river valley development scheme, the NVDP will lead to large-scale submergence of land and thus also the displacement of those communities for whom this land provides habitat, livelihood and lifeworld. And for this reason, the projects have become the object of intense contestation by the communities that stand to be affected by submergence and

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[1] Several dams in the scheme – the Tawa dam (1973), Bargi (1989), the Barna, Sukta and Kolar dams, and most recently the Indira Sagar Project – have been completed. Other dams – the Sardar Sarovar Project, the Maheshwar Hydroelectric Project, the Maan dam, and the Omkareshwar Dam – are in the process of being built.

displacement. From the mid-1980s onwards, social action groups working with dam-affected *adivasi* (indigenous) groups and gradually also in caste Hindu farming communities in Maharashtra, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh started an intense questioning of the responsible authorities as to the prospects for fair and adequate resettlement and rehabilitation. By the late 1980s, several of these groups had merged into the pan-state organization Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA; Save the Narmada Movement) which articulated a stance of total opposition to the kingpin in the project – the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) - and which further embedded its campaign against the SSP in a trenchant critique of the dominant model of development in India (see Baviskar, 1995; Dwivedi, 2006; Nilsen, forthcoming)[2].

In this article I set out to analyze the building of popular resistance to the Sardar Sarovar Project as a *movement process*[3]. The term refers to a process of contention in which subaltern social groups continually develop multiple forms of materially grounded and locally generated skilled activities around a rationality that in some way opposes the hegemonic projects of dominant social groups. As Piven and Cloward (1977: 20-1) has rightly argued, 'people experience deprivation and oppression within a concrete setting, not as the end result of large and abstract processes … it is the daily experience of people that shapes their grievances, establishes the measure of their demands, and points out the targets of their anger'. Yet, following Wainwright (1994: 7), those experiences do not merely constitute empirical instances or facts; rather, they are 'clues to underlying structures and relationships which are not observable other than through the particular phenomena or events that they produce'. Furthermore, these structures and relationship can come within the cognitive reach of movement participants if they combine and extend their 'fragmented knowledge' (ibid: 108). This, in turn, imparts a particular quality to movement processes which may manifest itself in a change in the character of the grievances, the demands and the targets of the anger of social movements. The quality in question is the *contingent potentiality* that the oppositional

[2] During the 1990s the NBA also branched out its mobilization against dams of the Narmada to contest the Maheshwar Hydroelectric Project, the Maan dam, and the Indira Sagar Project. There was also mobilization around the rights of the oustees of the Bargi dam on the upper reaches of the Narmada in the first half of the 1990s. I restrict the scope of this article to the NBA's campaign against the SSP. I also do not engage with the International Narmada Campaign against the World Bank as this has already been done fairly exhaustively by others (Sen, n.d.; Udall, 1995; Wade, 1997; Khagram, 2004).

[3] The analysis is based on research carried out between 2000 and 2003, and draws on both primary and secondary data. The primary data consists of in-depth interviews with a range of NBA activists, observations drawn from participation in NBA protests and visits to villages mobilized by the NBA, as well as a wide selection of documents produced by the movement and by individual activists and ex-activists of the Andolan. The secondary data consists of the extant body of scholarly literature on the Narmada Valley conflict.

collective action of subaltern social groups may start from forms of oppositional collective action which are bounded in scope and aims to a specific, situated and local experience of problems and grievances and then gradually develop towards more encompassing and radical counterhegemonic projects.

Such processes, if they occur, are energized and animated by the collective processes of "learning by doing" or 'cognitive praxis' that emanate from the practical concerns and dynamics of social movement activity (see Kilgore, 1999; Eyerman and Jamison, 1991). Following Barker and Cox (2002), we can conceive of a two-way learning process which revolves around (i) the knowledge that activists garner through conflictual encounters with opponents and the successes and failures of strategies deployed in such encounters, and (ii) the knowledge that activists garner through the sharing of experiences and discussions and disputes over (a) strategic and tactical choices and (b) the ideological and moral justification of opposition that is continually ongoing within social movements. The possible result of this process is an extension of 'the logic implicit in participants' skilled activity to a more comprehensive standpoint' (Cox, 1998: 7) in two specific ways. One can be called "joining the dots" – i.e. activists may develop a clearer understanding of how a situated experience of a specific problem is linked to underlying social structures and historical processes. The other can be called "joining hands" – i.e. distinct groups of activists may come to recognize each other as being affected by the same problems and, in turn, the same underlying structures and processes, and on the basis of this they may come together to oppose a common adversary. The sum effect of this is a process in which situated struggles 'shift gears, transcend particularities, and arrive at some conception of a universal alternative to that social system which is the source of their difficulties' (Harvey, 2000: 241). In order to make analytical sense of movement processes I propose the concepts local rationality, militant particularism, campaign, and social movement project. These will serve as ideal-typical categories that may allow us to grapple with the characteristics of the various phases of movement processes and the distinctive features of those mechanisms through which the collective agency of subaltern social groups is widened, deepened and radicalized[4].

A *local rationality* is a formal characteristic about the way people make sense of and engage with the world that is capable of being generalized and taking on a life of its own (see Cox, 1999a: 113; Cox and Nilsen, 2005; Nilsen, 2006). At the heart of local

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[4] Movement processes are of course *uneven* as opposed to homogenous trajectories; as Nash (1992), among others, has pointed out, a social movement is in itself a field containing a plethora of experiences and articulations of such experiences. This, however, is primarily a methodological problem: as Cox (1999b) argues, social movement researchers have to be alert to the danger of adopting an understanding of a social movement which corresponds only to that of some of the participants of that movement (typically the most prominent movement organizers). The following analysis stresses the multiplicity of experiences in the movement processes that unfolded in the Narmada Valley, as well as its fractural aspects and negotiated character.

rationalities lie subaltern needs and capacities that are constrained or encroached upon by the hegemonic projects of dominant social groups. Local rationalities, then, can be understood as those oppositional ways of doing, being, and thinking that people develop in their situated, everyday efforts to cope with, negotiate, and resist such constraints and encroachments. Crucially, local rationalities do not exist in 'hermetically sealed sites of autonomy' but in 'relational spaces of connection and articulation' (Moore, 1998.: 347) with hegemonic ways of doing, being and knowing, or, in Gramsci's (1998: 328) words, as 'a healthy nucleus that exists in "common sense", the part of it which can be called "good sense" and which deserves to be made more unitary and coherent'. Local rationalities may in turn give rise to overt acts of defiance, opposition and confrontation; the character of such confrontational episodes can be effectively grasped through the concept of *militant particularism* (Williams, 1989; Harvey, 1996, 2000; see also Cox and Nilsen, 2005; Nilsen 2006). The concept refers to how 'politics is always embedded in 'ways of life' and 'structures of feeling' peculiar to places and communities' (Harvey, 2000: 55) and hence also bear the imprint of this specificity. In other words, militant particularism refers to the struggles that emerge when a subaltern group deploys the ways of being, doing and thinking that define a local rationality in open confrontation with a dominant social group over a particular contentious issue or situation.

If lines of communication and connection are established between militant particularisms activists may come to define common strategies, solidarities and identities that are opposed to what is perceived to be a common adversary. I propose the term *campaign* to define the organization of a range of local responses to specific situations in ways that connect people across multiple such situations and construct a generic challenge to such situations (see Cox, 1999a: 109; Cox and Nilsen, 2005; Nilsen, 2006). Campaigns, in turn, are typically constructed in field-specific terms – i.e. as pertaining to a specific policy-field or a specific kind of issue – and do not automatically or for all their participants, bring into question the ways in which the field in which they organize is linked to the overarching social totality. Joining the dots between specific fields and the wider totality is, however, an inherent potentiality of movement processes. As activists discover the links between different fields of and different groups within those fields, and as they criticize the structural constraints that cause their problems or frustrate their campaigns, they may come to move beyond specific fields of contention and move towards a form of movement activity which posits the social totality as the object of challenge and transformation. The outcome may be the construction of a *social movement project* – a form of collective skilled activity which is defined by (a) the articulation of a challenge to the social totality, which (b) aims to control the self-production of society, and (c) possesses or strives to possess a capacity for hegemony

that would render (b) and thus (a) possible (see Cox, 1999: 102; Cox and Nilsen, 2005; Nilsen, 2006a: 85-7)[5].

The article starts with a broad sweep through the role of dam-building in India's postcolonial development strategy and the principal features of the political economy of capitalist development in postcolonial India so as to provide a rough guide to the wider field of force within which this process has unfolded. The analysis of the movement process that has unfolded in the Narmada Valley then proceeds in three stages as follows.

Firstly, I investigate the emergence of militant particularisms in the dam-affected communities in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat, and how this was in turn underpinned by the transformation of extant local rationalities. The analysis focuses on how this transformation was effected through conflictual encounters with local "regimes of terror" administered by low-ranking representatives of the state and the dam bureaucracy. Through this process, the Sardar Sarovar Project eventually came to be constituted as a contentious issue, and an infrastructure of contestation was built – both nationally and transnationally – in order to channel claims and demands towards the state and the channelling of information and support towards the movement.

Following this, I move on to delineate how the Narmada Bachao Andolan emerged as a pan-state campaign against the SSP. I focus on how this was driven by collective learning through conflictual encounters with state and dam-building authorities, and the production of a body of 'counter-expertise' that effectively contradicted the state's claims about the project. I also bring out how this process was criss-crossed by divergence between activist groups at the local and regional scale and convergence between activist groups at the national and transnational scale, and examine how this is represented in activist narratives. The final section of this part of the article turns to the trajectory of the campaign against the SSP between 1990 and 2000. This was essentially a decade-long attempt to force state and central governments to review the project. The demand for a reviews was underpinned most fundamentally by the belief that the project would have to be stopped due to multiple violations of legislation, norms and principles related to the rights and entitlements of dam-affected communities, the economic costs and benefits of the project, and its adverse and partially unmapped environmental impacts. The fact that these efforts were eventually defeated is then discussed in terms of what it tells us about

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[5] A social movement project that successfully develops a capacity for hegemony is likely to be associated with what Gramsci (1998) refers to as 'organic crisis', the development of dual power institutions, and the onset of a revolutionary situation animated by 'a dialectic between reactionary and progressive forces in search of a solution, a new order' (Gill, 2003: 33). However, this lies beyond both the theoretical and the analytical scope of the present article.

how social power relations affect the workings of the state and how this impacts upon the engagements of social movements with the state.

Finally, I analyze how the NBA has articulated discursive and practical challenges to the totality of the postcolonial development project in India. I argue that this challenge constitutes a reclaiming and reinvention of the development project on behalf of marginalized social groups, rather than the rejection of the project *en toto*. I proceed to a critical discussion of the challenges and barriers that this project is faced with in terms of constructing an actual capacity for hegemony in terms of its embeddedness in alliances of social movements and in terms of the extent to which the wider project for alternative development is perceived as relevant to their needs by the communities in whose name it has been articulated.

THE NARMADA DAMS AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF CAPITALIST DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

The construction of a series of dams on the Narmada River and its consequences in terms of the distribution of benefits – chiefly, but not exclusively, access to irrigation and electricity – and costs – submergence and displacement – amongst the implicated groups and locales amount to a process of what David Harvey (2003, 2005, 2006) has called 'accumulation by dispossession', Accumulation by dispossession is a term coined by Harvey (2005: 160) to refer to 'the continuation and proliferation of practices' that Marx grouped under the rubric 'primitive accumulation' – i.e. a dual transformation 'whereby the social means of subsistence and production are turned into capital, and the immediate producers are turned into wage labourers' through the separation of 'the producer from the means of production' (Marx, 1990: 875). The specific dynamics of this process differs according to which constituent element of the Narmada projects one chooses to focus on. In the case of the predominantly publicly funded SSP, accumulation by dispossession occurs through the expropriation and concurrent pressure towards the proletarianization of adivasi communities who engage in subsistence production in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh and caste Hindu farming communities who engage in petty commodity production in the Nimad region of Madhya Pradesh. Simultaneously, it will transform property rights in water in favour of dominant proprietary classes in industry and agriculture in southern and central Gujarat, a region characterized by rapid advances towards capitalist agriculture and industrialization since Independence – an advance which is directly reflected in the considerable political influence of the Patidar community which has spearheaded this transition (Dwivedi, 2006; Nilsen, 2006; see also Breman, 1978/9a/b, 1985, 1996 and Shah, 1990).

Now, the case of accumulation by dispossession in the Narmada Valley is not singular. Dam-building has figured centrally in the development strategies of the Indian state, in particular during the years of the Green Revolution: 1121 of the 1348 large dams built in India since Independence were erected between 1965 and 1979. The maldistribution of costs and benefits and the dispossessory ramifications that characterize the SSP have in turn been a generic feature of dam-building in India. In terms of the impact of dams on irrigation, the India Case Study Report for the World Commission on Dams argues that this has been 'almost entirely distributional' – that is, actual increases in irrigation and agricultural yields have been systematically overestimated and the benefits actually generated have been cornered by powerful groups in the command areas of the dams, all at the expense of the public and the project-affected people (Rangachari, Sengupta, Iyer, Banerji and Singh, 2000: 56-7; see also Singh, 1997: Chapter 4). Moreover, in terms of financial costs and benefits, the scenario has been one of both rising capital outlays and rising financial losses (Rangachari et. al., 2000: 60-65; Singh, 1997: Chapter 4). As the India Case Study Report argues, dams are largely funded with public money and thus the operational losses in question amount to 'implicit subsidies which the state governments provide to beneficiary farmers' (Rangachari et. al., 2000: 65). An exact calculation of the number of people displaced by large dams since Independence is difficult to provide, but ranges somewhere between 21 and 33 million people. The record on resettlement and rehabilitation (R&R) is a dismal one. In spite of the extensive powers of expropriation bestowed upon the state, there is as of yet no national legal framework protecting the rights of PAPs or laying down uniform national guidelines for the conduct of R&R (Parasuraman, 1999; Cernea, 1999). Thus, the actual trajectory of the majority of those displaced by dams has been that of migrating to urban centres and prosperous farming areas in search of waged work (Singh, 1997). Finally, displacement does not come with a neutral social profile. Scheduled Tribes – i.e. adivasis – constitute roughly eight per cent of India's population, but nevertheless make up 40 to 50 per cent of those displaced by large dams after Independence. An additional ten per cent are dalits (Whitehead, 2003: 3; Singh, 1997: 190).

Hence, whereas the considerable thrust towards dam-building in postcolonial India was very much an integral aspect of the overall effort to overcome the colonial legacy of limited structural transformation of the economy – Nehru famously referred to dams as "the temples of modern India" – this thrust was by no means an unequivocal success. Rather, the skewed patterning of the distribution of costs and benefits points to how 'an integrated feature of large dam projects' (Whitehead, 2003: 6) has been to concentrate 'hydraulic property rights' (Singh, 1997) in the hands of an emergent class of capitalist farmers whilst disproportionately dispossessing subaltern social groups from access to

means of production and thus generating pressures towards their proletarianization. This dynamic, in turn, is not singular to dam-building. Rather, it is linked to a fundamental and generic aspect of the political economy of Indian capitalism in which state-led development strategies have resulted in the transfer and concentration of productive resources to and among the uneasy coalition of industrial capitalists, rich farmers and the politico-bureaucratic elite which constitutes India's dominant proprietary classes (Bardhan, 1998; Kaviraj, 1997; Vanaik, 1990) whilst simultaneously abrogating the access of subaltern and popular classes to such resources. The process of resource transfer through state development strategies represents an attempt to secure the expansion of capital in the context of a 'passive revolution' (Chatterjee, 1986, 1993; Kaviraj, 1997) – that is, in a context characterized on the one hand by the structural weakness of the emergent bourgeoisie in relation to traditional dominant classes and on the other hand by the enfranchisement of the subaltern social majorities at the coming of independence. Rather than launching a direct attack upon these groups, the emergent bourgeoisie opted for 'a "molecular transformation" of the old dominant classes into partners in a new historical bloc and only a partial appropriation of the popular masses, in order first to create a state as the necessary precondition for the establishment of capitalism as the dominant mode of production' (Chatterjee, 1986: 29-30). Now, as much as the democratic character of India's polity precluded a direct and offensive usurpation of direct producers it was nonetheless necessary to achieve a 'degree of dissociation of direct producers from their means of production' (Chatterjee, 1993: 210) and this in turn implied the use of the powers vested in the state. In short, dominant proprietary classes have sought to overcome this dilemma of dissociation by shaping the workings of development strategies devised under the guise of the supposedly objective science of planning and implemented in the name of "the greater common good" of the nation so as 'to enhance the power of those who were the most important holders of property rights – in the first place, the industrial and commercial bourgeoisie and the rich peasantry – and of the bureaucratic office holders whose discretionary powers were increased with the greatly expanded role of the bureaucracy as a whole' (Corbridge and Harriss, 2000: 65). This process, however, has not proceeded without contestation. Beginning in the early 1970s, a new wave of popular movements emerged in India to contest the dispossessory and exploitative dynamics of state-led capitalist development (Basu, 1987; Omvedt, 1993; Vanaik, 1990; Katzenstein and Ray, 2005). The Narmada Bachao Andolan has been central to this trajectory, and in the following I seek to unravel its trajectory from the emergence of militant particularist struggles for information and rehabilitation to pan-state anti-dam campaign embedded in a wider movement project for alternative development.

MILITANT PARTICULARISMS AND RIGHTFUL RESISTANCE

The origins of the movement process that was to unfold in the Narmada Valley can be traced to the early and mid-1980s, when trade unions and social action groups sprang up in the dam affected adivasi-communities of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Gujarat, and later on in the caste Hindu communities of Nimad in the western part of Madhya Pradesh. These organizations constitute the militant particularisms from which the anti-dam campaign emerged, and in this section I investigate their trajectories and character, and the way in which they emerged through transformations of local rationalities.

Confronting Everyday Tyranny: The Khedut Mazdoor Chetna Sangath

A significant part of the foundation for the Narmada anti-dam campaign was laid through the mobilization of resistance to a local state-society relationship which I shall refer to as *everyday tyranny*: a matrix of violent and coercive practices through which low-ranking state officials made extortive claims of the adivasi communities of Alirajpur, Madhya Pradesh.

Forest resources are of crucial importance to adivasi communities: they provide fuel, building materials, grazing grounds, and, most importantly, the forest is used for the clearing of additional fields for cultivation – *nevad* – to complement village cultivation. This, however, is deemed as an encroachment by the authorities as national forest legislation severely curtails the customary use rights of forest-dwelling communities (see Gadgil and Guha, 1993; Prasad, 2004). The illegality of such customary practices in turn became a lever for local officials to extract bribes. Villagers who were caught by police or forest rangers doing agriculture would invariably be taken to the nearest police station where they would be beaten severely and have a case filed against them for encroachment. A hefty bribe would be demanded for the case to "disappear". In the village of Kakrana, a leading KMCS activists recounted how, if villagers were caught walking along the road carrying a sickle, they would be beaten up and the officials would demand money from them if they wanted to avoid criminal charges. Similarly, if people were caught with an axe, or if they were carrying firewood, they would risk beatings and extortion. In fact, in Kakrana, it seems that the extortion of bribes was regularized in the sense that the forest guards would charge a fixed amount from the village for allowing people to use the forests for agriculture and grazing (interviews and field notes, March 2003).

Coercion and extortion were also related to a range of cultural practices. For instance, whilst home-brewed liquor plays an important role in the many festivals that dot the adivasi calendar, domestic brewing of liquor is illegal. In Kakrana, this meant that

the local police outpost would make every household in a given hamlet send them chickens as a bribe to turn a blind eye to these activities. Also, if the police came across someone brewing liquor, they would take the person to the police outpost, bash him up and demand a bribe of 1.000-1.500 rupees. Similarly, the adivasi marriage system provided local officials with a lever for extortion. In the adivasi communities, men and women themselves choose that they want to live together, and the woman then comes to live with the man and his family. In such an event, the police would call the man's parents to their quarters to enquire whether the girl came to their house of her own free will. To "prove" that this was the case, the family would have to pay a bribe of 1.000 rupees, five or six kilos of flour, onions and ghee (interviews and field notes, March 2003).

What is striking in the accounts of villagers who had been subjected to coercion and extortion is the extent to which this had become a regularized feature of the relationship between adivasis and state officials. Giving and taking bribes had become an integral aspect of daily routines. Everyday tyranny was predicated upon a local rationality in which the capacity of the state officials to unleash violent punitive sanctions in the face of belligerence or defiance was well-known, and to resist it was unthinkable. This was bolstered by the living memory of the defeat of the Lal Topi Andolan, a socialist-led movement which registered important successes in mobilizing and empowering adivasi communities in the 1950s-60s, but which dissolved in the 1970s as its leaders were co-opted by the Congress party and the mass base subjected to severe repression (interview, Rahul Bannerjee, April 2003; see also Baviskar, 1995: 83-4; Bannerjee, 2003: 15-16)[6]. The alternative, then, became to live with extortion and to integrate deference into everyday ways of doing and being (see also Baviskar, 1995: 178; Bannerjee, 2003: 1).

However, this scenario changed dramatically as a transformative process of confrontation between the local representatives of the state and the victimized communities, mediated by urban, educated activists, got underway in the early 1980s. This process was instigated when two young men – Khemraj and Amit – who had grown disillusioned with what they perceived as the apolitical and technical approach to community development practised by many NGOs arrived in Alirajpur in an attempt to engage with adivasi communities in the area. They quickly struck up a relationship with Khemla, a young adivasi man who was known for his assertiveness in relation to the local

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[6] This should not be read as a portrayal of adivasis as essentially and intrinsically passive and bereft of a capacity for oppositional agency; as Baviskar's (1995) work makes clear, the Bhil and Bhilala adivasis of western India have a long and proud history of resistance to both caste Hindu and British encroachment upon their habitats and livelihoods. However, the conjuncture in the early 1980s was one in which open, collective resistance was not considered to be a feasible option, partly due to failed mobilization of the Lal Topi Andolan.

powers that be. The threesome stuck together in Khemla's village, and quickly came face to face with the workings of everyday tyranny. This is how Shankar, a former KMCS activist, recounted the early beginnings of confrontation:

> *Nearby Khemla's village, Khemla and Khemraj came across an instance where workers employed by a contractor to construct an irrigation pond were not being paid the legal minimum wage. When they confronted the contractor with this Khemla was beaten up. The news of this incident then spread in the area, and they were contacted by people from different villages throughout the area, all of whom informed them about the atrocities that were being committed by government works contractors in the region* (interview, April 2003).

This in turn sparked off new episodes of confrontation as the activists started travelling and working throughout the area. In a particular case, a villager had been picked up by officials and taken to the forest department depot in Attha, where he was severely beaten up. Khemraj and some of the villagers went to the forest depot to intervene in the situation. The forest officials beat Khemraj to a pulp, and the villagers accompanying him had to take him to hospital. About a dozen of the villagers then proceeded to sit on a dharna in front of the tehsil offices; press notes were circulated, and the incident became news. Eventually, the Chief Minister (CM) of Madhya Pradesh responded by suspending six of the forest guards. A meeting was arranged between the activists, the CM and the president of the Congress Party in M.P and the head of the state forest department was sent to the town of Mathvad. He was met by a large crowd who inquired into the legality of the violent and coercive practices of the forest guards, and in response implored the villagers to file complaints if such incidents took place again (interview, Shankar Tadvala, April 2003).

In this process, three things seem to have happened which all contributed to the reversal of the local rationality which sustained everyday tyranny. Firstly, the local agents of oppression were successfully challenged and that this challenge was backed by the higher echelons of the state. The power equations between oppressors and oppressed, then, were reversed and the former lost their air of invincibility. Secondly, the winning of victories contradicted the memories of defeats in the past and showed in a tangible way that mobilizing against and challenging the state and its representatives can in fact make a difference. Resistance, then, appeared as fertile rather than futile. Thirdly, the fact that the activists who had come from the outside had stuck to their word and had been willing to put themselves in harm's way to champion the rights of the adivasi communities contrasted with the related memory of co-optation and repression. The outsiders, then, appeared as trustworthy rather than deceitful. This initial round of confrontation and mobilization became the basis for the establishment of the trade union

Khedut Mazdoor Chetna Sangath[7] and the development of a politics centred on the defence of customary use rights, the innovative revival of cultural practices, and the claiming of citizenship.

The defence of customary use rights advanced the claim that villagers should have the right to use the forest for cultivation and other purposes without fear of coercion and extortion (interview, Rahul Bannerjee, May 2003). The demand for customary use rights was in turn endowed with an environmental dimension and a political dimension. The environmental dimension centred on countering the problem of soil erosion by limiting the further clearing of fields for cultivation in the forest[8]; as one of the urban educated activists of the KMCS explained, the organization sought to balance these 'pincer-like issues' by articulating the stance that 'we won't leave our nevad, we won't break any new nevad' (interview, Chittaroopa Palit, May 2003). The political dimension was present in a demand for the devolution of certain aspects of forest management from the state to the communities themselves (interview, Kemat, March 2003). The KMCS also emphasized the revival and rejuvenation of indigenous credit institutions and labour-sharing institutions. The revival of traditional credit systems helped break the dependency upon moneylenders in market towns in the area, and labour sharing was instrumental in carrying out soil conservation and irrigation works (interview, March 2003; Rahul, n.d.). Finally, the claim for citizenship revolved around creating an awareness of the constitutional rights that adivasis were in possession of – both as citizens of the Indian state and as a Scheduled Tribe according to the Constitution[9]:

> *We were saying that "look, the state is there, it has a constitution, which provides a lot of benefits for the adivasis, which are not reaching the adivasis. So what you do is you organize and you try to see that those benefits reach you" … the Indian constitution was not known to these people; they used to think of this as a Raj, and of the police as a raja and the ranger as a raja … So basically what the KMCS has done is that we made these people proficient enough to participate in the democratic system* (interview, Rahul Bannerjee, April 2003).

All in all, the emergence of the KMCS as a militant particularist struggle can be understood as a process of *catalytic work* through which new skills were engendered and entrenched forms of consciousness changed. When I asked villagers that had been involved in the mobilization process what they had learned from their participation in the

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[7] The KMCS was registered as a trade union for the reason that government contractors are obliged by law to respond to complaints made by unions (Kela, 2006; see also Baviskar, 1995).

[8] See Baviskar (1995) on ecological degradation in Alirajpur.

[9] The Bhil and Bhilala adivasis of Alirajpur come under the fifth schedule of the Indian constitution, which accords a range of means of protection to the tribal communities of middle India.

KMCS, three themes stood out: firstly, that of *losing their fear* of the officials; secondly, that of *learning* that officials were not entitled to extort them; thirdly, that of *acquiring the skills* that allowed them to challenge everyday tyranny. For instance, Luharia, one of the central KMCS activists from the village of Jalsindhi recounted how, through their involvement in such confrontations, villagers learned how to get organized. Whenever officials would come to the village, they would gather and prevent them from entering. They gained the courage to argue with the officials, and knew how to do so. His brother Gulabia emphasized that they had learned how to speak and who to speak to. They got a lot of information that helped them in dealing with the government officials. Notu, a KMCS activist that I spoke with in Alirajpur town remarked that it was precisely through the information disseminated by the urban, educated activists that the police, the revenue officials and the forest rangers were in fact getting salaries from the government and that they were not entitled to demand bribes or beat them up that he came to learn about the principle of the equal rights of citizens (interviews, March 2003). In short, fear, submission, and deference were substituted for the emotive and cognitive resources as well as the practical skills necessary to engage in what O'Brien and Li (2005: 24) have called 'rightful resistance' – i.e. resistance centred on confronting 'power holders who compromise the ideals that justify their rule' precisely by appealing to those ideals[10]. As the analysis will show, many of these features were shared by the militant particularisms that emerged in Maharashtra, Gujarat and Nimad.

Discovering the Dam: The Narmada Dharangrasta Samiti

In this section I shift the focus of attention to the mobilization of dam-affected adivasi communities in Akkalkua and Akrani tehsils in the district of Nandurbar in Maharashtra. The guiding thread of the section is the "discovery" of the dam – the identification of the SSP as a threat to the adivasi communities in the area and its constitution as politically contentious – and the process of organization-building around this discovery.

Keshuvbhai is one of the most senior activists from the dam-affected adivasi communities of Maharashtra. This is how he depicted the situation in the villages prior to 1985:

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[10] O'Brien and Li (2006) developed the concept of 'rightful resistance' in their analysis of emergent forms of contention in the contemporary Chinese countryside, in which rural populations frame contentious claims with reference to the central policies and legitimating ideology of the Chinese state. However, as they make clear in their discussion of the applicability of the concept, it is also a form of protest which can be found in democratic settings: 'So long as a gap exists between rights promised and rights delivered, there is always room for rightful resistance to emerge' (ibid.: 24).

The villagers had heard that there was a dam coming up in Gujarat and had been told that they would get compensation in the form of land for land. The authorities claimed that their lives would improve. They were told that the Sardar Sarovar would bring great benefits: it would yield massive gains in electricity and irrigation; thousands of villages that had been in darkness would be lit, and villages that were without proper water supplies would now have water. They didn't question these claims, nor did they inquire about how the dam would impact their community in particular; they conceived of the government as an ultimate power which was not to be questioned (interview, Marc 2003).

Their understanding of the government as all-powerful was linked to the workings of everyday tyranny (see above). They were all too familiar with the coercive and extortive ways of the forest rangers, police officers and revenue officials, and the government's survey teams conducted themselves no differently: when a team of surveyors came to a village, the villagers would typically have to provide pots of home-made liquor and give up their chickens for meals. The team would also demand bribes of 40 to 50 rupees from every household (interview, March 2003). The unaccountability of the state officials also extended to the non-disclosure of information; the communities were largely kept in the dark about the extent and the impact of impending submergence (see Parasuraman, 1997).

In 1985, Medha Patkar, an action researcher from the Ahmedabad-based NGO Society for Social Knowledge and Action (SETU), arrived in Nandurbar district to conduct a survey of the dam-affected communities. Her first impression of the adivasi communities was one of a lack of information and knowledge about the SSP and its impacts: "… the first two days we walked through the Valley, we realized that people didn't even know about the project … when we moved through the villages, we realized that there was no information" (interview, June 2003; see also Patkar, 1995: 157-8). Keshuvbhai recounted the initial encounters with the outsider as being riddled with scepticism, but this gradually changed as Patkar proved her genuine commitment in practice:

On one particular occasion, a government surveying team had come to Sikka, a nearby village. As usual, they collected fifty rupees from every household, demanded that the villagers cook them a chicken meal, and got very drunk. Medha showed up in Sikka and took photographs of the ill-mannered officials. The officials got scared and ran away. When they learned about this incident, the villagers came to trust Medha and started telling her about the atrocities they suffered at the hands of state officials (interview, March 2003).

Much like in the case of the initial mobilization in Alirajpur, then, the trustworthiness of the outsider is proven through conflictual encounters with local oppressors.

The next step in the process revolved around gathering information about the impacts of the SSP and establishing an organizational structure that would make it possible to articulate grievances and demands and mobilize communities around these grievances and demands. The information-gathering was carried out by Patkar and a team of young collaborators from SETU and the affected villages. Official project documents were examined and surveys of the dam-affected villages were carried out so as to establish a yardstick by which to gauge official claims about the costs and benefits of the SSP. Simultaneously, the need for an organizational structure became evident: 'When it was discussed in three- and four-hour meetings in hamlet after hamlet, it was very clear that the issues were multiple and the people must get channels and access to the right places where they could raise these questions and get the answers' (Patkar, 1995: 158). A multi-tiered structure emerged, comprising village-level committees with representatives from each hamlet, block-level committees with representatives from each village, tehsil-level committees with representatives from the various blocks, and finally a joint committee for both the affected tehsils. Internally, this became a vehicle for discussion and decision-making, and externally it became a vehicle for representation vis-à-vis the dam-building authorities and the state government. In early 1986, the organization was formalized as the Narmada Dharangrasta Samiti (NDS) and posited the right to information as its principal demand: 'Obviously, the first issue was that the planners, politicians, and other officials had not given us information … [T]he decision was taken not to be moved out, not to accept anything from the government … till we got answers to all our questions' (Patkar, 1995: 160-1).

The NDS quickly came to be embedded in an infrastructure of contention that cut across spatial scales and boundaries. A significant part of this infrastructure was constituted by an urban support network which linked the NDS to sympathetic groups in cities throughout Maharashtra (interview, Medha Patkar, June 2003). These support groups have been of great importance for the Andolan throughout its existence in terms of lobbying authorities and providing support during direct actions and in times of crises, for instance when severe police brutality has been unleashed upon the movement and its activists. The infrastructure also extended onto the transnational scale as connections were established with Northern NGOs that scrutinized the involvement of multilateral development banks in major infrastructure projects in the South. Links were established with the Environmental Defence Fund and Survival International – a move which also added an environmental dimension to the criticism of the SSP – and activists travelled to the US to engage with the World Bank and its funding of the SSP. The advocacy network that emerged was to be of crucial importance in bringing about the World Bank's withdrawal from the project in 1993 (interview, Medha Patkar, June 2003; see also Patkar, 1995; Wade, 1997; Udall, 1995; Sen, n.d.; Khagram, 2004; Nilsen, 2006).

Crucially, links were also established with the organizations working with dam-affected communities in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat. In Alirajpur (M.P.) the SSP was shrouded by a lack of information similar to that found in the affected communities in Maharashtra. Vaniya, a village activist with the KMCS and the NBA, explained that even though they had heard of the dam, they assumed that since the river had been flowing since time immemorial, it couldn't be dammed. And anyway, if the government wanted to build the dam, they would have to let them build it – they knew very well that no one can stop the government (interview, March 4 2003; see also Dhagamwar, 1997). However, following the advice of the Gujarat-based social action group ARCH Vahini (see below) KMCS activists begun to probe into the issue in the mid-1980s:

> … we went from village to village…surveying the kind of thing. And that was the time when Medha also came there, surveying the whole area and holding meetings, and then we met at Hapeshwar and that's how the whole thing started. And then it went on in that way; surveys revealed that people don't know anything … so we must fight for this, because the M.P. or Maharashtra government is not doing anything … (interview, Rahul Bannerjee, April 2003).

Within the KMCS, the question of the SSP and its impacts "really erupted and took on a life of its own" as some activists devoted more time to mobilizing in the submergence zone in Alirajpur (interview, Chittaroopa Palit, May 2003). This, however, was not a cause for fragmentation; the sentiment was largely one of solidarity between communities inside and outside the submergence zone, and solidarity between adivasi communities in M.P. and Maharashtra (interview, Kemat, March 2003).

Much like the trajectory through which the KMCS emerged, the crystallization of the NDS as a militant particularism of rightful resistance can be understood as a process through which local rationalities are transformed through catalytic work. The initial scenario was one in which adivasi communities were treated as subjects rather than citizens by being denied information about their impending displacement, and correspondingly lacked the practical skills and cognitive resources to challenge this situation. However, via external intervention, a process of catalytic work was set in train through which a previously distant, diffuse, and unquestionable fate came to appear as contentious and potentially avoidable. Resources and skills were generated that put responsible authorities across a variety of spatial scales within reach so that information and accountability could be claimed as a matter of right. Furthermore, it is possible to discern the beginning of the process of abstraction and translation through which campaigns emerge in the interaction between the NDS and the KMCS: activists involved in militant particularist struggles identify a mutual problem, share knowledge and resources, and develop – at least in an incipient way – common identities and strategies.

In the Narmada Valley, this process also encompassed the ARCH Vahini in Gujarat and the Narmada Ghati Navnirman Samiti in the Nimad region of Madhya Pradesh.

The ARCH Vahini and the Narmada Ghati Navnirman Samiti

In the dam-affected adivasi communities in Gujarat, mobilization started in 1980 under the auspices of ARCH Vahini, a social action group funded by Oxfam to engage in health related activities in the area (Patel, 1995, 1997).

Much like in the case of the KMCS and the NDS, the Vahini activists found that the communities had little or no information about the dam and its ramifications: 'The tribals knew nothing about the project and their imminent displacement' (Patel, 1995: 182). Overcoming the scepticism of outsiders, the Vahini activists started to raise the issue of resettlement and rehabilitation and to construct a working alliance with the communities. The first major conflictual encounter with state authorities occurred in 1983, when households in several villages had started to accept the official resettlement and rehabilitation package offered by the Government of Gujarat (GoG). The Vahini activists viewed this packaged as inadequate as it failed to grant compensation to households living of and cultivating "encroached" land. When the GoG reneged on a written promise of rehabilitation, the Vahini decided to act and took the matter to the Gujarat High Court, which in turn upheld the complaint. Anil Patel (1997: 72) sums up the impact: 'The effect was dramatic. Through their practical experience, the tribals now came to know that the government was not invincible after all, and that the law could be used to their advantage as well'.

Another decisive breakthrough for the ARCH Vahini in 1983 was the establishment of contact with the World Bank. The activists drew the Bank's attention to how the rights of encroachers and major sons and the right to land-for-land compensation went unrecognized by the GoG, and in response the Bank instigated an inquiry in the SSP resettlement and rehabilitation policy. The issue of encroachers' rights continued to be significant as the three riparian states and the World Bank entered into negotiations over the SSP Loan Agreement in 1984. The Bank demanded the regularization of encroached holdings and recognition of encroachers' rights to land-for-land compensation and the riparian states finally had to concede to these demands (Patel, 1997: 75). However, the GoG failed to follow up the guidelines for R&R stipulated in the Loan Agreement and a new round of contention was sparked off with a major protest at the SSP dam site in early 1985 as well as further action in the Gujarat High Court and the Supreme Court. The conflict kept rolling until 1987, when the World Bank implemented yet another inquiry into the SSP. The Bank mission in turn made it clear that the GoG was bound by law to provide land-for-land compensation to each encroacher and the major sons of

encroachers. For the Vahini activists, this in was a decisive victory which facilitated the crafting of a satisfactory policy and strategy for resettlement and rehabilitation (Patel, 1997: 76-7).

Again, then, we see how a small-scale subversion of the received wisdoms of everyday tyranny – manifest in the non-disclosure of information and the failure to recognize the rights of adivasi to resettlement and rehabilitation – were decisive in advancing mobilization. For the ARCH Vahini, this initial concession was followed by more significant gains in terms of improving the resettlement and rehabilitation policy of the GoG. As will become clear, this had profound consequences for the relationship of the ARCH Vahini to the anti-dam campaign which crystallized a year later (see below).

As Jai Sen (2002: 2) has rightly pointed out, the Narmada Valley conflict 'is often mistakenly assumed to be about adivasis alone'; this is 'incorrect, and very substantially so'. Significantly, the movement process in the Narmada Valley has involved the Hindu communities of the Nimad region of western Madhya Pradesh, which in contrast to the adivasi communities exhibits a social structure with distinct patterns of caste- and class-based stratification, an economy based on cash crop farming, as well as deep involvement in mainstream party politics. The Nimadi scenario also differs in terms of its history of resistance to the SSP as there have been several rounds of mobilization from the late 1960s and early 1970s to the mid-1980s onwards. The mobilization that took place in the 1970s aimed to limit the height of the dam to avoid submergence in Nimad, and was deeply implicated in party politics at state level. The embeddedness in local politics – essentially rivalry between the Congress Party and the Janata Party over control of vote in the area – also led to its foundering[11]. This in turn came to constitute an impediment to new rounds of mobilization. Sitaram Patidar, a central village activist in the area, recounted the experience as follows:

> *People were frustrated when the Nimad Bachao Andolan fizzled out; there was no guidance, and they didn't really know what a movement was – they didn't have the skills of political mobilization. People were arguing that if big leaders couldn't fight the project, then who could? They thought that political struggles could only take place between states* (interview, April 2003).

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[11] When agitations were launched in 1979, Congress, which at this point in time was in opposition both in Madhya Pradesh and at the Centre, supported the protesting farmers. However, when the electoral fortunes of Congress turned in 1980 – both in Madhya Pradesh and at the Centre – they withdrew their support from the protests, and the movement in Nimad quickly petered out (see Dwivedi, 2006: 89).

Nevertheless, by the mid-1980s veteran Gandhians and Sarvodayis had formed a new organization in Nimad – the Narmada Ghati Navnirman Samiti (NGNS). The initial impact of the NGNS, however, was limited as their activities were circumscribed to awareness-raising and attempts at negotiation with the government rather than grassroots mobilization (interview, Mahesh Patel, April 2003). This, however, came to change in mid-1987 when the activists of the NDS turned their attention towards the dam-affected communities in Nimad. Medha Patkar recounted how she first encountered Nimadi activists who found themselves at as to how to create a mobilizing momentum: "I went there and talked, and they said 'we are not able to go to the villages and mobilize, so now there is no work going on, but we have formed this committee'" (interview, June 2003).

There was clearly a lack of the kind of infrastructure of contention that had evolved in the adivasi communities in Maharashtra (see above), and the initial priority thus became the establishment of an organizational structure of mobilized communities:

> *I had to go every ten or fifteen days, and a small group of the Nimad farmers, we would take rounds in the jeep and hold meetings in village after village. And in every village representatives were selected and committees were formed … Then again the tehsil level committee, whatever tehsils we covered, then the representation started* (interview, June 2003).

Indeed, in their narratives of this period of mobilization, village activists would emphasize how the decisive change that occurred was that of the development and extension the NGNS as a grassroots organization in the wake of the intervention by Patkar and the NDS. Organization-building was accompanied by a gradual change in the perception that contesting state authorities was a losing game: villagers became aware of their entitlements in terms of resettlement and rehabilitation, and they witnessed confrontations where the critical questions of Patkar and her fellow travellers left state officials without answers (interviews, April 2003). As the long-standing village activist Jaganath Patidar put it, people were gradually convinced that mobilization was both necessary and possible (interview, April 2003).

Yet again, catalytic work laid the basis for mobilization, but with some important differences from the adivasi communities. Spreading an awareness of the impact of the dam and the actual rights of the dam-affected is central to catalytic work, but whereas in the adivasi areas this started at the level of spreading an awareness of the rights inherent in citizenship, in Nimad it revolved more around resuscitating confidence in the utility of mobilizing for the right to resettlement and rehabilitation. The building of a sense of confidence in the utility of resistance is also familiar, but in Nimad the main challenge was not to so much overcome the received wisdom of everyday tyranny as to

overcome the disenchantment with resistance rooted in the dynamics of party politics. Thus, the mobilization that was initiated with the interaction between NDS and NGNS represented a break with the past in that it constituted what can be called a "non-party political process"[12].

By the mid-1980s, then, militant particularisms of rightful resistance – a resistance centred on demands for the right to information and the right to resettlement and rehabilitation in the event of displacement – had emerged in the dam-affected communities of the three riparian states, and the SSP was being questioned and scrutinized in terms of its social costs and benefits and environmental impacts. This crystallization of militant particularist struggles was in turn predicated upon a transformation of local rationalities which generated a capacity for skilled, knowledgeable and assertive engagement with the political and administrative powers involved in the design, implementation and administration of the SSP.

The emergence of militant particularisms centred on rightful resistance in the Narmada Valley resonates well with recent perspectives on the role of the state in 'subaltern politics' in contemporary India (Corbridge and Harriss, 2000: Chapter 9). In their conception of 'the everyday state', Fuller and Harriss (2001: 2, 25) argue that rather than being an entity which is present in the lifeworlds of subaltern groups only as an oppressive leviathan which serves the powers that be and their alien agenda of modernization, the modern Indian state 'plays an important role in popular consciousness and understanding …' and 'even the poor, low status and weak can sometimes benefit from their adequately competent manipulation of political and administrative systems'. What all four mobilization processes have in common is of course that they *altered* the role that the state played in popular consciousness and understanding by *generating* a capacity for 'adequately competent' interaction and engagement (see also Corbridge, Williams, Srivastava and Veron, 2005). A variation on this theme is Chatterjee's (2004) argument that subaltern assertion – or 'the politics of the governed' as he dubs it – proceeds via an appropriation of the 'demographic categories of governmentality' that constitute 'political society' in postcolonial states. In the case of the KMCS this dynamic is evident in the emphasis that was put on spreading an awareness of the rights that the communities enjoyed by virtue of belonging to the Scheduled Tribe category as well as the efforts that went into carving out a rightful space for livelihoods that did in fact 'transgress the strict lines of legality' (ibid: 40). More generally, it is a process which is evident in the way these militant particularisms claimed the right to resettlement and rehabilitation: this effectively amounted to making 'a claim to a habitation and a

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[12] The term is drawn from Kothari (1984).

livelihood as a matter of right' (ibid: 40) by claiming inclusion in the administrative category of 'project-affected person'. The hard and fast line that Chatterjee draws between 'political society' and civil society as a domain commanded by social elites does not hold up, however, as the rights of citizenship loomed large in the politics of the KMCS.

The militant particularisms that emerged in the Narmada Valley were in turn embedded in and underpinned by an infrastructure of contention. Traversing spatial scales, this infrastructure enabled activists to engage with opponents and adversaries ranging from local government officials and bureaucrats to the World Bank, and, perhaps even more significantly, it enabled activists and affected communities to communicate amongst themselves. This in turn triggered a process of discovery where common situations were delineated and common enemies named; albeit uneven and fractured, this dynamic would in turn give rise to the common strategy and common identity that underpinned the Narmada Bachao Andolan as a pan-state anti-dam campaign. It is to this part of the movement process that I now turn.

THE FORMATION AND TRAJECTORY OF THE ANTI-DAM CAMPAIGN

On August 18, 1988 wholesale opposition to the SSP was declared by a collective of organizations of the dam-affected communities in the Narmada Valley that came to be known as the Narmada Bachao Andolan. This part of the article investigates the processes of collective learning that animated the radicalization of the movement process, the processes of convergence and divergence that occurred around this radicalization, and finally the trajectory of the anti-dam campaign as it unfolded from 1990 to 2000.

Towards Dam Opposition: Confrontational Learning and Counter-Expertise

The declaration of total opposition to the SSP constituted the culmination of a protracted engagement with responsible authorities about the impacts of project in terms of the extent of submergence and displacement and the status of plans for resettlement and rehabilitation of the dam-affected communities. This occurred in a context of increasing urgency, as the Ministry of Environment and Forests had given conditional clearance for the construction of the SSP to proceed in June 1987.

In November 1987, the NDS and the NGNS submitted a joint memorandum to the Narmada Control Authority (NCA)[13], putting forward a list of demands concerning rehabilitation and information; it warned that unless answer was required before December 15, a large-scale movement would be inaugurated to put pressure on the NCA (Dwivedi, 1997: 10). Spurred by the reticence of the responsible authorities, a public rally attended by 4.000 dam-affected people was staged in the SSP project-colony in Kevadia, Gujarat to raise issues of displacement and resettlement in January 1988. However, once again the demands for information and dialogue that emanated from the rally were stonewalled: the activists were still denied access to information about these issues. By May 1988, there was a widespread impression among activists that the SSP had not been through a satisfactory project proposal, and the involved organizations called another meeting to discuss these issues among themselves and with representatives of the NCA, the riparian state governments, and central authorities. Medha Patkar (1995: 162) sums up the result of the event: 'After that meeting, we signed a common letter saying that we were giving the government two months' time, and if they did not answer all the questions in two months, we would oppose the project'. Once again, however, the state governments and bureaucratic agencies responded with silence, and this yielded the result that was promised: 'We will stop Sardar Sarovar! We will die, but will not move out; we will not leave the Narmada Valley' (NBA, 1988: 196).

Arguably, the move towards dam opposition is exemplary of how social movement politics are radicalized through conflictual encounters with its opponents – what I call *confrontational learning*. These conflictual encounters constitute a body of experience which in turn give rise to forms of knowledge and understanding of the conflict in which the movement is immersed and the opponent with which it is engaged, which leads to new answers being given to that fundamental question that activists have to pose: what is to be done? Indeed, when I asked village activists about how they arrived at the decision to move from claims for adequate information and resettlement to opposing the dam *tout court* they would typically reply that "the government couldn't answer our questions, so we became convinced that they could not resettle us" (interviews and field notes, March/April 2003). What occurred in this process of confrontational learning was a partly a "shedding of illusions" and partly a "confirmation of suspicions" about the character of state and project authorities and their capacity and willingness to conduct proper rehabilitation. Furthermore, the nature of the process also provides justification for the radicalization that took place. Recounting the events of 1988, the NBA's official declaration of opposition to the SSP emphasizes how the organizations of the affected

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[13] The Narmada Control Authority is a body that was established to monitor and co-ordinate the activities of the riparian states in relation to the implementation of the SSP.

groups had set out on a rightful quest for dialogue with the state governments, but encountered reticence and unconvincing responses:

> All have expected that government would implement in an integrated manner the common resettlement policy for all three states, with necessary government machinery and land and other resources with the co-operation of the oustees … The discussion once again made it clear that the state Governments have no policy or resources for the oustees (NBA, 1988: 194).

The underlying argument is clear: rightful claims were pursued through established channels but yielded nothing but the knowledge that this pursuit was a dead end; in light of this, activists rightly opted for more radical stances and strategies.

Closely related to this dynamic of confrontational learning was an important process of knowledge production[14]. In a context where state authorities refused to divulge information, activists themselves had to gather and process information about the SSP in terms of its social costs and benefits, its environmental impacts, and extant plans for resettlement and rehabilitation. This process revolved partly around the examination of official documents pertaining to the project, partly around the surveying of dam-affected communities, and partly around the incorporation of critical appraisals of the project generated by actors external to the movement (Dwivedi, 2006; Routledge, 2000).

The examination of official documents led to the identification of serious shortcomings and errors in the planning and appraisal of the SSP, and the surveying of dam-affected communities provided the basis for questioning and challenging the responsible authorities and their claims about the project. The outcome was a body of knowledge which can usefully be referred to as *counter-expertise* (Skirbekk, 1984). According to NBA activist Shripad Dharmidhikary this counter-expertise added momentum and weight to the conclusions drawn from interactions with state governments and the dam bureaucracy: '… more and more facts came to light, and the enormity of the environmental impacts became clear, as well as our realization that the very rationale of the project – the project benefits – were highly doubtful. All this led us to challenge the project itself' (cited in Fisher, 1995: 23). I shall review the various facets of the NBA's counter-expertise as it is presented in one of the movement's most central statements of its politics, *Towards Just and Sustainable Development* (NBA, 1992), a comprehensive document which draws together the various strands of critical knowledge that had been generated about the SSP by the early 1990.

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[14] See also Dwivedi (1999, 2006: Chapter 7) for discussions of knowledge production and knowledge claims related to the SSP.

The first point of criticism concerns *the design and planning of the project* as such. It is claimed that this was carried out without adhering to official rules regarding impact assessments, and without the level of transparency that ensures a participatory planning process (p. 5-6). This, it is argued, is expressive of the democratic deficit which dogs the Indian polity and which violates the '[r]ight to know and right to participate meaningfully' (p. 6). Next *the claimed benefits of the project* – irrigation, electricity, and the provision of drinking water – are carefully reviewed, and it is argued that official claims about benefits are systematically overestimated, and, furthermore, that the benefits that are actually generated are systematically arrogated to dominant groups in Southern and Central Gujarat. The SSP, the argument goes, is justified on the basis of a 'mirage of benefits' (p. 5). The document then proceeds to demonstrate how, conversely, *the scale of displacement* is grossly underestimated (p. 16). This is related to the fact that a number of dam-affected groups are left out of the official definition and estimation of "project-affected people". This criticism is simultaneously quantitative – it pinpoints inaccuracies flowing from inadequate appraisal – and qualitative – it challenges the boundaries of the administrative categories of the state. The next point to be addressed is *the prospects for resettlement and rehabilitation* which are claimed to be nothing short of dismal as there is 'no comprehensive plan with the details of required land, infrastructure, time frame, allocations and the required political will is in the sight' (p. 17). The 'impossibility of resettlement' is designated as an explicit breach of constitutional rights which raises the broader issue of whether it is possible to justify the erasure of habitation, livelihood and lifeworld. The document then moves on to criticize *the financial workings of the project* (p. 21). Evidence is presented that shows that the SSP fails to meet the official cost-benefit ratio that has been stipulated for dam projects, and it is argued that the project will inevitably lead to a financial crunch as it must be underwritten by lending. This scenario is posited as an immoral "daylight robbery" of public resources – the funds are funnelled to a project with an extreme social bias – in a context of severe fiscal problems (India faced a severe balance of payments crisis in the early 1990s). Finally, the document raises *the environmental impacts of the project* (p. 23) by highlighting how the SSP was given environmental clearance in spite of the fact that an environmental impact assessment had not been carried out.

In the NBA's anti-dam campaign, this body of counter-expertise has functioned as a *discourse of resistance* which challenges the attempts of dominant groups to legitimate their hegemonic projects 'as being the motor force of a universal expansion, of a development of all the "national" energies' (Gramsci, 1998: 182). I want to highlight two aspects of this here. Firstly, at the level of the specific campaign against the SSP, the rationale of the project is challenged on its own terms by the presentation scientific knowledge that stands in contradiction to the official claims about the costs and benefits

of the project. Beyond the "factual" critique, in turn, there is a normative critique which points out how negligent and opaque planning procedures and the social bias in the distribution of costs and benefits violates the officially sanctioned rights and entitlements of the dam-affected communities. Secondly, and at a deeper level, this critique strikes at the very heart of the strategy through which ideological legitimacy has been sought for development planning in India, namely the positing of planning as an essentially apolitical 'technical evaluation of alternative policies and the determination of choices on scientific grounds' (Chatterjee, 1993: 201) for the good of "the nation" at large. Pointing out the shortcomings and flaws of the expert knowledge that provides the rationale of a development project such as the SSP and justifying this with reference to scientific standards amounts to a destabilization of the status of expert knowledge in terms of its quality. Pointing out the systematically skewed distribution of the costs and benefits of the project exacerbates this destabilization by calling into question the claimed objectivity of development planning and the extent to which it is dedicated to a generic "greater common good". The sum effect is to reveal how planning has served as 'a modality of power outside of the immediate political process itself' (ibid: 202).

As a discourse of resistance counter-expertise also has an internal function in relation to the dynamics of the movement process itself. The building of a campaign revolves around bringing together a range of militant particularisms around a generic challenge to a common problem. This is done at two levels in the NBA's counter-expertise. Firstly, the critique is formulated at a pan-state level, drawing together the situations and experiences of dam-affected communities in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra and abstracting a generic situation and a generic challenge from those specific contexts: 'The oustees in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra are well-organized and are *challenging their displacement itself* … *They have termed the impending displacement as unjust, unjustifiable* and have questioned the very Public Purpose for which they are being forced out of the valley' (NBA, 1992: 19). Secondly, the critique consistently extends beyond itself and links the various problematic aspects of the SSP to wider issues. This is evident in the argument that the socially and environmentally harmful impacts of the SSP are typical of 'all the mega projects' (ibid: 19), that opaque planning is 'but a reflection of the political culture' (ibid: 6) in India, that the social bias of the allocation of costs and benefits is expressive of 'the basic resource matrix of our country' (ibid: 19), and that the financial ramifications of the SSP are morally unacceptable in a time when 'the nation is passing through severe financial crisis' (ibid: 23). In both respects, the NBA's discourse of resistance moves well beyond what might be called a "not-in-my-backyard"-stance, and in doing so it pushes towards the "joining of dots" and "joining of hands" that defines the making of campaigns. Yet, as will become

clear in the following section, the making of the anti-dam campaign was not free from fractures and unevenness.

Divergence and Convergence in the Making of the Anti-Dam Campaign

Whereas the making of a pan-state anti-dam campaign wielding a multi-faceted critique of the SSP embedded in a generic critique of dams as a development strategy represented a significant achievement in terms of the labour of translation between and abstraction from militant particularist struggles, it would be wrong to present this as a permanent and unanimous achievement; the campaign has been riddled with intersecting processes of convergence and divergence. This is evident, on the one hand, in the ARCH Vahini's departure from the anti-dam campaign and, on the other hand, the insertion of the NBA in networks of dam opposition at national and transnational scales as processes of divergence and convergence.

The ARCH Vahini was not to follow on the path towards total opposition to the SSP. This divergence, in turn, has to be understood in relation to the trajectory of the Vahini's struggle for resettlement and rehabilitation in the dam-affected communities of Gujarat in 1987-88. The decisive moment in this process was the announcement made in December 1987 by the Government of Gujarat that it would implement a policy that recognized the rights of encroachers to resettlement and rehabilitation (see above). This generated a scenario of highly differentiated circumstances:

> The new Gujarat resettlement and rehabilitation policy appeared to provide the opportunities for which groups like Arch-Vahini had lobbied, though it represented a significant step forward only for those project-affected people willing to resettle in the state of Gujarat. Unfortunately, the Gujarati policy was not matched by similar policies in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra where the Narmada Ghati Nav Nirman Samiti and the Narmada Dharangrast Samiti respectively, had their constituencies (Fisher, 1995: 23).

Since then, the ARCH Vahini concentrated its activities on monitoring the resettlement and rehabilitation of displaced communities in Gujarat.

The divergence testifies to how the immediate parameters set by differing local exigencies impacts on the processes of translation between and abstraction from militant particularist struggles and the ability to construct a generic challenge to a generic problem. This is not a smooth-running process of unification, but rather a complex process of negotiation of specific exigencies and the way in which these exigencies influence activist preferences and choices. For some activists, the question "what is to be done" is answered with reference to the possibility of gaining tangible concessions on

specific issues in the here and now; for others, opting for such concessions entails "winning ha'pennies and losing pounds" and is thus ruled out in favour of a redefinition of the stakes involved in a conflict. Divergences, splits and conflicts, then, might be seen as an integral aspect of the work of going beyond the local and specific and towards more generic forms of social movement practice.

The divergence between the ARCH Vahini and the organizations in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra in turn became the object of a struggle over legitimacy. In his account of the events of 1988, Anil Patel (1995, 1997) registers his surprise at what he considers as an ill-founded and misguided strategic shift among the organizations working in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. Referring to the gains made in Gujarat, he argues that these organizations 'stopped looking for … ways to achieve similar policies in their states and started raising doubts about the policy of Gujarat …' (Patel, 1995: 190). He also argues that this shift reflected the criticism of the GoG's policies by urban intellectuals and Western NGOs. Furthermore, he claims that the declaration of opposition to the SSP was 'as sudden as it was total' (ibid: 190). What stands out in Patel's representation of the decision to move towards a stance of total opposition towards the dam is of course the emphasis on suddenness, rupture and external interference: it was not a conclusion drawn from endogenous experience and learning, but a spurious decision without a rationale grounded in local realities. Unsurprisingly, Medha Patkar's (1995: 161-2) account of the self-same events yields a different representation of the move towards dam opposition and the Vahini's divergence. She emphasizes how the ARCH Vahini took part in the questioning of the responsible authorities that was launched up until May 1988, and only "opted out" of the process after that. She emphasizes the difference in the evaluation of the significance of the GoG's policy on resettlement and rehabilitation: 'We felt that the few resolutions by one government did not mean much since the issues were much broader. For instance, even on rehabilitation, the issues of all three states should be looked at together' (ibid: 162).

The discrepancies between Patel's and Patkar's narratives are expressive of a "battle for legitimacy" between activists who spearheaded widely different strategic choices. When Patel (1995: 189) argues that 'the tribals in Gujarat … were rearing to get the new policy implemented' he seeks legitimacy for making a strategic choice that responds to the immediate exigencies of a militant particularist struggle – i.e. a strategic choice that is informed by the perceived success of a specific challenge to a specific situation. Conversely, Patkar's stress on the necessity of viewing 'the issues of all three states' in concert reflects a desire to legitimate the choice to construct a generic challenge which abstracts from local specificities and immediate exigencies. It should be noted, however, that in June 1995 the ARCH Vahini withdrew from the Gujarat Government Committee on Resettlement. Anil Patel then commented the decision as

follows: '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' (cited in Dwivedi, 2006: 177).

In contrast to divergence at the local and regional scales, the formation of the anti-dam campaign was deeply embedded in a process of convergence at the national and transnational scales.

At the transnational scale, McCully (1998: Chapter 10; see also Wade, 1997; Khagram, 2004: 183-9) notes that an international anti-dam movement started to materialize in the early and mid-1980s. After WWII, and particularly through the decades of the 1970s, 80s and 90s, anti-dam struggles occurred in the US, Tasmania, Eastern Europe, Brazil, Thailand, Norway, and India. A transnational structure that co-ordinated and supported these struggles started to evolve in the early 1980s, following the initiatives of US environmentalists. These individuals and organizations were of course important in the early formation of a transnational infrastructure of contention for militant particularisms that emerged in the Narmada Valley in the 1980s, and also in the the late 1980s and early 1990s (see Sen, n.d.; Wade, 1997; Udall, 1995; Khagram, 2004). At the national scale in India, campaigns against dam projects emerged on a significant scale in India during the 1970s (Khagram, 2004: Chapter 2; Dwivedi, 2006: 143-51). In terms of the campaign against the SSP, these developments are perhaps most evident in the form of what is generally known as the Anandwan Declaration of 1988. Increasingly attentive to the protests against large dam projects, the veteran Gandhian social worker Baba Amte spearheaded the organization of a conference to discuss the politics of dam opposition in Anandwan, Maharashtra. This resulted in the Anandwan Declaration – a resolution signed by 91 persons that called for a halt to the building of large dams (Sen, n.d.: 11; Khagram, 2004).

The question, then, is how these developments were perceived by activists of the NBA. Intuitively, one would perhaps assume that this was viewed in positive ways as the opening up of an enabling political *space*. Leading NBA activists, however, were typically very keen to downplay the importance of dam opposition at a national scale to the evolution of the campaign against the SSP. Medha Patkar, for instance, commented on the significance of Anandwan in the evolution of the NBA's anti-dam campaign:

> *"See, some people say that because of that, we started opposing the dam. Not at all. Position since beginning was that the questions should be raised, and depending on the dialogue we were taking a position. Thirty-first July 1988 was the meeting in Anandwan, ok? And on third August we were to take a decision … And on thirty-first, we had almost decided, but because that meeting was to be held, I could not say there that we had decided, so I said "we've almost decided" … actually that time I appealed to Baba to come*

to Sardar Sarovar area, but Baba said very crudely, you know, that, 'Sardar Sarovar, what is there in Sardar Sarovar? It's already done, finished. Now everyone should concentrate on Narmada Sagar'" (interview, June 2003).

Similarly, Chittaroopa Palit, another leading urban educated activist with the Andolan stressed how the organizations of the dam-affected communities faced criticisms from external milieus for not opposing the SSP:

"… there was a lot of discussion in many forums, and in fact when I was coming there was a lot of criticism of this movement [inaudible] and friends in Delhi told me "don't you know they're working for rehabilitation, they don't have any real conception of the opposition to dams" and so on" (interview, May 2003).

The emphasis in both responses is on the autonomy of the strategic choices made at the crucial conjuncture of 1988.

More than anything else, I interpret this as a defensive representation which is expressive of the way in which the NBA has been regularly confronted with attacks from opponents claiming that the politics of dam-opposition has been foisted on the affected communities by urban and foreign milieus. What can certainly be established is that the NBA crystallized as an anti-dam campaign at a time when opposition to large dams emerged at national and transnational scales, forged links with these initiatives, and in turn became a crucial node and reference point for the global anti-dam movement[15]. As such, the embeddedness of the Narmada anti-dam campaign in a multiscalar political space testifies to how such spaces enable the imaginaries, rationalities, and skills that activists engender in situated struggles to travel, and how this underpins the defining trait of campaigns, namely the construction of general challenges to general situations.

The Trajectory of the Anti-Dam Campaign from 1990 to 2000

The NBA's campaign to stop the SSP unfolded over the decade from 1990 to 2000. Following an initial phase in which authorities were lobbied and petitioned, the NBA in 1990 launched the demand that the Government of India should order an extensive review of the SSP, assessing its technical feasibility, cost-benefit equations, and its social and environmental impacts; during the course of the review, construction on the dam

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[15] The centrality of the Narmada movement in the global anti-dam network was made evident by the Manibeli-declaration of 1994, in which more than 200 NGOs from 43 countries called for an end to World Bank funding of large dams.

should be halted. This demand was accompanied by the adoption of a 'repertoire of contention' (Tilly, 1977) based on various forms of non-violent direct action strategies.

The struggle for review unfolded in four phases, the first of which started in 1990 with the NBA putting pressure on the governments of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra to implement a review of the SSP (Jayal, 2000; Khagram, 2004). In March 1990 the NBA organized a road block of the Bombay-Agra highway in Madhya Pradesh. Some 10.000 activists blocked traffic for 28 hours, demanding that Sunderlal Patwa's BJP government implement a review. The Patwa government heeded the activists demands and declared that not only would it push ahead with review at state level, it would also put forward the demand to the central government. Later the same month a *dharna* – a sit-in demonstration – was organized in Bombay to put similar pressure on Sharad Pawar's Congress government. In both cases promises were elicited to the effect that a review would be implemented, and that no submergence would take place until land had been identified for resettlement and rehabilitation. However, these promises failed to yield practical consequences (Patkar, 1995: 164-5, 170; Jayal, 2000: 171).

The demand for review then entered its second phase as frustrated activists upped the ante and shifted their focus to Delhi and V. P. Singh's Janata Dal government. This was significant, as this was a government 'elected on a mandate of change and with social movement backing' (Omvedt, 1993: 274); indeed, during the campaign for the general election in 1989 V.P. Singh had shown himself as being sympathetic to the cause of the NBA (Jayal, 2000). The protests started with demonstrations outside the offices of the Ministry of Labour and a three-day rally at the Delhi Boat Club in April (Patkar, 1995: 165). The efforts, however, were of little consequence, eliciting only 'contradictory and confusing' ministerial statements (Jayal, 2000: 171). Then, from May 14 to May 18, a sit-in demonstration was staged outside V.P. Singh's residence in Delhi. After four days, the activists were invited into the PM's residence to make their case. Singh then agreed to initiate a review of the SSP (Khagram, 2004: 122). However, this potential breakthrough was quickly stymied as the Chief Minister of Gujarat, Chimanbhai Patel – political spearhead of the Patidar agroindustrialists of South and Central Gujarat, a staunch supporter of the SSP, and at this point in time a Janata Dal member – intervened with massive counter-rallies demanding a speedy completion of the project[16]. This display of (apparent) popular support for the SSP and its potential ramifications in terms of the fortunes of electoral politics rattled V.P. Singh, who quickly reneged on the promises of review (Khagram, 2004: 122; see also Patkar, 1995: 165).

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[16] The counter-mobilization was heavily funded by the Gujarat Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Jayal, 2000: 172).

As Baviskar (1995: 207) has pointed out, the NBA now found itself involved in 'a race against time' as the construction of the SSP was proceeding without impediments. This was the context for one of the NBA's most spectacular and dramatic protest actions: the *Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra* (March of Struggle for People's Development). On December 25, 1990, some 6.000 men and women from the dam-affected communities set out from Rajghat, just outside the town of Badwani in M.P. towards the dam site 'to physically stop the work on the dam, by offering peaceful *satyagraha* at the dam site and thereby pressure the government to comprehensively review the SSP' (NBA newsletter 1991, cited in Dwivedi, 1997: 14). The march was stopped after six days, at the town of Ferkuwa, on the border between M.P. and Gujarat. This became the site for a crucial stand-off between the NBA and state authorities. Six activists went on hunger strike on January 7 as there had been no response to the demand for review. The strike lasted for 21 days, with activists calling off the hunger strike and withdrawing from Ferkuwa on January 28. The central government announced that it would set up an all-India review panel for the Narmada dams, and the World Bank assured activists that it would implement an independent review. Whereas these might seem as significant achievements, opinions remain divided on the outcome of the Sangharsh Yatra. As the minority government of Chandra Shekhar at the Centre was dependent upon support from Chimanbhai Patel in Gujarat, nothing substantial came of the promise of a review panel in the immediate aftermath of the march. For an observer like Jayal (2000: 174) this constitutes yet another victory for the social forces supporting the SSP in Gujarat. Others assert that securing guarantees of a review from the World Bank was an empowering and encouraging experience (Khagram, 2004: 124). The activists themselves, however, expressed their disillusionment by turning away from confronting the state and central governments and towards mobilization and protest centred on the dam-affected villages.

The demand for review by state and central governments lay dormant from 1991 to 1993 as activist energies were focused upon mobilization in the villages and interaction with the World Bank review team that arrived in the Valley in 1992. The third phase of the demand for review was instigated in 1993, in the wake of the withdrawal of World Bank funding for the SSP: 'A new phase began, with the NBA now face to face with the Indian state' (Palit, 2003: 88). The demand for review was again raised, but as before both state and central governments failed to respond. As a reaction, activists of the Andolan launched an indefinite fast in Bombay on June 3, lasting for three weeks until the government announced that it would initiate a review of the SSP. There was, however, no tangible follow-up of this announcement and the NBA posed the ultimatum of *Jal Samparan*: if a review of the SSP was not declared by August 6 a group of activists would drown themselves in the Narmada (Sangvai, 2000: 64). Pressures mounted on the

central government as the deadline drew near, and on August 5 a statement was issued to the effect that a Five Member Group (FMG) would carry out a review of the project. The Andolan's *Jal Samparan* was called off (Jayal, 2000; Khagram, 2004). However, the FMG had its wings clipped before it could fly. As much as the group went ahead with its work, the GoG and the dam-building authorities boycotted the work completely. When the FMG's report was finally made public in December 1994[17] it lent support to the NBA's criticism of the project, but this was largely without consequences even though there was significant fragmentation at the top: in Gujarat, Chimanbhai Patel had passed away and, in M.P., the Congress and Digvijay Singh, brandishing a pro-civil society agenda, had won the state elections.

The fourth and final phase of the struggle for a review of the SSP started in May 1994 when the Andolan brought a public interest litigation case before the Supreme Court claiming that the SSP would result in a violation of people's basic right to life and livelihood and should therefore be stopped (Khagram, 2004: 134)[18]. In January 1995, after an initial round of hearings, the Supreme Court solicited another report on the SSP from the FMG. When the report was submitted it claimed that the SSP could only be completed if the studies and plans on resettlement and rehabilitation and environmental impacts were completed. In May 1995 the Supreme Court imposed a stay on the dam while it examined the report (Khagram, 2004; Jayal, 2000). Several rounds of hearings were held throughout 1995 and 1996, and in February 1997 an indefinite stay was imposed on the construction of the SSP. The Supreme Court's intervention did not go unnoticed among the supporters of the SSP in the legislative: senior Members of Parliament expressing their dismay over the court's alleged meddling in inter-state affairs when, in the hearings of March 1997, the SC refused to lift the stay first imposed in 1995 (Jayal, 2001: 223). The Supreme Court, however, did not budge. Nevertheless, the Andolan's turn to the Supreme Court did not fare well in the end. On October 18 2000, the Supreme Court announced a 2 to 1 majority judgement which ruled that the construction of the SSP 'will continue as per the Tribunal' and that '[e]very endeavour shall be made to see that the project is completed as expeditiously as possible' (cited in NBA, 2000a: 7, 9). The Supreme Court, then, brought a definite end to the campaign to stop the SSP.

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[17] Whereas the FMG's report was submitted to the central government in June 1994, it was not made public until December that year, in the wake of pressure from the NBA.

[18] This was not the Andolan's first engagement with the judicial system – it had backed and filed petitions in the local and High Courts of the states on issues related to various violations of the legal parameters that the Tribunal Award had established for the SSP in 1979 – but, significantly, it was the first time the basic agenda of the movement, that of stopping the construction of the SSP, had been passed on to the judiciary.

Jai Sen (n.d.: 18) has argued that the Andolan's demand for a review of the SSP amounted to the adoption of 'a more moderate position and strategy' compared to all-out opposition to the dam. This move, he asserts, was 'a tactical one, probably made for two main reasons: to restore the movement's declining credibility and manoeuvring room because of its adamant "no-dam" position, and also to give the [World] Bank more room to manoeuvre (n.d.: 18)[19]. This, I think, is a flawed interpretation of the NBA's strategic orientations. First of all, the rationale for the demand for a review of the project seems to have been firmly rooted in the substantial body of counter-expertise that had emerged since the late 1980s. Citing obvious discrepancies between official norms and regulations and the actual realities of the project in terms of economic costs and the impact of submergence and displacement, Medha Patkar (1995: 170) comments that 'in the context of this overall reality' the best thing to do was 'to challenge the government … through a democratic process'. The demand for review, it seems, was neither a move away from the politics of dam opposition, nor was a review considered an end in itself. It was, rather, a strategic move in which the demand for review functioned as a means by which to achieve an end, which remained that of stopping the SSP. A closer consideration of this strategy reveals a lot about the rationality around which the Andolan's anti-dam campaign was constructed.

The demand for a review of the SSP constitutes what Dwivedi (1997: 28) has called 'jury politics'. Jury politics basically revolve around the presentation of a body of evidence about an object of contestation – in this case, a large dam – to a committee of experts and specialists that assess this evidence and then in turn function as a jury in that, based on the assessment of this evidence, they pass judgement on the claims that have been made about the object of contestation. As a strategy it is predicated upon a perception of the state to actually function as jury, i.e. as being able to assess and evaluate a body of evidence for or against a "defendant" in an unbiased way, and pass judgement on the "defendant" solely on the basis of that evidence. Indeed, when Patkar explains the motivation for adopting the demand for review as a key strategy, she refers to the belief that:

> … when people raised focused issues and declared their commitment, a representative democratic government … would really respond across the table, possibly via neutral moderators as we were proposing or any other mutually agreed-upon process. That is why in March 1990 we had decided not to go on saying, "No dam, no dam" but to propose a definite review process as a way out (1995: 170).

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[19] The World Bank was at this point in time considering the implementation of an independent review of the SSP.

Much the same can be said about the turn to the Supreme Court. The submission of public interest litigation was in part influenced by a perception of the Supreme Court as an institution that often backed the claims of social movements and other actors engaged in judicial activism (Jayal, 2000; Randeira, 2003a/b)[20]. As Chittaroopa Palit (2003: 93) put it, the Supreme Court that the NBA approached in 1994 was characterized by 'a more activist judiciary … which allowed for a tradition of public interest litigation that gave access to the poor and dispossessed …'. In many ways, this represents a continuation of the rightful resistance of the militant particularist struggles of the early phase of the movement process; as we saw, these were very much predicated upon using the principles, categories and ideologies of the liberal-democratic state to claim access to livelihoods, information, and resettlement and rehabilitation as a matter of right. What activists did in the anti-dam campaign was to appropriate norms and principles that were simultaneously increasingly globalized and increasingly integrated into the constitutions of states regarding human rights, indigenous people, environmental protection, and resettlement and rehabilitation. They then sought to hold the Indian state accountable to these norms and principles *via* institutional mechanisms provided by the state.

According to Khagram (2004: 3) anti-dam campaigns are likely to be 'much more effective in democratic institutional contexts' as these 'offer greater opportunities to organize and gain access to decision-making processes …'. Yet the trajectory of the Andolan's demand for review – a trajectory Khagram in fact engages with at length[21] – suggests otherwise. I am not arguing that the state operated as a closely sutured behemoth throughout the decade from 1990 to 2000. Indeed, it is quite possible to tease out cracks and fissures in the state-system in the process, for example in the apparent willingness of Chief Ministers and Prime Minister to inaugurate reviews. However, the significant dynamic is that of the closing of the ranks which occurred at every juncture where the push of the dominant proprietary classes and their representatives came to shove. The access of activists to decision-making processes was effectively abrogated. A similar pattern can of course be found in the NBA's engagement with the Supreme Court. Activists were prompted onto the judicial path by the Supreme Court's track record on public interest litigation, and as we saw the SC refused to lift the stay on the dam in the face of parliamentary discontent. However, all this was effectively brushed aside with the SC verdict of October 2000. Indeed, this verdict not only states that the SSP should be

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[20] As both Dwivedi (1997) and Jayal (2000) note, another important factor driving the turn to the Supreme Court was also the widespread resistance fatigue that was starting to undermine the NBA's capacity for mass mobilization.

[21] Yet, curiously for a book published in 2004, Khagram's study makes no mention of the Supreme Court ruling of October 2000. He is content with establishing that with the turn to the Supreme Court, the SSP conflict 'returned to one of India's critical democratic institutions – the Supreme Court' (Khagram, 2004: 135).

completed as quickly as possible, it also made it very clear that the Supreme Court was not to serve as an arena for contesting state development strategies: 'It is for the government to decide how to do its job … It is now well established that the courts, in the exercise of their jurisdiction, will not transgress into the field of policy decision' (cited in NBA, 2000a: 3-4). Once again, the ranks of the state-system were closed at a crucial juncture, and the closure went in the favour of dominant social groups[22]. Thus, whereas the rationality around which the anti-dam campaign was constructed marked a continuation of the rationality which animated the militant particularist struggles, the failed outcome of the campaign warrants some reflection, especially when contrasted with the success of rightful resistance in the case of the KMCS.

If we look again at the case of the KMCS and its mobilization around customary rights and citizenship, it certainly testifies to the potential for empowerment which resides in subaltern appropriations of what Abrams (1988: 82) calls the 'state-idea' – i.e. the representation of the state as a coherent body external to society which neutrally arbitrates in conflicts between equals. It also demonstrates that the 'state-system' – i.e. the 'palpable nexus of practice and institutional structure centred in government' (ibid.: 82) – is not a tightly sutured leviathan, and that it may well be 'made to do the bidding of India's lower orders' (Corbridge and Harriss, 2000: 239). However, in the case of the Andolan's struggle for review of the SSP and its turn to the SC the state-system appears more as "a committee for managing the common affairs of the bourgeoisie", and the state-idea as an ideological veil which 'contrives to deny the existence of connections which would if recognised be incompatible with the claimed autonomy and integration of the state' (Abrams, 1988: 77).

The explanation for these divergent outcomes is, I think, quite straightforward. The KMCS' offensive against the everyday tyranny of the local state – significant though it was for the communities involved – was centred on a claim to which the higher echelons of the state-system could concede without undermining its own authority and without going against the interests of extra-local proprietary elites. Indeed, ceding to the KMCS' demands can be seen as an exercise in bolstering the state-idea as such. The NBA's campaign against dam-building, however, was first of all directly pitted against the vested interests of the politically powerful proprietary elites of South and Central Gujarat and, secondly, embedded in a generic opposition to dam-building as a development strategy, as well as the critique of the wider model of development of which this strategy was a part. In short, the campaign against the SSP struck against the heart of the dynamic of resource transfer which has characterized India's passive revolution and the role of the state as an integral modality in this process; in so doing the campaign defied

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[22] See Randeira (2003a/b) on the increasing degree of alignment of the Supreme Court with the executive and legislative branches of the state in Indian politics.

'the permanence of existing structures and relations' (Kamat, 2002: 158). This of course throws up significant questions of how social movements engage with the state and what activists can expect from these engagements, and I seek to address them in the concluding discussion below.

CONSTRUCTING A SOCIAL MOVEMENT PROJECT FOR ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT

"Vikas Chahiye, Vinash Nahin" – "We Want Development, Not Destruction": this was the slogan given at the National Rally Against Destructive Development in the M.P. town of Harsud in September 1989, a massive organizing effort where some 50.000 activists from across India were brought together, and where the NBA figured prominently. The slogan also represents a crucial ambition in the politics of the Andolan, namely the embedding of the anti-dam campaign in a wider social movement project for alternative development. In the following I firstly investigate how the NBA has articulated a challenge to the dominant direction and meaning of development through discourses and practices of alternative development. I then proceed to a critical discussion of the extent to which the articulation of such a challenge has been buttressed by the development of a genuine capacity for hegemony.

Articulating a Challenge to the Totality: Discourses and Practices

It has been fashionable among critics from poststructuralist and postcolonial quarters to posit India's new social movements as the authors and actors of a political project that simultaneously represents and points towards 'an authentic site of autonomous insurrection beyond development' (Moore, 2000: 171). They are, in Escobar's (1995) notorious formulation, engaged in the crafting of 'alternatives to development' (see e.g. Parajuli, 1991, 1996)[23]. However, as I show in the following, the discourses and practices of resistance that have been articulated in the Narmada Valley suggests that these claims are fundamentally out of sync with realities on the ground.

In conjunction with the monsoon satyagraha[24] of 2000, the NBA staged a celebration of India's Independence Day on August 15. In the adivasi village of Nimgavhan

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[23] The critique of the theoretical underpinnings, methodological strategies and substantive arguments of post-development theory has, as Hart (2001) points out, been sufficiently substantial and I shall not rehearse it at any length in what follows.

[24] In the NBA's repertoire of contention, the term satyagraha is associated the annual protest events that took place during the monsoon months (June, July, August, September) every year from 1991 onwards until 2002.

(Maharashtra), Independence Day began with the hoisting of both the Indian flag and the NBA's banner by Siddharaj Dhadda, a veteran Gandhian and a respected freedom fighter. Following the flag hoisting, a confrontational event erupted. Two teachers were present at the ceremony. These teachers were employed at local state-run schools, but the reality was that their teaching was as absent as the schools they were supposed to be running. The teachers were confronted by agitated villagers and activists who argued that their vocation amounted to little more than picking up their paycheques. This dismal state of affairs was then thrown into sharp relief with the following point on the programme: the felicitation of young adivasis who had fared well in official schools after first having completed basic schooling in the Andolan's *Jeevan Shalas* – literally "schools for life" built and run by the Andolan with a curriculum adapted to adivasi realities. Following this, the celebrations continued in the nearby village of Domkhedi with the inauguration of a micro-hydel project. A check-dam had been constructed on a small stream adjacent to Domkhedi, which, when combined with a pedal-powered generator, provided electricity to the village for the first time ever. Whereas the SSP threatened to displace the villagers from their lands and produce costly electricity that would only be available to affluent and predominantly urban consumers, here was a project controlled and executed at village level that actually had the potential of delivering a tangible improvement in people's lives. A subsequent NBA press release stated: 'Independence Day is so often a celebration of a country's victory over oppression, but in Nimgavhan, it had an additional meaning of the people's continued resistance against the injustice and exploitation within a nation' (NBA, 2000b).

Through the celebration of Independence Day, the NBA conveyed a narrative about its political project in which the spirits of the past were conjured up and their names borrowed in an effort to create something that has never yet existed (Marx, 1984: 10)[25]. The freedom struggle and the attainment of Independence were acknowledged as fundamental events and achievements – the presence of freedom fighters, the unfolding and hoisting of the Indian flag, indeed, the very celebration of Independence Day itself testified to this. However, at the same time it was a narrative of a national project profoundly out of kilter. The "tryst with destiny", in this narrative, had gone awry; the promises of freedom and development have been hijacked by elite interests and thus betrayed, leaving large sections of the population by the wayside as outcasts. This betrayal was efficiently illustrated by the contrasts evoked in the celebrations: the putrid condition of state schooling versus the vivacity of the *Jeevan Shalas*; the destruction

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Basically, what the satyagraha revolved around was a braving of the rising of the waters of the Narmada which set in with the monsoon rains and the closing of the floodgates of the SSP.

[25] This is of course also a generic feature of the dialogical dynamics inherent to the cultural politics of social movements (see Steinberg, 1999; Barker, 2002).

wrought by the SSP versus the benefits brought to local communities by the micro-hydel project. Simultaneously, the focus on the NBA's constructive activities was expressive of a political project of alternative development which resonated far beyond the Narmada Valley. The movement thus projected itself as an agent on a mission to reclaim and reinvent the ideals of freedom and development.

A similar argument can be found in the Andolan's paramount textual statement of its politics. *Towards Just and Sustainable Development* starts off by situating the anti-dam struggle squarely in the context of a national struggle for an alternative model of development:

> The people's movement in the Narmada Valley against the controversial Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) is part of the nationwide struggle for a new model of development in India … The issues raised by the Andolan are interrelated, interwoven. They emanate from the same system and reinforce each other (NBA, 1992: 1).

The system in question is 'the "Development" which the political elites in India had adopted after … Independence, and the foreign assistance resulting in a vicious debt cycle' (ibid.: 1). This model of development is in turn criticized on three fundamental points: firstly, the lack of popular participation in decision-making processes; secondly, the unsustainable depletion of natural resources; thirdly, the marked inequalities in the socioeconomic field (ibid: 2-3). In short, India's postcolonial development project is criticized for violating the ideals of participatory democracy, environmental sustainability, and social justice, and this violation in turn has to be countered a struggle which 'aims at protecting people's right to life and … a more humane, egalitarian, sustainable and participatory model [of] development' (ibid.: 3).

Now, I do not, of course, labour under the misconception that a closely orchestrated protest event and a carefully worded official manifesto convey a discourse of resistance that reflects a uniform "collective consciousness" stretching out into every nook and cranny of the Andolan (see below). However, it nonetheless testifies to the fact that the challenge to the totality – India's postcolonial development project – is not articulated from 'an originary space of authentic insurgency and insurrectionary otherness' (Moore, 2003: 352). Rather, the discourse of resistance is of an essentially *immanent* character: it articulates a critique of India's postcolonial development project that is 'comprehensible on its own terms' (Sinha, 2003: 309), and it does this through the appropriation and inversion of its idioms of legitimacy. Put slightly differently, whereas the discourse of resistance expressed through protest events and in movement documents clearly formulates a radical and fundamental critique of the dominant direction and meaning of development in postcolonial India, there is little here to suggest a rejection of development as such. Indeed, the Andolan's discourse of resistance can

more aptly be situated within the imaginary that Gupta (2000: 16) refers to as 'oppositional populism': a 'disputed and contentious redeployment' of 'the rhetoric of development' in popular critiques of state-led development that is fundamentally predicated upon a dichotomic deep structure which counterpoises a monolithic "people" to a monolithic "elite". If we look at how the Andolan's discourse of resistance identifies the agents that will take the movement project forward and how it names the opponents of this movement project, we find precisely this deep structure[26]. The actors who will take the social movement project forward are designated as "the people" – undifferentiated by class, gender, caste, ethnicity or other structures of stratification and differentiation: 'the larger issues of the alternate model of development become concretized, relevant within the lives of the people and raised by and through the people …' (NBA, 1992: 29). Conversely, the development which is decried is a development which has served the interests of India's elites and which 'can be sustained only on the basis of the partnership between the powerholders in this land and their multinational moneylenders and other allies' (ibid: 2-3). I discuss this representation in relation to the communities mobilized through the Andolan further below.

The NBA's social movement project for alternative development has also assumed a practical dimension in the form of a programme of constructive activities known as *Nav Nirman* (New Wave). Upon its inception in 1996 it was described by the Andolan as 'a gigantic social experiment … [that] can offer crucial insights into exploring alternative systems of governance and development' (cited in Dwivedi, 1997: 24)[27]. Kemalsingh, an adivasi activist from Nimgavhan (Maharashtra), explained the rationale of *Nav Nirman* as follows: 'The movement's idea is not only to oppose the dam, but to do something constructive so as to prove not only that the dams are destructive, and that they should be opposed, but that it's possible to do something constructive to help people' (interview, Nimgavhan, March 16, 2003). *Nav Nirman* includes activities such as the building and running of schools – Jeevan Shalas (Schools for Life) – with an alternative curriculum in the adivasi areas, introducing skills and practices of forest protection and regeneration, soil conservation and replenishment through bunding and composting, watershed management, community health care systems that seek to integrate indigenous and modern medicine, the use of alternative energy sources, and savings-and-loans activities (field notes; NBA, n.d.; Bavadam, 2003). Discussing Nav Nirman, Medha Patkar explained its rationale as follows:

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[26] This analysis draws loosely on Touraine's (1981) conception of identity, opposition and totality in social movement projects.

[27] The fact that the Supreme Court had imposed a stay on the construction of the SSP at this point in time was an important factor in creating an opening for the NBA to engage in constructive work.

… you see, basically, the right to resources within the community … They would not be against exchange of resources with other communities, but they would try and attain fulfilment of their basic needs at the smallest unit level … These units should be the units of planning … o this whole action, from planning to execution would really involve the decentralized planning, a local choice of technology would be involved (interview, June 2003).

This rationale, in turn, emerges at the confluence of two currents, one being the rich tradition of community development that figured centrally in Gandhi's political thought and in Gandhian politics after Independence[28] and the other being the actual practical experience of activists in the dam-affected adivasi communities in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

The emphasis on decentralized community development of course echoes central tenets of Gandhi's constructive programme which, as Hardiman (2003: 77) notes, contained as one of its key components the notion of *swadeshi* according to which 'a village, locality or nation would be as self-reliant as possible'. Pioneered during the anticolonial struggle, After his death, Gandhi's notion of community development was kept alive in the efforts of committed social workers, and then, in the 1970s, with the flourishing of new social movements and social action groups, community-centred development strategies again emerged as significantly oppositional. Kamat (2002: 10) refers to this resurgence in community development work outside the auspices of the dominant party system and party politics as 'the new grassroots movement': a plethora of small organizations who came to identify the dominant conception or ideology of development as the root cause of persistent poverty and increasing inequalities in Indian society, and who concurrently turned to decentralized development activities through voluntary organizations in rural areas[29].

One of these areas was of course the Narmada Valley, where Nav Nirman emerged as activists grappled with the lack of access to basic services and infrastructure in the adivasi villages. Explaining the trajectory of the Jeevan Shalas to me, Chittaroopa Palit pointed to how they originated in attempts to compel the state to provide the services they were actually obliged to provide. State authorities, however, failed to

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[28] As Sinha's (2006) brilliant paper shows, community development have several, and distinctively non-Gandhian origins. Moreover, in the postcolonial era, it existed not only as an oppositional practice in Gandhian politics, but also , 'an agenda of rule' (ibid.: 19) of the postcolonial state (see also Frankel, 2005).

[29] The argument that the new grassroots movement was characterized by autonomy from the dominant party system must be qualified somewhat, as the short-lived rise to power of the Janata Party promoted rural improvement programmes which encouraged 'voluntary work and the formation of voluntary organizations in the countryside' (Kamat, 2002: 12).

respond, and this in turn spurred the Andolan to provide these services through their own activities (interview, May 2003). The way in which the provision of education was carried out then became an object of critical reflection:

> *… we were, sort of, always struck by self-doubt, you know, because the first task was just to put schools in place, which the people were doing, and just to get masters … The thing… even pedagogically these institutions were challenged, because, for example, there were all these debates about "what is it that this education is going to be about" … I mean, are we creating institutions and supporting a process which is called education, but which will create an understanding that will be different from the experience of those people, even in opposition to, and the same sort of hegemonical understanding of what is development, and what dams are and so on …* (interview, May 2003)

This in turn prompted the Andolan to interact with critical educationists to develop an alternative curriculum and pedagogical approach: '… there was an attempt to change the Shalas from, you know, simple, sort of, "let us at least give these skills to the students" to a much more interactive mode in which the values of land, water, and, you know, forest and the local economies were valued much more' (ibid). Thus, when the Andolan stopped looking to the state for the provision of a social infrastructure – as here, in the form of schools – a process was instigated which revolved around creating institutions that would not merely be functional in filling the void created by state negligence, but rather a constituent element of the overall struggle in which they were embedded.

Now, the discourses and practices that the Andolan have developed around the project of alternative development are rendered problematic precisely because of the centrality of the notions of an undifferentiated "people" and undivided communities at the core of the opposition that is levelled to the dominant direction and meaning of development. The conception of a homogenous "people" that carries forth a project of alternative development against "the elite" does not match with the Andolan's social base in that there are long-standing conflictual relations between adivasi communities and caste Hindu communities, and in that the Nimadi farming communities are criss-crossed by class and caste divisions.

In Nimad, the landowning castes – predominantly Patidars – have been at the frontline of the anti-dam campaign. Their representation parties and stakes in the conflict tends to be one which pits socially harmonious rural communities of the Narmada Valley against the powerful coalition of urban industrialists, politicians and transnational capital. Whereas some representatives of the landowning castes would admit that that a "feudal mentality" was still prevalent among sections of the powerful groups in the villages, they would still insist that relationships between castes had become far more egalitarian than

what was the case in previous times (interviews and field notes, April-May 2003). At the opposite end of the caste-class spectrum, a different view was offered: landless labourers, most of whom are Dalits, reported that practices of untouchability still exist in the villages, and that their wages were far below the minimum level stipulated by the state. This was in turn paralleled by their marginal participation in the mobilization process. For them, participating in the movement meant going to rallies and demonstrations. However, they had not been a part of the decision-making processes or been consulted about the Andolan's strategies. Whenever there is a mass action where their participation is required, an announcement would be made from the temple, and work would be stopped for the day. They had never interacted directly with the NBA leadership; only the local activists would sometime come to their houses. They all categorically rejected that relationships between the caste groups had improved in the wake of mobilization (field notes, April 2003). Caste domination and class structures, then, seem to have created a core-periphery structure in the campaign, and also seem not to have faced any serious challenges through the mobilization process itself.

Similar contradictions riddle the Nav Nirman experiment. It was only practiced in the adivasi areas: Nimad has been left out of this part of the movement's strategy. On the one hand, this could be considered to follow naturally from the fact that these communities are already fairly "developed", whereas the adivasi areas have been systematically deprived of social infrastructure, Nimad is fairly well-endowed with schools and health facilities, electricity and irrigation have been part of the region's economic fabric for decades, and articulate local politicians have seen to it that development works have been carried out in the area. On the other hand, as Baviskar (1995: 221) points out, the social and economic structure of the Nimad communities constitutes something of a negation of the movement's professed adherence to ideals of social equality and environmental sustainability: 'Plains landowners employ daily wage labourers, mostly adivasis, who are paid twelve to fifteen rupees every day, even though the legal minimum wage for agricultural labour is Rs. 25 … While the dam has rightly come to symbolize unsustainable and inegalitarian development, agriculture in Nimar is not based upon sustainable practices either'. The fact that Nimad is left out of the constructive activities for alternative development can be considered as expressive of what might be called the Andolan's internal *realpolitik*. Dwivedi (1999: 58-59) has put it as follows: 'To expect the Nimadi farmer to think beyond issues of fair compensation is to place the burden of fighting the 'development dystopia' on a people whose interests appear more immediate and who are actually beneficiaries of this development'. Demanding of the prosperous and powerful social groups that they relinquish their social and economic privileges by, say, handing over land to a community collective as was done in the *bhoodan* and *gramdan* movements in the 1950s, or move away from cash crop

agriculture, is unlikely to gain much of a hearing. Indeed, it might well lead to the estrangement of an important part of the movement's mass base and the consequent loss of the material resources they bring to the movement.

Now, the obfuscation of conflictual difference in the Andolan's mass base is of course perfectly understandable in terms of the strategic concerns of the anti-dam campaign. Working against all odds in the first place, it was a crucial and necessary achievement to bring together diverse communities between and within which there were multiple opposing interests and abundant potential for conflict: inter- and intra-group divisions were sidelined in the struggle against a common threat[30]. Still, the uneasy question of Nimad socioeconomic structure does not simply go away. The conflictual differences that criss-cross these communities might resurface as constraints upon the development of a movement project in which social justice is a central ambition. This is so in that claims for social justice cannot simply be directed outward; they are equally valid vis-à-vis relations and practices of caste and class internal to and between the communities united in their opposition to an external enemy. Making social justice an actuality through 'the transformation of productive inequalities' and 'the dismantling of disenfranchising social hierarchies' (Moore, 2003: 203) in turn clearly runs counter to the vested interests of dominant groups in these communities. This can be considered as the point at which the limits of the 'oppositional populism' that characterizes the Andolan's movement project for alternative development emerge. To act on this – to raise internal critiques and further the capacity of subaltern groups within the community to mobilize autonomously around such issues – is "uncomfortable" in the sense that it is likely to destabilize and disintegrate extant movement formations. Not to act on it, though, constitutes a lapse into a romanticized conception of "the local" and "the community" which effectively silences the plight of those most exploited and oppressed. Such a lapse would constitute an abdication of the ambition of social justice.

Building Capacity for Hegemony: Questions of Reach and Grounding

A social movement project does not only revolve around the articulation of a challenge to the social totality; it also revolves around the building of a capacity for hegemony – i.e. an ability to lead the skilled activity of different social groups in a challenge to the

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[30] The commonality of the threat is of course also subject to discussion: as Dwivedi (1999, 2006) has pointed out, different groups within the mass base are differently equipped in terms of their capacity to deal with the impact of displacement, with landless labourers, adivasis and women being by far the most vulnerable groups.

hegemonic projects of dominant social groups. Importantly, such a capacity is predicated upon what I call *reach* – the extent to which a social movement project actually brings together the skilled activity of different groups – and *grounding* – the extent to which the challenge to the social totality is experienced as meaningful by those. In this section I discuss reach in relation to the NBA's involvement in alliance-building and grounding in relation to the politics of representation.

The foremost manifestation of the establishment of reach is alliance-building. The NBA has been at the forefront of attempts to unite social movements across India around a politics of alternative development. Medha Patkar has arguably been the pivot of these attempts, and in her view, necessity was "the mother of invention" of alliance-building as a strategy:

> *I had written a small paper … that was because immediately after we started in Maharashtra in 1985, I felt that the support network is absolutely necessary for fund-raising to supporting when we are in crisis … and fighting the state and the system you need this kind of alliance* (interview, June 2003).

The experience of a need for a form of alliance – or what I have called an infrastructure of contention (see above) – first became manifest in a network between movements that eventually became the Bharat Jan Andolan (BJA), co-ordinated by the SC/ST Commissioner B. D. Sharma. Initially erected to provide localized struggles with much-needed support, the network quickly came to change character: 'That idea then went ahead that it shouldn't be called [a network] anymore, we should call it a movement' (interview, Medha Patkar, June 2003). Thus, rather than being a functional adjunct to particular struggles, the BJA evolved into an institution that articulated a political agenda beyond specific struggles and into which specific struggles were in turn integrated. This process, however, also became a source of divergence and fracture. According to Patkar, the decision to focus mainly on adivasi struggles and the refusal to welcome trade unions into the BJA erred both with the character of the social base of the NBA and with the perceived need to bring farmers and workers together 'because the globalization and all had started in India' (interview, June 2003).

The Harsud rally in 1989 was the context of the next attempt at forming a nationwide alliance. The guiding motivations of Harsud seem to have been three-fold: firstly, to bring local groups together in a wider political network; secondly, to establish an extensive geographical reach across the nation; and, thirdly, to bring together groups from across the range – and indeed from opposite ends of the spectrum – of oppositional politics in India. The outcome was the formation of the Jan Vikas Andolan (JVA)

(interview, Medha Patkar, June 2003). The JVA, however, failed to become a political force to be reckoned with, leaving Patkar and others disheartened:

> *… the Jan Vikas Andolan decisions from meeting to meeting were the decisions to, for example, analyse a government's decision on something during next two months and then issue a statement and that kind of… no mass action was emergent. So many of us felt frustrated … it was just not moving ahead* (interview, June 2003).

Thus, whereas the NBA had dissociated itself from the BJA over differences over the composition of the social base of the alliance, the dissociation from the JVA occurred due to differences over strategy.

The way in which alliance-building has been fraught with conflicts over the social scope and strategic orientations which generate splinters and initiatives for the formation of new alliances points towards a crucial learning process. Activists with a shared ambition – an ambition of developing a social movement project – but different approaches as to how to realize this ambition come up against each other in contestations and negotiations over whose approach is to give direction to the building of the alliance and thus come to understand whom and whose approaches they can and cannot work with; a certain approach is applied – whether it is a modified or not through the rounds of contestation and negotiation – and the experience of the potentials and limits of the approach constitute the basis for the modification or rejection of this approach.

It is from this process that the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) emerged. The discussions which led to the formation of the NAPM date back to 1992 and a context characterized by the onset of neoliberal restructuring and the rise of Hindu communalism in India:

> *… in one of the meetings in Bhopal, on the first [of] December 1992, which was in the context of the globalization and the Rath Yatra … we discussed what should be done, to raise the national strength or force again. One suggestion was to have another Harsud, against globalization. But some of us felt very strongly that now the sporadic one-day event would not go. So there was the whole idea of national alliance of people's movements* (interview, Medha Patkar, June 2003).

The NAPM as such came into being in 1996, following a national tour that traversed fourteen states. At the conclusion of the tour, a conference was held and a basic organizational structure announced, consisting of national convenors' committee and state-level convenors' committees. The NAPM decided to centre its energies on the Enron debacle in Maharashtra, and by 1997, more than 100 organizations had become official

(as opposed to 'allied') members of the alliance (Multinational Monitor, 1997: 1-2). Today, the NAPM is reckoned as India's paramount representative of the country's social movements, and is currently deeply involved in the mounting struggles against Special Economic Zones.

However, the crucial question is the extent to which an alliance such as the NAPM and its politics of alternative development can be said to be embedded in the local communities it claims to represent. Whereas I am obviously not in a position to comment on the mass bases of the whole range of movements that participate in the NAPM, I will put forward some reflections on my impression of the perception of the alliance in the NBA mass base. What struck me as evident during my fieldwork was that the various alliances that had been formed – such as the JVA and the NAPM – seemed to be remote from the lived experiences of village activists. Even those who had been most active with the NBA would refer superficially to the rally in Harsud as having been "a big rally where many movements raised the issue of displacement" or "in Harsud we took an oath that we wanted only small dams, and that big dams are destructive and will be resisted". When I asked whether they were familiar with the JVA or the NAPM, they would answer that they did not participate much in those activities; some even claimed that they had not heard of these organizations (interviews and field notes, March and April 2003). Thus, whereas the formation of an alliance such as the NAPM represents an achievement in terms of moving towards the articulation of a challenge to the social totality, this alliance and the challenge it poses is not experienced as immediately significant by those whose interests and values it claims to represent.

Alliance-building has clearly been an important part of the Andolan's efforts towards the building of a social movement project in that it is a *necessary condition* for developing a capacity for hegemony: there is strength in numbers and unity, and that strength is needed if progress is to be made in terms of the goal of imposing an alternative direction and meaning on India's development. A formation such as the NAPM with more than 100 member organizations across India has clearly achieved the establishment of *extensive outward reach* for its social movement project. However, establishing an alliance with a common view of what kind of alternative direction and meaning should be given to development is clearly not a *sufficient condition* as long as these alliances and their politics are of limited relevance to the communities who are identified as their protagonists. The lack of a subjective experience of alliance politics as meaningful and relevant at a local level can be thought of as a problem of *limited intensive downward reach*. Hence, whereas the forming of alliances can be seen as constituting a first and necessary step in the development of a capacity for hegemony, such capacity can only be achieved if followed by a second step which is focused on building or augmenting intensive downward reach. The building of intensive downward

reach would be a process through which a social movement project is rendered meaningful and relevant to the lived experiences of members of local communities, and – seeing as the proof of the pudding tends to be in the eating – i.e. ensuring that this social movement project has ramifications for these communities.

Closely related to the issue of the limited downward reach of alliances and their politics is the issue of whether or not there is a discrepancy between the discourse of resistance expounded by the leadership or through such events and documents as was analyzed above, and the actual degree to which this discourse of resistance has been appropriate by "the rank and file".

This question has figured prominently in academic and activist debates over the Andolan and its politics of alternative development. Amita Baviskar (1995: 227-28) has argued about the issue of 'the politics of representation' in the NBA that '[t]he formulation of a critique of development is not a concern of the people in the valley; they are fighting as they have always fought – against outside oppression'. For Baviskar a simple positing of the NBA and its mass base as resistance to the dominant model and trajectory of development neglects the actual subjective understandings that guide the collective action of the adivasi communities. Similar criticisms have been made by Rahul Bannerjee, a former KMCS and NBA activist. He maintains that whereas the adivasi communities have 'a long history of militancy right from ancient times', the Andolan has foisted 'an alien Gandhian culture of satyagraha on to an essentially militant people …' (Bannerjee, 2000: 38-9). In his view, the 'pseudo-romantic view of the few indigenous people who are still with the NBA' (ibid: 39) is merely a strategy deployed to garner urban support. Such criticisms have not gone unnoticed among activists in the Andolan. Chittaroopa Palit commented as follows on Baviskar's arguments:

> "I mean, internally also it was a very organic process, you know, for example, as far as my critique of Amita Baviskar's book, you know, is that she somehow seems to see that whole… the critique of development was an … imposed project, and that basically what the adivasi was talking about was land, you know, wanting land for land. But I never heard anyone saying you know, [we want land for land] … The dignity of living in only adivasi villages is something quite different …" (interview, June 2000).

In response to Bannerjee's criticisms, Sanjay Sangvai (2000b: 3-4) writes: 'From its initial years, the organization in the Narmada Valley always dealt with the issue of adivasis in contemporary terms … the emphasis has always been on rights and material well-being in contemporary terms'.

This debate over the politics of representation within the Andolan – where critics of the movement emphasize the "imposed" character of the politics of alternative

development and leading activists point to its "organic" character – can be understood as a debate which revolves around the question of whether or not the alternative direction and meaning of development that looms large in the Andolan's discourse of resistance is an 'inherent' or a 'derived' ideology (Rudé, 1980). Such a debate is arguably misguided as social movement projects per definition entails the abstraction from the concrete, the particular and the local towards the abstract, the universal, and the global. Consequently, the discourses of resistance that are produced as part of this process are likely to emerge as complex amalgamations of "particular" loci of consciousness formation and "universal" loci of consciousness formation. The former are likely to be of an 'inherent' character and thus more relevant to the lived experience of the inhabitants of insurgent communities situated in a specific locale of resistance. The latter are likely to be of a 'derived' character, i.e. introduced by those activists who have served as catalysts and movement intellectuals throughout the movement process, and hence a more prevalent part of their political language and consciousness than that of the mass base. However, we can discuss the degree to and ways in which amalgamations of inherent and derived elements have been appropriated and disseminated in a movement's mass base.

When I asked adivasi activists what they thought "development" (*vikas*) really was or should be, their answers typically went along the lines of "Development should be for all; what is this development where some people drown and other people prosper" and "For us development means that our land should be preserved, we should get enough to eat for the whole year – we don't want anything else", or "We want development that does not destroy" with a reference to the non-destructive techniques such as small dams that had been deployed in the Nav Nirman programme and which had brought tangible improvements in the quality of life in the communities (various interviews, March 2003). Others again would argue that development meant such concrete benefits as having work, access to health care and education, or general material improvements in the standard of living (field notes, March 2003). These statements are arguably expressive of the aspirations of social groups whose most basic needs have been neglected and violated by the dominant direction and meaning of development and whose existence has thus been characterized by survival at the margins. Understandably, alternative development revolves around basic notions of justice and an emphasis on the necessity of fulfilling basic, material needs and generating tangible improvements in living through non-destructive technologies. The fact that this contrasts with the elaborate discourse of resistance expressed in protest events and movement documents testifies to a situation where movement intellectuals and leaders have been unsuccessful developing their ideas of alternative development 'through an organic relationship with those to whom they are directed and in whom they are inculcated, using or developing appropriate spaces' and, moreover, to translate 'the

body of ideas into a compelling popular style and idiom' (Johnson, 2002: 7). Yet, an important point is that this is not an immutable state of affairs, but rather a challenge to be overcome in an as-yet "incomplete" movement process. If anything, this challenge underscores the importance of prioritizing activities centred on dialogical learning and the creation of spaces for such learning as an integral part of the construction of a movement project.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The main points of the above analysis of the building of popular resistance to accumulation by dispossession in the Narmada Valley are as follows.

The movement process originated in the emergence of militant particularist struggles in the dam-affected communities in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat in the early and mid-1980s. These militant particularisms were centred on rightful resistance – initially, in the case of the KMCS, claiming basic civil rights and constitutional entitlements in the face of localized oppression by state officials, and gradually, as the ramifications of the SSP came to the attention of and was shared between the groupings in the different states, the right to information and the right to resettlement and rehabilitation. The emergence of militant particularist struggles were underpinned by a transformation of local rationalities where fear and deference gave way to the skills, knowledge and emotional dispositions that were necessary to bring the 'state-system' and the 'state-idea' were brought 'more firmly under [the] gaze and control' (Corbridge et. al., 2005: 263) of subaltern social groups.

The movement process was radicalized through a process of confrontational learning through which awareness was generated among the activists that the responsible authorities were neither willing nor able to implement adequate measures for the resettlement and rehabilitation of the dam-affected communities. This was underpinned by the construction of a substantial body of counter-expertise about the SSP which both contradicted the validity of official claims about the project and exposed their social bias. Enunciating a discourse of resistance that abstracted from the specific circumstances of the affected communities in the three riparian states and which linked the critique of the SSP to wider societal power relations, this process yielded the pan-state anti-dam campaign that came to be known as the Narmada Bachao Andolan. The making of the campaign, in turn, was characterized by both divergence and convergence. Assessing the prospects for successful resettlement and rehabilitation differently, the ARCH Vahini in Gujarat opted for collaboration with the state government rather than dam opposition – a move which reflects how situated exigencies may militate against the processes of abstraction and translation that define the building of a campaign. At the

same time, however, the anti-dam campaign in the Narmada Valley was embedded in anti-dam networks at national and transnational scales that were emerging at the time, which in turn explains the centrality of the NBA in global anti-dam politics. The campaign against the SSP was conducted through a strategy of 'jury politics' – i.e. a demand for review of the project, predicated upon the assumption that if the SSP was found to be in violation of official stipulations related to dam projects the state would be obliged to cancel it. Spanning a decade, the NBA pursued the demand for review in relation to state governments, various central governments, and finally the Supreme Court. However, their claims were persistently stymied, and most decisively so in the Supreme Court judgement of October 2000 which sanctioned the completion of the SSP.

In my analysis of the Andolan's construction of a social movement project for alternative development I stressed how this needs to be understood as a process that proceeds through an appropriation, inversion and redeployment of the modern development project for the creation of discourses and practices that signal the emergence of 'new political programs' and 'new bases for social and political life' (Sinha, 2003: 308). However, I also emphasized several contradictions and challenges related to this project. In terms of the discursive and practical challenges articulated to the totality, I called attention to how oppositional populism obfuscates conflictual forms of difference and exploitative social relations in the NBA's mass base. Whereas this is understandable in terms of the strategic requirements involved in the construction of the anti-dam campaign, it restricts the scope of social justice in a way which undermines the emancipatory potential of the social movement project. In terms of the capacity for hegemony, I raised questions as to the downward reach of the alliances constructed around the project and the grounding of the discourse of alternative development in the communities and social groups which it claims to represent. These are issues that must be tackled if a radical counterhegemonic project is to be viable at all.

As I noted at the outset of the article, we are currently witnessing an endgame in the Narmada Valley. Whereas the NBA still seeks to vindicate the rights of communities affected by the SSP, the struggle to stop the project is over, and has been for some time; accumulation by dispossession will proceed in the Narmada Valley. However, the endgame in the Narmada Valley is paralleled by the crystallization of new struggles against dispossession as a consequence of the increasingly aggressive introduction and implementation of neoliberal accumulation strategies by the Indian state. This is arguably most clearly evidenced in the introduction of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in India, which will entail the seizure of at least half a million hectares of land in a process which, as Chandrasekhar (2006) argues, 'is nothing short of a crude form of primitive accumulation of capital'. Popular resistance to SEZ-related dispossession is emerging across India and in such a context, it is crucial to draw lessons from such movement

processes as that which have unfolded in the Narmada Valley. In my view, the most crucial insights that can be gained from this experience relate to how social movements engage with the state, and I shall make that the focus of some closing reflections.

Interactions with the state – or the 'state-system' and the 'state idea' – have been a constant feature of the movement process in the Narmada Valley. During the crystallization of militant particularist struggles this revolved chiefly around a strategy of creating an awareness of and claiming civil and political rights. In a study of adivasi mobilization in Maharashtra, Kamat (2002: 122) refers to such strategies as 'a pedagogy directed at demystifying the state', and criticizes it for its implied view of the state; demystifying the state, she maintains, implies that 'politics … emanates from the state agents as it were, and not from the state structures' (ibid: 124). In short, this strategy entails the internalization of a 'state idea' which ultimately contributes to the reproduction of the status quo as 'the will towards transformative praxis' is interpreted and mediated 'in ways that articulate with the prevailing hegemony of ideas and practices', the result of which is 'consent over the *forms* of political action' (ibid.: 158).

Whereas this critique is theoretically cogent, I nevertheless think it is misplaced. Firstly, it lacks sensitivity to how a strategy of empowering subaltern social groups vis-à-vis the state can in fact be radical relative to the context in which the strategy is adopted. When we are dealing with the mobilization of subaltern social groups in the context of the forms everyday tyranny that characterized local state-society relationships in the adivasi communities in the Narmada Valley the strategy of claiming citizenship amounts to nothing less than the articulation of a set of 'radical need and capacities' (Nilsen, 2007) which, if realized, holds the potential to decisively rupture this tyranny. Furthermore, I am less than convinced that her assertion that the pedagogy of demystifying the state entails disciplining the will towards transformative praxis to a form of political action that is incapably of going beyond the parameters of liberal democracy. In fact, I think Kamat here confuses the *form* and *content* of this approach. Surely, the mobilizational process that unfolded in the adivasi communities in the early and mid-1980s entailed the development of a form of knowledge and skills centred on the principles and procedures of the liberal democratic state, but the content of the experience seems to me to be more profoundly related to the realization that that overlords could be overthrown and, consequently, that resistance is fertile rather than futile. Here we do well to remember that social movements firstly '*mobilize* people who were not necessarily previously active' and secondly '*radicalize* people who were previously content with a view of the world designed for situations of relative quiescence' (Barker and Cox, 2002: 21-2), and, consequently, the argument that mobilizing around the ability to make claims on the state locks in place activism in a form that underpins the status quo loses some of its credibility.

However, the distinction between 'state as practice and the state as structure' (Kamat, 2002: 124) which underpinned the rightful resistance of the early militant particularist struggles in the Narmada Valley becomes problematic in that it continued to serve as the basis of the anti-dam campaign. As my analysis showed the strategy of 'jury politics' consistently and eventually decisively failed backfired, and it did so due to the way in which the Andolan's anti-dam campaign both directly and indirectly thrust against and beyond the structural dynamics of India's passive revolution the role of the state as key modality in that process. Indeed, the NBA's anti-dam campaign was a form of social movement practice which in effect challenged 'the principles of power from above on which the capitalist state rests' (Geoghegan and Cox, 2001: 8), and this effectively reveals how there are structural constraints to state power which have 'unequal and asymmetrical effects on the ability of social forces to realise their interests through political action' (Jessop, 1982: 224).

The logical strategic conclusion of this, I think, is to argue that social movements do wisely in thinking carefully about which bets to hedge on the normal political process within an institutionalised social order and which to place elsewhere. Strategically, this entails an attempt to steer a course between, on the one hand, the anti-statism of someone like Kamat and, on the other hand, the state-centrism that is evident in perspectives such as that of Corbridge and Harriss (2000: 203) who argue that social movements should first and foremost 'put pressure on the state to take the part of the poor, or to protect the poor from some of the abuses heaped upon them'. In other words, it entails the advocacy of an *instrumental* rather than a *committed* engagement[31] with the state – i.e. an approach to interaction with the state-system and the state-idea based on limited expectations of what can be gained and a clear perception of what cannot be gained and what is risked in pursuing this avenue. It also entails an awareness that a challenge to the social structures of power on which the capitalist state rests – if it is to be pursued at all – is a bet best hedged on the construction of a social movement project which seeks to develop the collective skilled activity of subaltern groups to the point where it can successfully challenge extant power structures and their entrenched institutional manifestations. In other words, if contestation of subaltern dispossession is a commitment, we cannot avoid giving serious consideration to more radical forms of political action than that of holding the state accountable to democratic principles and pro-poor commitments. Constructing such a project will undoubtedly be a process of constant self-criticism, of self-interruption, and of returning to the apparently accomplished in order to begin it afresh. Undoubtedly, the trajectory will be one of throwing down adversaries only to have them draw new strength from the earth and rise

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[31] I owe this distinction to Laurence Cox.

again – more gigantic than ever – and of recoiling from the indefinite prodigiousness of the aims of insurgency. But such is the nature of the labour which engenders those situations in which all turning back is impossible, in which the conditions themselves cry out: "here is the rose, dance here" (Marx, 1984: 6).

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