Sunken Voices: *Adivasis*, Neo-Gandhian Environmentalism and State–Civil Society Relations in the Narmada Valley 1998-2001

Judy Whitehead *University of Lethbridge*

Abstract: Large dams on the Narmada River have submerged some of the territories of adivasis (aboriginal peoples) of Gujarat state. Neo-Gandhian environmental movements that petitioned the Indian Supreme Court to halt dam construction recently lost their case. This paper shows that neo-Gandhian environmentalism collapsed in Gujarat for four major reasons, both external and internal. The external reasons emerge from the changing nature of state and civil society relations in the post-liberalization period, in which non-governmental movements become fragments of the apparatus of consensus. The internal reasons relate to the nature of neo-Gandhian discourse, and involve the romanticization of adivasi communities and technology fetishism.

Keywords: adivasis, environmentalism, social movements, state, civil society, romanticism

Résumé : De vastes barrages ont fait débordé la rivière Narmada qui a inondé certains territoires des Adivasi (peuples autochtones) dans l'État du Gujurat. Les mouvements environnementaux néo-gandhiens qui ont présenté à la Cour suprême indienne une requête afin de stopper la construction de barrages ont récemment perdu leur cause. Le présent article démontre que l'échec de ces mouvements repose principalement sur quatre facteurs, tant externes qu'internes. Les facteurs externes découlent du caractère changeant des relations entre l'État et la société civile dans le contexte post-libéral qui a transformé les mouvements non gouvernementaux en fragments des rouages du consensus. Quant aux facteurs internes, ils sont liés à la nature du discours néo-gandhien et incluent l'attribution d'une aura de romantisme aux communautés adivasi de même que le fétichisme de la technologie.

Mots-clés : adivasi, mouvements environnementaux, mouvements sociaux, État, société civile, romantisme

> What the ensemble of organisms commonly called private might be at any given time, would surely depend on what kind of social situation you were looking at. [Smith 2004:102]

> The lower classes, historically on the defensive, can only achieve self-awareness via a series of negations. [Gramsci 1971:272-3]

Introduction

On October 18, 2000, the Supreme Court of India rejected a Public Interest Litigation filed by a famous environmental movement, the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), to halt construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam on the Narmada River in west-central India. The judgment ignored the NBA's findings of inadequate resettlement for dam oustees and supported the Gujarat government's assertions to the contrary. The majority 2-1 decision also put limits on further public interest litigation by stating that the court should not intervene in administrative decisions (Randeria 2003). It praised the benefits of dams for national development and allowed dam construction to continue along with and not before proposed improvements to resettlement and rehabilitation had been implemented. Seen as a body blow to environmental organizations that were using national courts to challenge large-scale development projects, the decision was preceded by a drop in support for the NBA among Gujarat's *adivasi*[1] population, the groups whose lands were most affected by the submergence area of the dam.

This paper examines four major causes for the collapse of the NBA in Gujarat. The first arises from the changing relations between the state and civil society that have emerged in the wake of liberalization, including the privatization of some of the state's repressive functions. The second factor arises from the primacy which neo-Gandhian environmentalism accords to technology, especially large-scale technology, seeing it, and not social rela-

tions of production, as the root cause of social injustice and ecological degradation (Nandy 2003:171-181). Hence, a division emerged between the ecological critique of large dams and tribal rights concerning land and livelihood security. Third, the NBA's critique of large-scale technology was accompanied by romanticized images of small-scale subsistence communities living in harmony with the environment, a representation that generated both international appeal and local tensions. Finally, the paper examines the changing role of the state and civil society in the post-liberalization phase, arguing that small, non-party based social movements are not strong enough, on their own, to counteract emerging forms of transnational hegemony in which a diversity of supra-state and state actors pass the responsibility for human rights and environmental concerns to each other (Randeria 2003). While these four factors are analytically separate, they tended to overlap and converge at various points in the period between 1998 and 2001. They are therefore treated as separate "moments" of the transformation of economy, state and civil society in the era following India's "economic liberalization" in 1991. Pushed from both above and below, the NBA could not move beyond a defensive, oppositional strategy and ideology in Gujarat, ultimately becoming isolated there even from the adivasis that it claimed to represent.

In a well-known passage, Antonio Gramsci saw repression as linked to political society, or the state, while consent was largely located in the institutions of civil society.

> What we can do for the moment is to fix two superstructural levels: the one that can be called civil society, i.e. the ensemble of organisms commonly called private, and that of "political society" or "the state." These two levels correspond first to the function of hegemony that the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of "direct domination" or command exercised through the state and juridical government. [Gramsci 1971:12]

However, Gramsci also saw hegemony as a shifting constellation of power that often encompassed force and whose landscapes were historically and socially specific (Smith 2004; Crehan 2002:104). Indeed, his stress was on the connectivity between force and consent, with the concept of hegemony posing the question of how power was exercised in each specific context. I suggest that economic reforms in India have been accompanied by a changed set of relations between state and civil society, force and consent. In the enlarged global political space that has emerged in the wake of structural adjustment, interconnections between international institutions and the Indian state have intensified. At the same time, civil society organizations and NGOs have mushroomed and sought transnational alliances, finding new networks of support for social, human rights and environmental concerns. However, these two movements are not parallel and congruent. Nor has the national state become increasingly marginal, functioning only as a "nightwatchman," as early globalization theorists assumed that it would (Turner 2002). For states like India that possess a relatively strong national bourgeoisie, reforms can be implemented in a piecemeal fashion. At the same time, the government can capitalize on its perceived assaults by international organizations to render itself unaccountable to national citizens (Randeria 2003). The state can also play the "nationalist" card against movements from below that challenge the inequities associated with accumulation by dispossession, a process that Harvey describes as a practice through which resources, land, knowledge, and services that were formerly socially owned or controlled, become privatized and hence contribute to the creation of value (Harvey 2003:145-146).[2] In the process, civil society organizations have been increasingly circumscribed to an accommodative, rather than a transformative resistance. By accommodative resistance, I mean conscious resistance that results in an overall and long-term maintenance of existing power differences and class relations.

As is well-known, the major NGO that represented the rights of the Gujarat adivasis whose lands were being submerged was the Narmada Bachao Andolan, with Medha Patkar and later Arundhati Roy emerging as prominent spokespersons. This group arose through the amalgamation of several NGOs, including the Narmada Ghati Navnirman Samiti (NGNS, Committee for the Renewal of the Narmada Valley) based in Madhya Pradesh. The NGNS was established by Gandhian leaders who took a position of total opposition to the dam. In Gujarat, ARCH, later to be named ARCH-Vahini, focussed on acquiring adequate land for resettlees, and championing the rights of the many adivasis who did not possess written ownership records of lands they had been cultivating. In 1985, Medha Patkar visited the region and, appalled at the scale of displacement, founded the Narmada Charangrast Samiti (NCS), or the Narmada Oustees Association, which later evolved into the Narmada Bachao Andolan through the amalgamation of the NCS with the Gandhian organizations in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. In conjunction with the Environmental Defense Fund of the U.S., whose president, Bruce Rich, toured the valley in 1986, the NBA became convinced by 1988 that adequate resettlement for the 250 000-odd peo-

ple to be displaced was not possible (Sangvai 2002:43). Thereafter, it broke its alliance with ARCH-Vahini. Instead, it advocated a no-dam policy that it has maintained, despite legal setbacks, until very recently.[3]

The NBA achieved many successes during its 16-year resistance to the Sardar Sarovar Dam, with the Narmada dams becoming the most highly-debated development issue in India. In 1993, in partnership with the Environmental Defence Fund and the International Rivers Network, the NBA was able to force the World Bank to withdraw its funding for the dam. It continued to use transnational linkages to achieve continued support for its cause, and in 1995 was successful in persuading the Indian Supreme Court to halt dam construction pending further review of the resettlement process. However, by the late 1990s, it became increasingly ineffective in translating its international support into local gains. By this time, debate on the dam within India tended to support the Gujarat government's position that irrigation from the dam was needed to relieve drought conditions in the western part of that state. The gradual wearing down of the NBA's resistance is an example of the changed relations between state and civil society that have emerged in the poststructural adjustment period.

For many observers, the failure of the NBA in Gujarat is not especially surprising. Gujarat state, after all, is the self-styled "laboratory" of Hindutva, a religious nationalist movement based on high-caste interpretations of Hindu scriptures, and a majority of its population has been staunch supporters of neo-liberal development policies. In recent decades, its rural propertied groups, dominated by a Patidar peasanty, have increasingly invested in trading companies, sugar-cane mills, and other businesses that have virtually fused rural with urban commercial interests (Desai 2004:119; Bremen 2003:28-29). The Patidar caste, a non-elite but dominant caste in the Gujarat countryside, emerged as the most powerful beneficiary of capitalist development in agriculture, spearheading the green revolution in that state and benefiting from post-Independence land reforms (Bremen 2003:30). Their increasing economic clout has been accompanied by an assertive political presence in both major political parties, the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party. In addition, they created the Khedut Samaj, or Farmers' Organization, to promote the interests of rich farmers in Gujarat and to control labour, much of it consisting of adivasi, or tribal labour in south and central Gujarat (Bremen 2003:29; Ruttan 1990:235).

Gujarat has therefore witnessed an increasing fusion between rural and urban propertied groups. These newly propertied classes have been dominated by the Patidar peasantry for whom technological modernization had been their means of economic advancement over the past half century and for whom an aggressive Hindu identity has marked their most recent thrust into political prominence—an arena formerly dominated by urban elites (Desai 2004:123). The Patidar peasantry was especially appreciative of large-scale dams that promised to increase the irrigation potential of lands that were already slated for sugarcane expansion. Indeed, approximately 150 new sugar-cane mills had been constructed in the catchment areas near the irrigation canals from the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) in eastern Gujarat in anticipation of the increased irrigation that the dam would bring.

The neo-liberal turn that benefitted the Patidars and other propertied classes in Gujarat also led to a reorganization of state and civil society that I explore in four different moments. The first moment relates to frictions arising from new "civil society" organizations that emerged with the rise of Hindu majoritarian politics in the 1990s. Unwelcome visitors to my research trajectory, they nevertheless illustrate the changing role of civil society, as the state contracts out disciplinary functions of its political will to private organizations.

First Moment: Civil Society as Repression

My research during the summer of 2001 focussed on those adivasis who received a second transfer of land after being dissatisfied with their initial compensation package offered by the government. Not surprisingly, given the polarized nature of the debate and the triumphalist reaction of the Gujarat government to the Supreme Court decision, difficulties and barriers punctuated my fieldwork. These included district officials hanging up on my telephone calls, police presence in and around submerging villages, checks by the District Collector of my passport, visa and letter of research permission, and the refusal of the Chief Conservator of Forests to allow me permission to enter the proposed Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary, citing reasons of national security and fears of infiltration by Pakistani "terrorists."[4] All these are state actions of the more mundane repressive variety that I expected as the quotidian complements of studying one of the most famous civil disobedience movements in South Asia.

Yet there were new elements of repression in the summer of 2001. These involved the cellular-like local mobilization against "foreign researchers and home-grown environmentalists" by paramilitary religious organizations in rural areas neighbouring the resettlement sites. While I experienced several disturbing personal incidents, a number of activists with the NBA suffered physical harassment from such groups. Indeed, it was suspected

that the December 1999 forcible entry of the NBA's Vadodra office, the destruction of documents and beating of its staff had been organized by the Bajrang Dal. A similar beating was meted out to Rasik BhaiTadvi, an adivasi activist still awaiting resettlement lands, in the spring of 2001. The Bajrang Dal was created as a militant youth wing of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad during the Ram Janma Bhoomi agitations[5] starting in the late 1980s. The Bajrang Dal describes itself as a group of "warriors and protectors of the Hindu nation," militantly policing the body politic by expunging India of suspected anti-national and anti-Hindu elements. In Gujarat in recent decades, these "anti-national elements" have variously been defined as Christian missionaries in hill areas, environmentalists, social activists, Muslims, and vaguely-defined "foreigners." Environmentalists opposed to the dam, adivasis who supported the NBA, and others like myself were clearly "matter out of place" for the Bajrang Dal. Simultaneously, the definition of anti-national elements subsumed both minorities and social activists, illustrating how neo-liberal development policies and religious "fundamentalism" often march arm-in-arm. It was also apparent that this was a new political-cultural landscape in which the boundaries between civil society and the state, repression and consent, were being redrawn, and in which some of the "repressive" functions normally associated with the state were being increasingly taken up by civil society groups.

The use of "civil society" organizations such as the Bajrang Dal allowed the state to appear to be acting democratically and "objectively," seemingly above contending class interests. However, the neutrality of the state was more apparent than real, as there are multiple connections within the Sangh Parivar, the self-styled "family" of Hindutva associations; between their militant wings, such as the Bajrang Dal, cultural organizations, such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, and the more parliamentary and gradualist wing of Hindutva, the Bhartiya Janata Political party, which ruled Gujarat state between 1999 and 2001. All, at various points, have supported the creation of a Hindu nation, albeit one that is scientifically and technologically developed (Subramanian 2003). All the organizations are connected in terms of ideology and personnel, although using diverse means to realize this political project. The mobilization of militant civil society groups in support of the dam, however, meant that threats of harassment to activists could appear to emanate from civil society itself, as part of the "popular will" of the Hindu majority.

Second Moment: State as Consent

Since forms of repression partly emanated from Hindu nationalist groups, the legislative and judicial arms of the state could be seen as "above the fray"; mediating between the contending interests that had been polarized by an environment versus technology debate regarding the Sardar Sarovar Dam. Through a sustained and well-financed campaign that represented environmentalists as anti-development and anti-national, the state was able to project itself as ultimately determinant of the future livelihoods of the displaced adivasis and of representing the general interests of Gujaratis as a whole.

My earlier interviews in Chopadi, a submerging village, in 1998-99 indicated that a majority of adivasis there supported the NBA policies and strategies, although this support was not universal or unequivocal. It was based partly on the practical premise that the anti-dam policy pressured the government to find new resettlement lands after disappointment with the first lands allotted. A few wished to withdraw further into the Rajpipla Hills, and quite a number would accept any government settlement that was favourable. Almost no one in Chopadi wished to actively resist displacement by standing in the rising Narmada waters each monsoon, a major tactic of the NBA's *satyagrahas*[6] used further upriver in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. Yet in the summer of 1999, a year before the Supreme Court's decision, I sensed a waning of my hosts' enthusiasm for activist work. They told me how tired they were of the controversy and believed, given the inflexible position of both state and central governments, that an increase in the dam's height was inevitable. Among several of the younger men and women, there was bitterness that the most prominent NBA activists were urban-based and possessed the requisite social and cultural capital to be "heard" by the media, development institutions and the state.

I did not understand the significance of these sentiments, nor how important the case of the submerging village of Chopadi was to the public interest litigation filed by the NBA at the time. When I returned to this submerging village after the Supreme Court's decision against the NBA, permanent approval to dam construction had been given, and some of the people petitioning the state government for new resettlement sites had, in fact, been awarded new lands in Gorai. My former host was no longer there, but his younger brother told me that they had left Chopadi after receiving a very good transfer of resettlement land in Gorai. "What about you?" I asked. He said, "I will never give in to the government." I was somewhat surprised by his response. A few days later, the son of my former hosts arrived to accompany me to visit his parents at Gorai. Arriving there, I was pleasantly surprised to find a well-endowed village. A large storage tank with water and taps with actual running water provided

drinking water to the hamlet, the village was electrified, and even had a children's playground replete with slides, swings and monkey bars. Fairly large houses had been constructed on the same pattern as the houses in the hill villages, with teak beams and doors, and an upper storey to house grains and provide extra space. A road linked the hamlet with the main approach road to a neighbouring town, and workmen were constructing drainage pipes along the roadside so that fields did not become waterlogged. All these features were promised in the Gujarat government's compensation package (Dreze et al. 1997), but had been lacking in resettlement sites I had previously visited.

I was both surprised and happy to learn that my host's son had now married, that Amnibhen's amoebic dysentery had been effectively treated, and that their younger children were in school. Their route from the original submerging village to Gorai had indeed been a long, rocky and twisting one. The 15 Tadvi families now residing there, in compliance with government resettlement plans, first moved from Chopadi to resettlement sites in Dediapada district in the early 1990s. Not only was the land in Dediapada un-irrigated because it did not fall under the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) catchment area, it was also barren, infertile or rocky. In addition, Vasawa oustees from the Karjan Dam were already residing there, working as agricultural labourers on lands originally owned by absentee Patidars that had been subsequently purchased by the state for redistribution to the SSP oustees. Hostilities between the Tadvi SSP oustees and the Vasawa Karjan resetlees led many Tadvis to fear for their personal safety. In 1995, en masse, and despite resistance from the Gujarat government and police, they left the Dediapada resettlement sites to return to their partially submerged villages. Despite partial flooding each monsoon, these villages still managed to provide more than adequate subsistence living (Whitehead 1999). Indeed, the self-sufficiency of the submerging villages was a source of pride and autonomy, and had enabled a 16-year resistance to the state, despite the state government's refusal to compromise on the dam's height. From Chopadi, they requested that the NBA take up their cases, using NBA logistical and media support to stage numerous *dharnas* (sit-ins) in Kevadia colony to press their demands for second resettlement sites. As active members in the NBA in the late 1990s, their names appeared on petitions to the Sardar Sarovar Project Nigam Limited and they had many stories of their participation in dharnas in front of the SSP offices in Kevadia Colony, the times they spent in jail, and their travels to Mumbai and Delhi. A six-month dharna in 1998 in Kevadia Colony, with supporting demonstrations in Delhi and Mumbai, resulted in about 40% of the returnees receiving new lands by the summer of 1999. However, about 60%, or the majority, were still awaiting new compensation packages and remained in the submerging villages, or had families divided between resettlement sites and submerging villages.

When I visited Gorai, I mistakenly assumed that the 15 families there were among those who, with the NBA's support, had finally been able to pressure the state to find new lands. The following day my cynicism returned. We visited Kranti Bhai's fields and I commented how large and fertile they seemed. He mentioned that ten households from Chopadi had received not only five acres, but more land, plus more cash compensation. Arjun Kaka Tadvi, one of the former adivasi spokesmen of the NBA, for example, had received ten acres of land. I asked how that could happen, when the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal Award stipulated five acres as land compensation and there were people left in Chopadi without a second resettlement. Kranti Bhai said that they had had to give up their case in the Supreme Court in order to acquire their new lands. He later told me that Chunnibhai Vaidya, a prominent pro-dam activist, convinced many adivasi spokespeople of the NBA in Gujarat that the anti-dam policy was futile. If they publicly withdrew their cases from the Supreme Court, they would receive new lands and cash compensation. This resulted in a rift in Chopadi, with one group, those who were still without new lands, opting to stay with the NBA and remain there despite threatened submergence. Several families had also moved further inland. Those receiving new lands left both the village and the organization. The two sides, and even families, were bitterly divided in 2001, as shown in the statement by Kranti Bhai's younger brother. NBA activists in Baroda believed that this event caused the collapse of the Gujarat Visthapit Sangharsh Samiti, the organization of Narmada oustees created by the NBA, and constituted a crucial loss of NBA's support in Gujarat's resettlement sites and submerging villages. It also meant that the Supreme Court case lost much of its legitimacy, since it was the experiences of those returning from resettlement sites in Dediapada district to submerging villages that constituted its strongest evidence. Indeed, urban activists and the adivasi "capitulators" were not on speaking terms in the summer of 2001.

The conclusion drawn by the NBA was that the "tribal" leadership weakened at a crucial moment when the legal stakes were highest. If Chopadi had remained united, they believed, all would have eventually received new lands. However, I believe that the people of Chopadi had been "broken" before this event occurred. They had

endured 16 years of broken promises, inadequate resettlement, migration to cities, and returns to submerging villages. The lives of the younger generation had been framed by this controversy: both their education and their marriages had been disrupted, as few wished to marry into families with no landholdings. They also had little hope that the courts would decide in their favour. In Gorai, Kranti Bhai told me that he felt that resistance meant a slow suicide, and he had his children to think about, while many urban activists did not. He felt that the NBA was fighting a losing battle, and was persuading adivasis to take up tactics—for example, an anti-dam stance—that were not totally of their own choosing. In choosing compromise with the state over continued resistance to dam construction, he and other Gorai resettlees emerged from a sixteen-year struggle as rural middle peasants rather than as *de facto* landless labourers.

Here, the state, working with pro-dam civil society organizations, positioned itself as benefactor to the beleagured adivasis and mediator in a polarized debate that was framed in terms of "environmental unsustainability of large dams" versus "the needs of national development." The Gujarat government recognized that adivasis experienced and understood the central issue to be land hunger and not the environmental problems associated with large dams. Through a sustained and well-financed campaign, it was also able to simplify the NBA's opposition to large dams as entirely anti-development and, by metaphoric extension, anti-national as well.[7] In addition, the SSP was equated with Gujarati *asmita* (pride), while Medha Patkar was linked to the interests of Maharashtrians. Successfully dividing an already demoralized population, the government was able to manipulate issues of livelihood security to persuade an important section of adivasi leaders to leave the NBA. Yet the phrase "already demoralized and fragmented population" points to deeper questions about the apparent willingness of an entire section of the local adivasi leadership to be so persuaded after nearly two decades of resistance.

Third Moment: Identities and the Politics of Representation

The Narmada movement originated from critical analyses by middle class, urban activists of the "destructive effects" of globalization, offering cultural critiques of development, largely influenced by Gandhian thought (Nandy 2003:165).[8] In place of large dams, the NBA has created an alternative development paradigm that values small-scale and labour-intensive technologies, a non-consumerist lifestyle, and ecologically sustainable development (Sangvai 2002:92). While it incorporates elements of environmentalism, socialism, communitarianism, unorthodox Marxism, and Gandhian thought, the Gandhian elements remain prominent:

> The new ideology has integrated the political and ethical aspects of life, ranging from the global politico-economic analysis of issues to the criteria of lifestyles...The emphasis is on the holistic and contextualised perceptions and conceptions of reality as against a decontextualised and fragmented analysis. [Sangvai 2002:95]

Politically, their alternative development paradigm stresses decentralized decision-making, and self-governing villages, encapsulated in the slogan, "*humara gaon, humara raj*" (our village, our rule). Further, it is derived from an appreciation of local knowledge bases and a critique of modernist scientism. In the words of one of the most articulate spokespersons of this view, "development came into the southern world as an analogue of science and colonialism." Hence, "a cultural critique of development reverses its priorities in order to privilege existing cultural traditions" (Nandy 2003:164). Hence, the NBA views itself as having "digested post-modernist and deconstructionist ideas and politics," positioning itself as a post-development alternative to science and large-scale technological change (Sangvai 2002:95).

Despite its espousal of participatory politics and consensual decision-making, an unfortunate aspect of the movement is that its primary spokespeople have been urban-based, middle class activists. It is generally urban activists who have organized and led demonstrations, given press interviews, negotiated with the World Bank, state, Indian and other governments, attended international seminars and conferences, and networked with international environmental organizations. Adivasis, in this struggle for their lands and livelihoods, did not largely represent themselves, they were represented.

The everyday practices through which a middle class group organized, managed, and controlled media images of adivasis continued a longstanding pattern of distinction between the hill communities and the rest of India that dates to the early colonial period. As intermediaries between the adivasis and the wider world, urban activists often came from middle class backgrounds and were fluent in English, Hindi and local languages, unlike many Tadvi and Vasawa adivasis who were facing submergence. They also understood urban worldviews, often laced with romantic images of honest and simple "tribal" peoples, through which public discourse about and for adivasis was interpreted both nationally and internationally.[9]

This representation sometimes involved appeals to dominant groups' perceptions of adivasis as "ecologically

noble primitives" (Conklin 1995), who lived in self-sustaining communities that were "naturally" conservationist. Throughout the 1990s, the vocabulary of the movement as well as the timing of local actions was increasingly dictated by the demands of the global arena and its transnational constituency because the international campaign involved lobbying northern governments, especially the U.S. Congress, against supporting the World Bank's support for the SSP. Mobilization came to be focussed on an anti-dam policy that conformed to a Western environmental discourse that had transnational legitimacy, while the issue of compensation and land rights became secondary (Sen 1999). The image of "naturally conservationist" small-scale communities that were being destroyed by large-scale technologies had an obvious appeal for such a constituency.

I will give some examples of this imagery in action. During the Rally for the Valley in the summer of 1999 to protest an interim decision by the Supreme Court, the arrival of noted writer and activist Arundhati Roy was attended by hundreds of journalists from both India and abroad. All these had to be accommodated in the tiny hamlets of Jalsindhi and Domkhedi, in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. For the first time since visiting the Narmada Valley, I saw groups of male adivasis attired in "traditional" *lungis*[10] and turbans—some playing long flutes—ready for the photographers. When I happened to step beside a group playing music, an irate journalist asked me to step aside, since I was spoiling his photograph of "authentic" adivasi culture.

At another point, Luhariya Bhai, a local activist from Jalsindhi, was presented to journalists as one of the victims of submergence, perhaps in an effort to promote local voices. In the ensuing interaction, however, the same imagery emerged. Luhariya Bhai recounted for national and international journalists what living in the valley meant for his family. He listed the crops he was able to grow, including *makkai*, *tuer*, *danger* and *chillis*,[11] discussed how silting from the submergence area ruined his crops, and outlined his cultivation practices, ending by stating that almost everything he needed to survive was found in Jalsindhi. The English translation by the urban activist for the journalists, however, was that the adivasis received everything they needed *from the forest*, as if they were hunter-gatherers who did not engage in cultivation. The tendency to exaggerate the primitivism and subsistence-orientation of hill communities was evident in other conversations I had with NBA activists. For example, when I mentioned to an NBA worker that my hosts in Chopadi were astute about the value of Japanese consumer electronics, her reply was that Chopadi was not a "real" adivasi village because the resettlement process had "ruined them." At another point, I mentioned that there had been several recent divorces in Chopadi. This, too, was seen as a deviation from a pure adivasi norm, caused by "destructive modernizing influences" and not a reflection of distinctive gender norms of the hill communities. So, too, was the existence of drinking in Chopadi. Rather than being seen as characteristic of a specific hill culture that had a long history of alcohol consumption, it was interpreted as resulting from the stress of resettlement. In these examples, an isolated and non-commercialized "authentic" tribal community was juxtaposed to modernized and corrupted "tribes" of today. Conversely, behaviour that did not conform to this norm was attributed to outside influences while modernity became an overarching signifier of destruction.

An additional factor in the projection of adivasis as "naturally conservationist" may derive from the anti-consumerist ideology and life-style of the urban-based activists that derives from their Gandhian training and orientation. This includes not only a distinctive political philosophy of militant, non-violent civil disobedience, but also a cultural ethos based on satyagraha (truth-seeking), and a non-consumerist lifestyle. Indeed, I often observed and admired the habitus of the activists, their forms of dress and address, their sense of sacrifice and service, and their voluntary poverty that matched lives with ideals. Yet I also noted that this contrasted with the pragmatism that many adivasis in Chopadi expressed. "If we thought we could be film stars and live in Juhu, then of course we would move to Bombay. But there is nothing there for us. Without our land, we are nothing," was a sentiment I heard expressed in different ways and at different times during my stays in submerging villages.

Indeed, whether through their new contacts with the outside world or not, many Tadvis of Chopadi often struck me as rejecting what they viewed as the more austere lifestyle of the Gandhians. This was expressed not only through an astute appreciation of consumer goods, but more significantly through gendered idioms that explicitly rejected caste forms of moral regulation: they accepted divorce and second (love) marriages, expressed distaste for caste distinctions, and preferred bridewealth to dowry, which many women especially saw as signalling the higher status and greater autonomy of adivasi women. At one point, they referred to me jokingly as a *pukka* or pure Gandhian, because I did not drink alcohol. These different forms of habitus encoded distinctions that resonated with caste forms and norms, with the upper-caste reticence and propriety of the Gandhians contrasting with the relatively more autonomous lifestyle of the hill com-

munities. The "differences" from upper-caste propriety that marked the hill communities, however, were sometimes understood by many urban activists through a trope of corrupting modernization.

The different subjectivities, philosophies and ethos of urban activists and adivasis produced a potential gap between them of which the state was not unaware. The symbolic representation of adivasis as (presumed) outsiders to capitalist corruption contradicted Chopadiites own pragmatic evaluations of the limited political and economic options they faced. Their marginality to an emerging capitalist order was not a matter of choice but of necessity, and they understood that without land and resource control, their probable fate was proletarianization and poverty. Tensions and contradictions arose when adivasi assertions for land and survival conflicted with the image of a self-sustaining, low-technology community that lived in harmony with the forest.

Indeed, I believe that just such a disjuncture emerged between the ideals of the urban activists and the practical perceptions of many Chopadiites themselves. Unbeknownst to the urban activists, a mounting sense of futility concerning the long drawn-out legal battle with the government was wearing down many of the local adivasi leaders. In addition, the lack of organic leadership of the movement contributed to a growing sense of disillusionment among educated youth. A young man from Gadher, who claimed to have a B.Sc., was upset that he was not treated as an educated activist by the NBA and was not used by them in various media campaigns. This complaint was reiterated by a number of young, educated men I spoke to in 1999, including my research assistant, who often did not like to visit the NBA office in Vadodara because he felt ignored there.

These younger people were aware of the fact that the urban activists had attained international fame, while they had at most travelled to Delhi and Mumbai as examples of "victims of development." Some of the younger men and women thought that the NBA should have taught them English, so that they too could communicate with the media and represent their cause nationally and internationally. They were also aware of the Adi Jati Vikas Party, led by Chhotubhai Vasawa of Vagodhia, which had been championing the creation of autonomous tribal councils in Gujarat since 1993 (Joshi 2005). The perhaps unwitting representation of adivasis as noble primitives unaware of modernity did not fit the aspirations or perceptions of a sizeable section of younger people who had grown up under the shadow of the resettlement process, were articulate about the political and economic forces shaping their lives, and wanted a greater say in the direction of the NBA's strategies. The differences between the environmentalist discourse based on sustainable, low-technology communities and an adivasi rights discourse focussed on resource control was neither as explicit nor openly oppositional as reported in Madhya Pradesh (Baviskar 1995:188-191, 2003:290, 308). But in Gujarat, too, these differences pervaded the asymmetric interactions between urban activists and adivasis like a submerged undercurrent, eventually contributing to the Gujarat adivasi leaders' "betrayal" of the NBA's legal cause.[12]

Environmental Discourse and the Politics of Land

When the NBA decided in 1988 to oppose dam construction, on the grounds that they believed adequate compensation for oustees was impossible, they subtly shifted the terms of debate from a concern with land rights and just compensation to one focussed on environmentally sustainable development. In so doing, the organization also shifted the framework of analysis from the underlying social relations of capital, value and labour, to a thing, the dam, which itself became imbued with the powers to radically alter the fate of the adivasis.

Several effects followed from this particular shift in discourse. The first was that adivasis sometimes felt alienated from the technical discourse surrounding dams and their environmental destructiveness, such as the length of canals, salination and seepage from canals and rates of evaporation of water as it travelled to Saurashtra and Kutch. Residents of Chopadi sometimes stated apologetically that they had no real knowledge about how destructive the dam was to the environment, but they knew a great deal about farming in the forest. The requirement for technical "expert" knowledge in wider fora regarding dams and their "effects," produced a potential division of labour between activists and adivasis that could be difficult to surmount and tended to increasingly privilege the voices of educated, middle-class activists.

The second major effect of this shift in discourse was that ecological concerns tended to take precedence over issues of land ownership, resource and territorial control. Protests among displaced communities focussed on land titles and just resettlement and rehabilitation, but the transnational discourse on dams tended to emphasize their ecological destructiveness. This is not to state that the NBA ignored the issue of land resettlement, far from it. However, the question of inadequate resettlement seemed at times to become a means rather than an end—a way to prove how destructive large dams, in fact, were.

The anti-dam stance also fell prey to the error of commodity fetishism. While large dams are examples of surplus value congealed in the form of a thing, they are the product of underlying social relations, social processes and social policies that produce power differentials and class relations between people. To argue otherwise is to imbue the products of labour with the capacity of ruling over their producers, while social relations that produce congealed forms of labour in the form of a dam become epiphenomenal, an outgrowth of the technology. From my interviews in submerging villages, however, the issue of territorial rights and resource control remained dominant for adivasis and structured their political choices. While most in Chopadi ideally preferred to stay there provided the dam's height was lowered and they were awarded secure forms of land possession, the second choice was to accept a government settlement provided it is was a good one. Nor were they in principle opposed to technological change, as long as they had more control over the process. Their main, justified fear was of becoming landless proletarians in the global marketplace. Hence, while the anti-technology critique of neo-Gandhianism might link the consumerist refusal by middle class activists to the subsistence-orientation of small-scale producers, it did not encompass those who were already facing proletarianization, nor those who wished to engage in "development," but from a more favourable landed position.

As many writers have noted, the environmental degradation of land, water, and forests in India is simultaneously a class issue (Jodha 1986; Iyengar 2002). This is because accumulation by dispossession in India disproportionately affects adivasis and the rural poor who have historically relied on common property resources to a greater extent than the rest of the population. Although the NBA did not ignore the land issue, the transnational focus on ecological protest changed priorities somewhat, inverting the relations between technology, social relations and capital accumulation. In understanding the effects of large-scale technologies on small scale communities, it is important to note that transnational organizations, urban activists and adivasis entered this struggle with somewhat different goals and critiques in mind, and the stakes for the adivasis were much higher because they involved questions of land dispossession and eventual proletarianization and poverty.

Fourth Moment: Changing Parameters of State, Civil Society and Resistance

The movements to oppose large dams in India arose during a transition in modes of regulation between the 1980s and 1990s. In India, this change from Fordism to flexible accumulation involved policy changes that included the dismantling of the Nehruvian developmental project that combined import substitution policies, capitalist accumulation and industrialization with legitimation policies. The legitimation policies of state planning involved, according to Chakraborty, "social measures to avoid the unnecessary rigours of (primitive) accumulation...for the masses resident in India's villages," enshrined in the Planning Commission and its policy documents (Chatterjee 1997:283). These ameliorative policies were important parts of the welfarist rhetoric of the Congress Party that held power in India for most of the fifty years following Independence in 1947.[13] Following a balance of payments crisis in July 1991, the now familiar neoliberal economic prescriptions began to be applied to Indian economic policy by the World Bank and IMF, policies welcomed by an important section of Indian industrialists. These policies involved subtle shifts in the developmentalist rhetoric of the state. Neo-liberal development paradigms relied on the market to create growth, extolled individual autonomy and private property, and were basically anti-statist, seeing the state as creating imperfections in factor markets. Hence, the welfarist rhetoric and those state policies that "ameliorated the rigours of accumulation" were largely jettisoned, while the state was reshaped into an organization aimed at attracting capital investment, both domestic and foreign. In addition, neo-liberal policy makers promoted non-governmental and civil-society organizations in the place of the state to create a "social cushion" for those hardest hit by the shock therapies of neo-liberalism. As the welfare functions of the state were rolled back, it was assumed that civil society organizations could take up their roles:

> NGOs were considered (by the IFIs) to be a better conduit for the distribution of multilateral and bilateral aid, for the dissemination of new ideas and concepts, and as a means to foster local participation and greater democracy in order to improve civil society. [Zaidi 2000:204]

The failure of the NBA to halt construction of the dam ultimately raises questions concerning the role of autonomous organizations trying to resist both a "cunning national state" and supra-state institutions that have emerged in the wake of liberalization (Randeria 2003). Are such organizations really offering alternative forms of resistance? Kamat, for example, has analyzed the processes through which an NGO that politicized bonded labourers in Maharashtra became absorbed into the consensual wing of neo-liberal governance through adopting a developmental project. This project gradually over-

shadowed its politicizing role, and was ultimately disempowering for those it claimed to represent (Kamat 2001). Her argument is that many NGOs are in danger of being absorbed into the apparatus of consent. Are even overtly resistance organizations such as the NBA being positioned as part of the apparatus of consent by providing the human rights voice that national states are abrogating in their drive to promote international and domestic investment?

The NBA has utilized Gandhian methods, tending to favour legal challenges to the state alongside dramatic civil disobedience campaigns. This litigation undoubtedly pressured the state to find some new lands for resettlement. However, to depend on the law to challenge state policy leaves an entire set of questions unanswered and even unasked. This is because legal challenges were framed within the parameters of the 1979 Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal Award, which stipulated that five acres of land would be given to every male household head in compensation for land submerged (Dreze et al. 1997). The NBA's case was based on the premise that the state failed to live up to the promises of this Award. The protests of the NBA, and its public interest litigation, were therefore mainly against the excesses of the state, while the state's continuing dispossession of adivasi lands for "national development" was allowed to retain an overall patina of legitimate authority. Hence, they tended to accept "one of the key sources of contemporary power—private ownership of the means of production—[which was] ostensibly depoliticized (and naturalized), i.e. treated as if it were not a proper subject of politics" (Kamat 2001:72).

Despite its success in articulating the plight of the dispossessed in the Narmada Valley, the philosophy underlying neo-Gandhian resistance does not provide a critical understanding of accumulation by dispossession and its relation to large-scale dams and other capital-intensive technologies. This is because it does not frame accumulation within capitalist reproduction, but sees it as an outgrowth of technological development driven by excessive consumption. It therefore tends to equate "development" with "consumerist greed," and to espouse small-scale technologies and anti-consumerism as the answer. In Gramscian terms, neo-Gandhian critique achieves its identity mainly through a series of negations of neo-liberal policies and cultural values, rather than through understanding the underlying forms of capital accumulation that drive the expansion of neoliberal policies and state forms. It therefore fragments issues on the basis of the destructiveness of a particular technology, rather than providing a common basis of critique for all those facing the accumulation of their lands, forests, water and other common resources.

The anti-dam stance of the NBA had several unfortunate effects in Gujarat. First, the focus on dams alone had the effect of dividing various marginalized groups from different regions within the state. As was well understood by the state government, farmers and graziers in Kutch and Saurashtra were suffering from drought conditions caused partly by declining groundwater levels due to increased tube-well use by large farmers, itself a product of agricultural capitalization. Like the adivasis of the eastern belt, these populations, some of whom were adivasis, had rather large portions of common property lands and resources that were gradually being appropriated by large farmers (Iyengar 2002, Jani 2002). Yet various Gujarat governments, led by both the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party throughout the1990s, were successfully able to divide adivasis, the rural landless, and poor peasants of eastern and western Gujarat on this issue. They portrayed environmentalists as opposing the needs of drought-prone Kutch and Saurashtra—arguments which the NBA seemed largely unable to counteract. Second, large sections of Gujarat's population believed that the NBA's advocacy of small-scale technologies and anti-consumerism was an unrealistic and utopian response to globalization. Small-scale alternatives that the NBA suggested to alleviate the drought situation, such as watershed management, check dams, and local groundwater and rainwater harvesting, were largely met with either ridicule or silence in Gujarat itself.

By focussing on an effect rather than the underlying cause of accumulation, the anti-technology stance of neo-Gandhianism eventually became like the ritualized rebellions against the king described by Max Gluckman (2004:112). These rebellions allowed commoners to express their discontent and displeasure at particular kings, reversing roles and ideologies in a mirror-image binary form. However, they did not alter the structure of kingship itself. Both neo-Gandhian protests and rebellions against the king fulfill the role of accommodative resistance. They both enable expressions of discontent over specific policies, while inverting the dominant discourse in the process. However, they do not critique the underlying structure of accumulation or processes of class formation, allowing these to remain institutionally unchallenged.

Analyzed in global terms, resistance NGOs may now function as the major—and sometimes the only—agents raising human rights issues in partly global and partly national forms of shared sovereignty, demanding that the state, the IMF, and the World Bank respect principles of formal equality of citizens while pursuing capital accumulation. They occupy what can be termed a "human

rights" slot in an overall regime of neo-liberal governance that includes both national and supra-national actors. But they have not as yet challenged the separation between state and economy, nor have they challenged the process of accumulation by dispossession upon which such a separation depends. Hence, they have not been able to broaden their analytical stance sufficiently to enable all those affected by accumulation by dispossession to find a common voice and organizational platform.[14]

Indeed, one of my Tadvi interlocutors viewed his participation in the NBA in just this way: when I asked Kranti Bhai why he had finally received five acres of land while his youngest brother had not, he replied that he had been much more prominent in the anti-dam movement than his younger brother. He had worked hard for 16 years by participating in dharnas and marches, by organizing people to return to the submerging village and by arguing with district and resettlement authorities over issues related to the allotment of lands. Thus, his name came to the attention of the government, and knowing of his persistence, they had singled him out in the summer of 2000 to offer him land in Gorai. For him, joining the NBA was a means to pressure the state to live up to its promises and respect the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal Award. One might conclude that the subaltern voices of those adivasis who betrayed a cause that represented them but did not empower them to direct its trajectory, had finally found a space within the political, symbolic and economic "enclosures" that framed them.

Judy Whitehead, Department of Anthropology, University of Lethbridge, 4401 University Way, Lethbridge, Alberta, T1K 3M4, Canada. E-mail: whitja01@uleth.ca

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Notes

1 *Adivasis* can be translated loosely as "aboriginal people" and is a term that is applied to approximately 8% of India's population who mainly practice subsistence agriculture, slash and burn farming, hunting and gathering, or some combination of the three. The term "scheduled tribes" is the official designation of this population, while the term adivasi arose as a result of a movement for "tribal" self-assertion in Chattisgarh in the 1940s. Since most of the people I worked with chose the term adivasi, I also use that term. The major adivasi groups that were to be displaced by the Sardar Sarovar Project in Gujarat also self-identified as Tadvi and Vasawa, names that were related to wide descent groups and constituted the sense of a separate, endogamous community.

2 Harvey thus updates and extends Marx's concept of "primitive accumulation": a process of dispossession that produces capital on the one side, and labourers on the other (Marx 1973:176). Harvey argues persuasively that periods of capitalist crises, for example, the crisis of Fordism, engender new rounds of "primitive accumulation," as services, territories and knowledge that had been socially owned become privatized and thus contribute to the creation of new "value" and "surplus-value." These recurring processes he refers to as "accumulation by dispossession," since they occur periodically, rather than just at the beginning of capitalist production. I have argued elsewhere that dams, through divesting control over water and lands from communities to the state and private companies, are a highly effective force of production that produces massive forms of accumulation by dispossession (Whitehead 2002).

3 The NBA has recently changed its no-dam policy, arguing that this is no longer a feasible alternative, and has taken up the cause of the land rights of oustees in Madhya Pradesh, where the majority of the resettlees reside. Indeed, it seems to have garnered national support for this position recently (see Frontline, April 22-May 5, 2006, http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/stories/20060505003912000.htm).

4 The latter incident may not seem especially surprising in terms of present-day security concerns. However, it occurred two months before 9/11.

5 The Ram Janma Bhoomi agitations were a movement to demolish a Muslim temple in northeastern India, and build a Ram temple there. The spot was located in Ayodhya, and was believed to be the birthplace of Ram, a major Hindu deity. The agitations in 1991-92 led to widespread "communal" violence between Hindus and Muslims throughout India, with the minority Muslim community being targeted for organized attacks. Vishwa Hindu Parishad is the cultural organization of the Sangh Pariwar, the militant Hindu set of organizations that wishes to create a Hindu nation and state.

6 *Satyagraha* literally means "truth-force" and refers to civil disobedience that expresses the perceived "truth" of one's position and perception, even in the face of extreme repression.

7 Since the postcolonial state defined itself as a developmentalist one, this metaphoric extension between anti-developmentalism and anti-nationalism was fairly easy to create and disseminate.

8 Nandy, at some points, seems to equate science, colonialism and development, so that a cultural critique of development becomes defined as a reverse mirror-image of mainstream development thinking (see Nandy 2003:151-170).

9 Indeed, the image of traditional, environmentally sustainable tribal communities resisting destructive development policies had been a potent image for transnational environmental campaigns supported by U.S.-based environmental organizations such as the Environmental Defence

Fund, a key international ally of the NBA, who pioneered this alliance in the Amazon.

10 Lungis consist of strips of embroidered, cotton cloth that are wrapped around the body several times.

11 Makkai is a form of maize; tuer is a lentil; danger is an "inferior" form of rice; and chillis are spices.

12 There is some evidence that the split between the NBA and tribal rights movements in Gujarat has become much more explicit, as Chhottubhai Vasawa has told his followers to have nothing to do with the NBA (Joshi 2005: personal communication).

13 Indeed, many of the earlier critiques of the Congress Party prior to liberalization were based on the state's inability to offer more than rhetoric as an amelioriation of poverty because its power rested on a series of alliances with powerful rural elements that were gradually incorporated into the state apparatus through a passive revolution (see Kaviraj 1997).

14 The NBA is part of a wider alliance in India, the National Association of People's Movements. However, this alliance does not include major trade unions or peasant organizations in India and hence its relative political clout is still rather weak.

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