

## CHAPTER 6

# THE NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN

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### 6.1. INTRODUCTION

Water in a contemporary society has undoubtedly become a site where contending perceptions meet. Recognizing the importance of the politics of water, Karl Wittfogel (1957) stated that every society is based on hydropolitics. The conflicts over water reflect the physical and symbolic character of water and can therefore focus on issues as diverse as particular physical infrastructure or non-state specific ideology. The water is requisite to human life inevitably means that water is also fundamental to culture. Therefore, systems must be in place to distribute water in ways that reduce the possibility of conflict. However, the contemporary societies have been experiencing a burgeoning of water related conflicts throughout the world, especially with the rise and global spread of big dam building. Until 1960s-1970s, the water discourse of the multilateral agencies can be described as the 'hydraulic mission' (Swyngedouw: 1998; Reisner: 1984), commensurate with the drive towards modernity in which settlements and ecosystems submerged during construction of dams were seen as necessary sacrifices for the greater common good. Since then, Wade (1997) describes the upsurge of environmental projects, assessments and strategies within the World Bank (which is the chief funding agency for such projects) as 'mission overload', responding to the pressure from beyond areas immediately affected by dams. Consequent to this, a negotiated 'complex multilateralism' emerges as the development agencies are influenced by, and form links with, social movements (O' Brien et al: 2000). This relationship with the non-state actors is new, but the depth and extent of the policy 'greening' is unclear as it is still emerging, and the movements and the multilateral agencies are diverse and internally differentiated.

Thus, today the discourse on water and dams has become almost synonymous to the discourse on conflicts throughout the globe.

In India too, all major rivers are dammed or are in the process of being so. This has, however, not been able to deliver good to the local populace in the areas of the big dams, and therefore, the questions are now being raised about the viability of large dams that have often proved to be ecological disasters. The performance of the large dams in India has not been laudable. Viewed in terms of their contribution to irrigation, the India Case Study Report of the World Commission on Dams (WCD) makes harsh judgement on the capacity of the large dams to deliver on promises of increased irrigation. In terms of Cost-Benefits Ratio (CBR), the dams seem to have started off badly and gotten worse from there (see Singh, 1997 and Nilsen, 2005 for details). However, we have little data to review the performance of large dams in terms of their hydro-power capacity. Nonetheless, it is now widely seen that the large dams have been criticized for the disasters related to them—social, economic, and environmental. The negative externalities produced by the construction of large dams have, therefore, resulted in the rise of conflicts, often culminating into large scale social movements in contemporary India (see Chapter 4: Taxonomy of environmental movements in India), in the form of environmental movements, which constitute a bulk of the environmental movements in the country. Silent Valley and Munnar in Kerala, Bedthi in Karnataka, Tehri and Vishnuprayag in Uttaranchal, Koel-Karo in Bihar, Lalpur in Gujarat, Bhopalapatnam and Inchampali in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh borders, and the dams across the Narmada in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat are some leading examples where dam related disasters like ecological devastation and human displacement have taken place or are in the offing.

The system of water harnessing through the construction of large dams and the resultant conflicts over the issue of distribution of water resources have, therefore, contributed to the multiplication of peoples' movements on the issue. The Table below shows the important ant-dam struggles in India since the early 1970s, and the main issues raised by such protest movements.

**Table 6.1:**  
**The Details of Some Major Dams and Related Issues**

| Name of the Dam                        | Year Since the Protest Became Active | Main Issue of Protest                                   | Details  |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| Koel Karo, Bihar                       | 1973                                 | ◆ Tribal Displacement<br>◆ Loss of Forest               | 1256 villages affected, mostly tribal                        |
| Tehri Dam, Uttaranchal (Previously UP) | 1978                                 | ◆ Fragility of Ecosystem<br>◆ Dislocation of People     | 195 Villages affected<br>Displacement of about 70,000 people |
| Subarnarekha, Bihar                    | 1978                                 | ◆ Displacement and<br>◆ Rehabilitation                  | Displacement of 1,20,000 People                              |
| Bedhi, Karnataka                       | 1979                                 | ◆ Environment and<br>◆ Displacement                     | About 4000 Tribal Displacement                               |
| Bhopalapatanam-Inchampalli             | 1983                                 | ◆ Displacement<br>◆ Loss of Livelihood<br>◆ Environment | Affecting about 75,000 Tribals                               |
| Sardar Sarovar on Narmada, Gujarat     | 1985                                 | ◆ Resettlement and<br>◆ Rehabilitation                  | Displacement of about 400,000 People                         |
| Bochghat on Indrawati                  | 1986                                 | ◆ Environment   | Affecting about 10,000 People                                |
| Maheswar Dam, Narmada, Madhya Pradesh  | 1992                                 | ◆ Resettlement and<br>◆ Rehabilitation                  | About 400,000 to be affected                                 |
| Bisalpur on Banas and Dai, Rajasthan   | 1993                                 | ◆ Resettlement and<br>◆ Rehasbilitation                 | Displacement of over 70,000 people                           |
| Bargi on Narmada in Madhya Pradesh     | 1994                                 | ◆ Displacement and<br>◆ Rehabilitation                  | Submergence of about 162 villages                            |

(Source: State of India's environment: Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi)

However, the debate on the ecological impact of dams has generally remained confined to environmentalists alone. Hence, the study of the politics of

large dams has become prominent on the agenda of social scientists in the recent years.

The present study concerns with the Narmada Bachao Andolan which developed as a critical response to damming Narmada, India's most ambitious development project to date, and yet the most controversial. The Narmada water dispute and the consequent movement in the Narmada Valley, for a political scientist, provides a classic illustration of three highly complex problems: allocating a resource and the costs and benefits of developing it in a federation where two or more states and a central government are jurisdictionally involved; sharing water in an upstream-downstream conflict; and resolving the conflict between human rights and environmental justice on the one hand, and government and pro-development interests, on the other.

## 6.2. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

The Narmada Basin covers an area of approximately 94,500 square kilometers between the Vindhya and the Satpura ranges in Central India. It is the site of the Narmada Valley Development Project (NVDP), an ambitious project that seeks to harness the river Narmada that flows through the three states of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat, which envisages that thirty big dams, one hundred and thirty-five medium dams, and three thousand small dams will be constructed on the Narmada river and its forty-one tributaries. However, the Narmada basin has such characteristic that has led the people to oppose the project envisaged by the state. This is because between gorges flanked by densely forested basaltic hills, the 1312 kilometers long Narmada Valley contains large alluvial plains in Madhya Pradesh. To the West, the Narmada River meanders through Gujarat widening into a 25-kilometer long estuary as it flows into the Gulf of Cambay. More than 22 million people live in the valley and several tribal groups, particularly Bhils and Gonds occupy the forested uplands. The project is estimated to affect over 2.5 lakh of people. The Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) and the Narmada Sagar Project (NSP) are the two largest dams to be constructed in the Narmada River, and the SSP alone will submerge 245 villages: 19 in Gujarat, 33 in Maharashtra, and 193 in Madhya Pradesh. Thus these two projects have remained controversial owing to their large-scale displacement and problems of

humane rehabilitation. This has resulted in the emergence of a protest movement unique of its kind called the 'Narmada Bachao Andolan'. However, it needs to be noted and clarified here that although resistance in the Narmada Valley is often equated with the Narmada Bachao Andolan's campaign against the SSP, just as the Narmada Valley Development Project is more than the SSP, the NBA is also more than the struggle against the SSP, embracing within its fold the protests against the Maheswar and the Bargi Dams, too.

The movement has drawn upon a multiplicity of discourses for protests such as displacement risks and resettlement provisions; environmental impact and sustainability issues; financial implications of the project; forceful evictions and violations of civil liberties; issues pertaining to river valley planning and management; implications of western growth model, and alternative development and appropriate technology, among many others. The movement uses various tools of protest such as *Satyagraha* (political action based on truth and non-violence as coined by Gandhi), *Jal Samarpan* (sacrificial drowning in the rivers), *Rasta Roko* (road blockade at strategic points), *Gaon Bandhi* (refusing the entry of government officials into the villages), demonstrations and rallies, hunger strikes and blockade of projects.

The Narmada Bachao Andolan has successfully brought to public domain the hitherto closed and protected discourse on mega development projects, thereby opening new vistas for environmental movements. The protest also has pointed out the necessity to address the shortcomings in institutional frameworks governing big developmental projects by laying bare the ecological implications of such mega development projects.

As Routledge (2003) notes, the Narmada Bachao Andolan has been conducting its resistances across multiple scales. It has grounded its resistances against the project in the villages, and it has also taken the struggles to non-local terrains including the national and international levels. These resistances are articulated within a number of inter-related realms. In the political realm, the Andolan has challenged the state centered and increasingly trans-corporate biased character of the political process, articulating critiques of neoliberal development

ideology and the role of the state. In the environmental realm, it is involved in a struggle to protect local ecological resources like forests and rivers. In the economic realm, it articulates a conflict over access to productive natural resources like forests, land and water that are under threat of exploitation by the three riparian states and the transnational corporations. And, finally, in the cultural front, it articulates to protect the identities and solidarities of the communities of the communities affected by the project which are grounded around issues of kinship, neighbourhood and the everyday social interactions. Hence, the movement involves interplay of various socio-political, economic and environmental variables at different levels from a local remote tribal hamlet to a sophisticated office of the transnational company at the international level. This complex interaction between the movement variables lend it the scope to move and transform, thereby affecting not only these variables but the entire relationship between the movement, the state and the public policy. This provides a challenging and a unique opportunity for a social scientist to comprehend its dynamic and transformative character and its consequent implications to public policy and the society.

The Narmada Bachao Andolan has been hailed as a good example of the environmental movement in India (Shiva and Bandyopadhyay: 1989; Gadgil and Guha: 1995), and has attracted a wide scholarly attention (Wood: 1993; Omvedt: 1993; Baviskar: 1995; Sangvai: 2002; Khagram: 2004; Nilsen: 2006). It is undoubtedly the most famous Indian example of resistance to large Dams. As one of the leading anti-dam movements in India, the Narmada Bachao Andolan has waged a long, multi-pronged fight against the Narmada Valley Projects. It has also challenged, and sometimes even defeated, international and national institutions that defend current hegemonic development paradigms and the continuous exploitation characterizing the Indian society. While propagating sustainable, people centered development, the Narmada Bachao Andolan has highlighted the contradictions of development paradigms that are based on unequal distribution and utilization of resources and lead to unbalanced growth (Srinivasan: 2004). However, the movement has awaited a comprehensive profile in terms of its dynamism and transformations, which the present study levies a critical gaze.

### 6.3. THE MOVEMENT AND ITS COURSE

The Narmada Bachao Andolan did not at once emerge as a monolithic pan-state movement as it exists today. Not being an evidently identifiable chain of events, the course of the movement began with the sporadic incidents in different corners of the three riparian states of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat. Hence, the course of the movement prevents any diachronic analysis. At best, its course of development can be comprehended as a discourse of resistance accessible through movement documents and specific symbolic practices. In the following section, an attempt has been made to map the precursors of the Narmada Bachao Movement until the later half of the movement (second half of the 1980s) when it appeared as a unified movement followed by a discussion on the movement as a pan-state environmental movement after its institutionalization, till date.

The present NBA is a resistance movement against the construction of dams across the Narmada River and its social and environmental costs. However, most part of the resistances in and around the Narmada Valley is the resistances against the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP). The precursors of the institutionalized NBA that we delve into in the following sections too are resistances organized against the SSP by the local organizations at different points of time in the three riparian states.

A major resistance movement organized against the SSP is the one by the *Khedut Mazdoor Chetna Sangath* (KMCS) in the submergence zone in Alirajpur, in Jhabua District of Madhya Pradesh in the early and mid-1980s. Although the KMCS was a trade union which initially worked for defending customary use rights of the tribals to forest resources, yet it came to address the problems associated with dam building on the Narmada River. Hence, in Alirajpur, it was the KMCS which started a mobilization campaign against the SSP, which, however, ultimately melted in to the current NBA in the later half of the 1980s.

Maharashtra also initially witnessed a similar resistance mobilization by the local organizations. In the tribal areas of Akkalkua and Akrani Tehsils in the

Nandurbar District of Maharashtra, the groundwork for local mobilization was laid down in the mid 1980s by Medha Patkar who was researching there for an organization called SETU on the issue of displacement and resettlement in the SSP submergence zone. Her interaction with the dam affected people in the region prompted her to establish an organization to articulate the grievances of the submerging communities and to voice their demands. This eventually led to the formation of the *Narmada Dhanagasta Samiti* under the leadership of Medha which started campaigning for better implementation of resettlement and rehabilitation of the dam oustees.

In the tribal areas of Gujarat, anti-dam mobilization began under the leadership of the ARCH Vahini (AV), an action-research organization working on health related issues and funded by OXFAM. In Gujarat too, the ARCH vahini came across a situation of information gap on the question of dam displacement and resettlement in the local community. Hence, the AV started mobilizing on issues of information on displacement resettlement and rehabilitation, with occasional confrontations with the Government of Gujarat.

The first stirrings leading to the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada Movement) in the Western Nimad region of Madhya Pradesh began in the fag end of the 1970s. The caste Hindu farming communities of Western Nimad Plains initiated the resistance against the SSP first as '*Nimad Bachao Andolan*' immediately after the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal (NWDT) presented its final award on 16 August 1979. The affected villagers from Nimad launched the '*Nimad Bachao Sangharsh Samiti*' as a struggle for the reduction of the height of the proposed dam. Although the Nimad Bachao campaign was chiefly supported by merchants and farmers in Nimad and worked within the established structures of party politics (as this time coincided with BJP being in power both at the Centre and in Madhya Pradesh, when Arjun Singh, an established Congress (I) leader in Madhya Pradesh mobilized the people in and around Nimad on the issue of displacement), the attendance in the rally is said to have been several times more than what is seen today. However, with Arjun Singh winning the 1979 state elections on a platform that pledged support for the movement, the



situation changed for worse. Arjun Singh ditched the movement, leading finally to its collapse. Hence, the stirrings quickly waned due to their embeddedness in the equations of the parliamentary politics. This phase representing sporadic stirrings in different parts of the three riparian states may be regarded as the first phase in the evolution of the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

The second phase of the protest occurred sometimes in 1985, a time when some environmentalists' forums outside the valley like the Kalpavriksh and the Hindu College Nature Club expressed their disquiet in the press. At this stage, Medha Patkar got involved in community mobilization in Maharashtra on the issue of submergence and displacement. Initially, just resettlement and rehabilitation of the people being displaced by the SSP Dam also became the core issues of the movement. However, when it became apparent that it was not possible for the state to resettle all the displaced persons properly, the focus shifted to total opposition to the dam, and finally, in course of time, to preserving the environmental integrity and natural ecosystems of the entire valley. Thus, the issues transformed from reduction of dam height to question of resettlement and rehabilitation to the question of environmental integrity culminating in the total opposition to the project.

Sometimes in the later half of the 1980s, the interactions between the local organizations in all the three riparian states and their anti-dam mobilizations led the Narmada Dhanagruha Samiti, the Narmada Ghati Navanirman Samiti and the Narmada Asargruha Sangharsa Samiti of Kervadia Colony in Gujarat to finally declare their joint opposition to the Sardar Sarovar project. These organizations merged together and finally, a pan-state environmental movement came into existence. This institutionalization of the local level protests into a monolithic, pan-state environmental movement represents the third phase in the evolution of the movement.

Fourth stage of the movement is located sometimes in the early 1990s. The movement reached a dramatic phase late in 1990 when Baba Amte and approximately five thousand protestors, mostly tribals, began the Narmada Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra (Narmada People's Progress Struggle March) from Badwani, Madhya Pradesh to Ferkuwa on the Madhya Pradesh- Gujarat borders. However, in practical terms the Gujarat government defeated the tribal protestors. However, far from admitting defeat, the Narmada Bachao Andolan announced a non-cooperation movement in the valley including the anti-tax paying campaign and the prevention of all government officials except teachers and doctors from entering the villages. The movement took a new turn with the withdrawal by the World Bank, and the pressure from the movement for the review of the project.

#### 6.4. MOVEMENT PARAMETERS AND MOVEMENT DYNAMISM

Social movements are not eternal. They have a definite life cycle; they are created, they grow, they achieve successes or failures and eventually, they dissolve and cease to exist. They are more likely to evolve in the time and place which is friendly to the social movements. They are more likely to form in the societies and cultures allowing expression of ideas by individuals -which explains why most social movements exist in United States and Europe, and fewer in more autocratic places like Russia or China. Such friendly context and environment is only a background facilitating the creation of the social movement. There must also be polarizing differences between groups of people: in case of old movements (referred as Social Movements), they were the uneven distribution of wealth and poverty. In case of the New Social Movements, they are more likely to be the differences in customs, ethics and values. Finally, the birth of a social movement needs an *initiating event* (Smelser, 1962): a particular, individual event that will begin a chain reaction of events in the given society leading to the creation of a social movement. For example, American Civil Rights movement grew on the reaction to black women, Rosa Parks, riding in the whites-only section of the bus. Polish Solidarity movement, which eventually toppled the

communist regimes of Eastern Europe, developed after trade union activist Anna Walentynowicz was fired from work. Many social movements are created around some charismatic leader. After the social movement is created, there are two likely phases of recruitment. The first phase will gather the people deeply interested in the primary goal and ideal of the movement. The second phase, which will usually come after the given movement had some successes and is trendy. People who join in this second phase will likely be the first to leave when the movement suffers any setbacks and failures. Eventually, the social crisis can be encouraged by outside elements, like opposition from government or other movements. However, many movements had survived a failure crisis, being revived by some hardcore activists even after several decades. Thus the movement is dynamic, with a multiplicity of phenomena and processes operating in various dynamics. Especially in the case of the environmental movements, this dynamic presents the significant challenge of identifying all the different social actors, scales and levels, as well as the strategies and goal structures operating in such contexts and then describing the way they interact with each other in the complex process of political struggle.

In case of the Narmada Bachao Andolan, originated as a response to the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal Award and is lead by charismatic leaders. Its activists are recruited from different sections of Indian society: the tribals of the affected area and the educated middle-class activists who have joined the movement from different urban centers in India in the course of the movement. It evolved, grew and still continues to grow, passing through different stages with its unique characteristics, shaped by various social relational factors, history, culture and the activists involved in the movement, nature of the target and the nature of the domestic and international environments. Thus the movement is dynamic and it is constantly changing in its objectives, issues, strategies, and finally in its nature and content. We shall explore the various factors that have led to the movement of the movement and its consequent transformations at different levels in different stages of the movement.

#### 6.4.1. Caste affiliations and Movement Dynamics

The locale of resistance in which the NBA evolved, especially in the later stage of the movement, also features several factors that affected the process of mobilizations. One of such factors is caste (a structural-relational parameter of the movement) solidarity and social bonds based on caste, having an impact on movement mobilizations (see Hypothesis 1). We have, in the following sections, attempted to show how the factor of caste and caste relations in a given society affects the process of movement mobilization, taking explanatory examples from the anti SSP and anti-Maheswar dam campaign in the alter stage of the NBA.

Gadgil and Guha (1992) see the caste system as a form of ecological adaptation. Contrarily, from the perspective of movement analysis, we believe that the structural relational factors like caste cleavages and religious differences are likely to bear an adverse impact on the movement organization and mobilization. This is because in a much segmented society such as India, genuine popular mobilization should be arguably more difficult to achieve, since the people involved to a much lesser extent than in more equal societies ought to have common, shared values. One must know that there is often a profound aversion between different castes in India, and, as Dipankar Gupta (2000) writes, even seemingly closely related castes have difficulties coming together. Some communities nevertheless come together and participate in large-scale social actions, whereas others do not participate to the same extent under similar situations.

Since the Narmada Bachao Andolan has taken place in an area inhabited predominantly by the tribals, especially in case of the anti-SSP campaigns, one may be under an impression that the caste differences do not arise in the tribal region and therefore, movement might have had no impact whatsoever from caste factor. However, it needs to be noted that places like Nimad in Madhya Pradesh, a hub of the NBA activities has had the past experiences of social

tensions being created by caste. Dhar and Jhabua Districts and the Nimad Plains in Madhya Pradesh, and Dhule, Nanded and Jalgaon districts of Maharashtra, the places where the NBA is active, are inhabited by people belonging to upper caste Hindu community, the lower castes (Scheduled Castes), and the adivasis or Scheduled Tribes (see Table below for details. This Table is, however, intended only to give an understanding of the nature of social structure and social composition in the NBA stronghold areas).

**Table: 6.2**  
**Distribution of SC and ST Population in some Select Districts of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra where NBA is Active**

| District/State  | Total Population | SC Population | ST Population |
|-----------------|------------------|---------------|---------------|
| East Nimad (MP) | 1431662          | 163160        | 38323         |
| West Nimad (MP) | 2028145          | 198018        | 937710        |
| Dhar (MP)       | 1367412          | 94895         | 731272        |
| Jhabua (MP)     | 1130405          | 34641         | 968372        |
| Dhule (MH)      | 2535715          | 134359        | 1036491       |
| Jalgaon (MH)    | 3187634          | 295047        | 313551        |
| Nanded (MH)     | 2330374          | 422942        | 275972        |

Source: Constructed on the basis of the State Primary Census Abstracts for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, Census of India, 1991.

Effective mobilization for the movement demands a conducive social atmosphere, which demanded the improving of the caste relations in the area. Improving the caste relations was not an easy task. This was because the government tried to cash in on the traditional caste divide in the villages by luring the landless Dalits to opt for resettlement. Such a situation was also evident in Nimad Palins of Madhya Pradesh, the tribal areas of Maharashtra and in Alirajpur in Madhya Pradesh because of the similarly stratified society (in terms of class relations) owing to the community's socio-economic and educational backwardness. Hence, caste became a site of contestation between the

proponents and opponents of the movement, thereby lending scope for movement dynamism.

Let us briefly explore as an example the caste composition of the Nimadi population and its impact on the movement. The Western nimad villages are composed of diverse caste groups and the adivasis people. A village like Chilkada has a population with a diverse caste and adivasis composition ranging from Yadavs, Muslims, Kevats, Kahars, Patidars, Mankars, Brahmins and the Adivasis. Similarly, Chota barda, one of the largest villages in the SSP submergence zone consists of caste groups like Patidars, Yadavs, Brahmins, Koli Dalits, Kevats, Kahars and many other smaller crafts-based caste groups. However, Patidars constitute a bulk of the West Nimadi population and are the most prosperous and powerful land owning groups in the region. However, in East Nimad plains, it is the Gujars which constitute the economically and socially powerful group. Hence, the question of caste differentiation and caste-based discrimination are not less pronounced in the region. On the one hand, the upper castes who control the land support the movement because of their perceived risk of land marginalization, on the other hand, the lower castes and the adivasis who are basically the wage labourers support the movement because of the threat of loss of jobs, the security of the village economy, and their dependence on the common property resources. Moreover, whereas the labouring class is likely to be hit hard by the adverse effects of cash compensation such as tendencies towards alcoholism, unproductive spending etc., on which the movement capitalizes, the support of the upper caste Nimadi farmers to the NBA is conditioned by the perception of unfair compensation to the loss of land. This unites the two groups in the Nimadi plains based on which the movement has elicited a large support in the region. But, on the other and, the caste-based discrimination that plagues the society acts as the opportunity structure for the proponents of the project to divide further the Nimadi population and weaken the movement. Hence<sup>3</sup>, the caste has provided a site where the contending parties interact, thereby providing movement its driving force in terms of designing of newer objectives and strategies (for instance, NBA creating the agenda promoting caste solidarity), and lending te movement to move and transform.

On the contrary, in case of the Maheswar anti-dam campaign, a part of the broader NBA, the caste relations and social bonds have provided an enabling environment for rapid and speedy mobilizations. The movement could harness support from communities outside the submergence zone in the area because the two dominant caste groups there, the Gujars and the Patidars showed strong caste based solidarity. Moreover, these dominant caste groups in the area are highly organized communities and they share strong social bonds established through marriages. This social structure, characterized by caste solidarity and strong marital social bonds acted as a reservoir of social capital for the movement, banked on which the movement widened its support base. Thus, caste relations and the structuration of conjugal practices have acted both as strength and as a constraint in movement mobilizations.

#### 6.4.2. Influence of Cultural and Historical Legacies and Movement Dynamics

Analysis of history and culture helps explain why certain ritual acts are successful in mobilizing the environmental movement while others are not. In addition, cultural analysis reveals how discourses and ritualisation impacts the solidarity, identity and consciousness of movement participants, which also helps explain why a movement is successful (Hsiao, et al: 1999). In case of the NBA, the making of the movement has relied heavily on cultural constructions. Rivers have been an integral part of the rise of civilization in the Indian sub-continent. This has resulted in a deep-rooted reverence for rivers in the Indian minds. Riverbanks in India abound with temples and holy shrines; bathing in most of the rivers is seen as a process of washing away one's sins. The flow of the rivers is basic to these beliefs which see the flow itself as a source of purity. And, an attempt to impede the flow is seen as an irreligious act, an act of sin. These beliefs find an expression in the numerous songs and stories that form an integral part of the cultural milieu of the people living close by. This is stronger in case of the adivasis and forest dwelling communities in India.

Since a large fraction of the project affected people in the Narmada Valley constitute the adivasis communities, a brief exposition of the dominant adivasis cultural values relating to their relations to the land are necessary at this

junction so as to elucidate the impact of embedded structural parameters of the movement like the cultural legacies on the movement dynamics. The forest, fire, thunder and rain, sun, moon and stars, and animals generally dominate the adivasis cultural and belief systems. The adivasis in general and in the Narmada valley in particular have a militant feeling of possessiveness of their land in which 'lie the bones of their ancestors'. The adivasis rituals centered around the totem pole placed at the burial sites suggest their considerable dependence on the spirits of their ancestors for security as they believe that these spirits calm the external elements which influence their lives. In this way they have a very strong cultural and religious attachment with the soil of their ancestors. Hence, eviction from their ancestral homes is an alien, incomprehensible and puzzling thought for them, apt to arouse in them immediate militancy against any such attempt.

The NBA has mobilized the affected adivasis communities resorting to such factors in the adivasis cultural milieu with *naras* like '*Doobengeh Par Nahi Hatengeh*'. Hence, even land-for-land compensation offer of the government which may be a viable option for the non-adivasi oustee, is irrelevant and unacceptable to an adivasis farmer for whom the land is more than material. This cultural value system is a propelling element to motivate and mobilize the adivasis masses, and, the source from which the movement derives strength and sustenance to keep itself going, the motive force being provided by the contradictions between the modern and the traditional, rational and the irrational at one level and dialogical interactions between the local culture (the structure) and the leaders and activists of the movement (the agency) on the other.

Similarly, historical legacies have influenced the making of the movement and movement mobilizations. The Narmada Bachao Andolan began as a resistance against the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP). Tribal and non-tribal politics in the area affected by the SSP and other Projects on the Narmada have a long history ripe with experiences of protests and remembered through stories and *gayanas*. To quote a few, for instance, the Bhils of the Satpuda ranges waged three long-drawn wars against British occupancy during the mid-nineteenth century, pursuing the aliens in the plains of Khandesh. A number of tribal movements in this area have reflected the issues of tribal rights, survival and autonomy. The



tribals of the Satpuda region in Dhule district of Maharashtra were organized in the 1970s under the leadership of Ambersingh Maharaj, a tribal Gandhian Socialist leader, and later under the aegis of '*Shramik Sanghatana*' a radical trade union of tribal agricultural labourers. Such tribal movements in Maharashtra have been fighting on contemporary issues generated by the feudal-capitalist system. In the process they devised contemporary approaches, idioms and means of struggles for social justice. One such issue that has led to struggles in the region is the issue pertaining to water resources. Hence, apart from the general history of tribal protests as have been pointed out above, a notable water related protest movement has taken place in the region in the pre-independent period, hailed as a predecessor of the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

In 1921, the peasants in the prosperous Mulshi valley near Pune in Maharashtra declared total opposition to the hydropower dam to be built by the Tata Company. The peasants' organization in the Maval area in Maharashtra raised concerns about displacement and submergence of the farming community, fertile land and well-settled villages. They questioned the claims of benefits of electricity from the dam to the Bombay industries at the cost of destroying agriculture. Leaders of the Mulshi peasants like Senapati Bapat and Vinayak Bhuskute confronted the 'capitalists' like Tata and vowed to protect the interest of the peasants. They challenged the 'public purpose', the cost-benefit analysis of the dam, and asserted the priority of social good and the cultural rights of the larger community over the benefits of a few. They continued their opposition with novel methods, despite the fact that Gandhiji's did not favour their stand. In 1924, Bapat declared *Atma Samarpan* (self-sacrifice) to oppose the dam (Vora: 1994). This was the first anti-dam peoples' movement in India.

#### 6.4.3. International Regimes on Environment and Movement Dynamics

When the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal made its award in 1979, the environmental law in India was in its infancy. The 1972 UN Conference on Environment in Stockholm had led to the expansion of the environmental agenda both at international and national levels. It also led to the establishment of a variety of international regimes and institutions on environment. This development in turn led to the expansion of the environmental agenda at the

World Bank during the 1970s, to the world wide growth of environmental NGOs and the creation of agencies on the environment within the States. At the World Bank, an office of the environmental affairs was established in the mid 1970s, and the environmental project guidelines were issued in 1984 (World Bank: 1984). Consequently, similar developments took place in India with the government of India signing many international agreements relating to environment on Marine Wealth, Open Space, Air Pollution, Montreal Protocol, Biodiversity Convention, Antarctica Treaty and the Climatic Convention, among many others, the Indian Government passing several Acts pertaining to the environment keeping in consonance with the provisions of the international norms on environment, and the then Indian Prime Minister issuing a directive in 1980 mandating environmental impact assessment by federal agencies for major and minor irrigation projects. Hence, the period saw not only the development of state environmentalism in India but also the development of environmental consciousness and the mushrooming of environmental organizations. These developments in India which owe primarily to the development of the international regimes and institutions on the environment have had both positive and negative impacts on the emerging environmental social movements of which Narmada Bachao Andolan is one. The struggle in the Narmada Valley was gradually evolving, being affected by these developments, in course of time, the Narmada struggle itself contributed towards the growth of these global environmental regimes. For instance, Principle 1 of the UN Conference on Human Environment (1972) which observes that the man has the fundamental right to freedom, equality and adequate conditions of life, in an environment of a quality that permits a life of dignity and well-being, and he bears a solemn responsibility to protect and improve the environment for present and future generations; and Principle 4 which stresses upon man's special responsibility to safeguard and wisely manage the heritage of wild life and its habitat, combined with the provisions of the constitution at home (see next section for details), provided an enabling environment for the movement to emerge and consolidate. In a similar way, the interactions of the movement with the provisions of other international regimes, institutions and agreements on environment contributed for the movement to further develop and move to what it exists today.

#### 6.4.4. National Constitutional -Legal Framework and Movement

##### Dynamics

According to the Conventional understanding of the Social Movement (Diani: 1992), social movement, law and law reform and society interact in a simple, unidirectional fashion. Social movements seek to secure law reforms, and in turn, law reforms bring about changes in the society. While this conventional conception can be helpful for the purpose of analyzing the direct effects of social movements on law reforms, it misses several important dimensions of the relationship among social movements, law, and society. For instance, social movements can seek to effect social change through other means, be it through seeking to influence public opinion, mobilizing voters or by creating non-legal norms of behaviour. These shifts in public values can too bring about social change. Moreover, the changes in societal values etc. can feed back into the legal system and affect the prospects for law reform; and any such law reform may influence back the social movement itself. Hence, in this way, social movements, law, and society interact with one another in a more dynamic and multi-directional fashion, thereby bringing about a dynamism and transformation in the social movement itself. Hence, according to Cary Coglianese (2001), social movements, law, and society have a symbiotic type of relationship, which is best manifested in environmental movements. In this backdrop, in the following sections we have tried to explore the complex symbiotic relationship between the Narmada Bachao Andolan and the national constitutional-legal framework and how this dialectical relationship has contributed to the movement dynamics and transformations (Hypothesis 1)

Let us briefly explore some of the fundamental constitutional provisions pertaining to environment under the constitution of India. The Indian Constitution provides for a wide range of provisions towards the protection of the environment, which have a bearing on the social movement organizations. First, Article 14 of the Indian Constitution envisages that the state shall not deny to any person equality before law and equal protection of laws within the territory of India. This corroborates with the Principle 1 of the UN Conference on Human environment (1972). Secondly, 48-A under Part IV of the Constitution provides that *"The state shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to*

*safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.*" This article is in compliance with Principle 4 of the UN Conference on Environment (see the previous section for details). Later on, the forty-second amendment to the Constitution (1976) added Article 51-A (g), which enshrines a fundamental duty that commits the citizen to environmental protection that reads that it shall be the (fundamental) duty of every citizen of India *"To protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife, and to have compassion for living creatures"*. Further more, the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitution (Amendment) Act 1992 on the revitalization of the Panchayati Raj adds Schedule XI to the Constitution. The Schedule has eight entries, which are linked to environmental protection and conservation. There are also numerous other amendments that provide for the environmental protection and conservation. These legal-constitutional provisions create an enabling environment for the preservation and protection of the environment. Moreover, the judiciary has taken the lead in terms of the actual immediate effects in the matters of the environment. Failure of the governmental agencies to implement the laws made has, In India, prompted the NGOs and Public to approach the courts as a last resort. Thus the credit for the evolution of environmental jurisprudence in India goes to the Supreme Court which has contributed to this end by way of its landmark judgements in cases like Andhra Pradesh Polluting Industries Case 1996 (6 SSC 26), Antop Hill Case 1985 (W. P. 12179/1985), Aquaculture Case 1988 (AIR 1988 SC 1037), Brick Kiln Case 2000 (2000-6-Scale 315), Coastal areas Case 1987 (AIR 1987 SC 965), Delhi Ridge Case 1996 (8 SCC 462), Delhi Sewage Treatment Plant Case 1984 (W. P. No. 13381/1984), Environmental Awareness and Education Case 1991 (W. P. 860/1991), Gamma Chamber Case 1985 (W. P.4677/1985), Ganga Pollution Case 1987 (AIR 1987 SC 1086), Ground Water Depletion Case 2002 (W. P. 1996), Kamal Nat Case 2002 (W. P. 182/1996), Taj Trapezium Case 1997 (AIR 1997 SC 734), Vehicular Pollution Case 1990 (W. P. 13029/1985), among many others.

Moreover, in the present context, the issues on environment are closely intertwined with the inalienable rights of the indigenous people, especially to their land on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the equation is more complicated by the fact that the right to property has been deleted from the list of fundamental rights (Articles 19 (1) (f) and 31) in the Indian constitution, thereby

giving scope to the state to acquire the property in land for public purposes. This has brought about a complexity in the movement itself, which articulates the issues in terms of tribal rights, displacement, rehabilitation and environmental conservation, providing room for a complex interplay between law, legal reforms and social movements of the Narmada type. However, the focus of the present analysis is the Judiciary ---- movement interactions in the course of the movement

In February 1994, the sluice gates of the Sardar Sarovar Project were closed. This scenario became the backdrop for a substantial strategic move on behalf of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA). In May 1994, the NBA submitted two cases to the Supreme Court, the more significant case being that of public interest litigation against the Sardar Sarovar Project, which in effect claimed that the execution of the project constituted a violation of people's basic right to life and livelihood (Khagram, 2004: 134). The Andolan invoked several articles of the Indian constitution to justify their case, including Article 32, which grants all Indian citizens the right to approach the Supreme Court to defend the enforcement of basic rights, as well as international norms, agreements and procedures on resettlement/rehabilitation and environmental concerns. The project was also questioned in terms of its adverse benefit/cost ratio and how this negated the contention that the project was in the national interest.

The Supreme Court first took up the cases filed by the Andolan in August and September of 1994. However, it was only in January 1995 that it first took action when, after hearing the arguments of the petitioner and the respondents, the court ordered that the Five Member Group (FMG) should prepare another report on the Narmada's hydrology, the height of the Sardar Sarovar Project, and the status of resettlement/rehabilitation and environmental impacts. The group submitted its report in April, stating that the Sardar Sarovar Project could only be completed if the studies and plans on Resettlement Rehabilitation and environmental impacts were completed, if the local people were allowed full participation in and information about the implementation of the project, and if the dam bureaucracy was restructured so as to ensure efficiency and accountability during implementation. In May, the Supreme Court

imposed a stay on the construction of the dam while it examined the Five Member Group's report. In July, the Court called upon petitioners and respondents to submit additional materials before the full hearings. Following the submission of some 30 volumes of material from both parties, hearings began in November 1995 and were then resumed in January and April 1996 (Khagram, 2004; Jayal, 2000). A new round of Supreme Court hearings were inaugurated in August 1996, where the court expressed that while an assessment of the developmental value of the project was beyond the realm of their jurisdiction, there was little doubt that the fundamental rights of the people of the Valley as guaranteed in the constitution were under threat by its implementation, and that the failure on behalf of the project authorities and government officials to comply with a range of environmental agreements constituted a clear violation of Indian and international law. Furthermore, the Supreme Court declared – against the argument of Government of Gujarat that the Tribunal's award could not be reopened until 2024 and that there were thus no legal grounds for Supreme Court re-adjudication – that the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal had not have conceived of the vast changes in the institutional context of Resettlement and Rehabilitation in 1979, and that the Supreme Court could thus pass judgement on the project. An indefinite stay was imposed on the project, and in turn reiterated in a ruling in following hearings in February 1997 (Khagram, 2004: 136). This appeared to be a win-win situation for the Andolan.

However, on October 18, 2000, the Supreme Court delivered its verdict on the case of Narmada Bachao Andolan versus Union of India and Others. In a 2 to 1 majority judgement, the Supreme Court established that the construction of the Sardar Sarovar Project 'will continue as per the tribunal'; the building of the dam was to proceed *pari passu*, that is, after a given increase in height, Resettlement and Rehabilitation would have to be implemented before construction can be resumed upon the granting of permission from the Narmada Control Authority. The Supreme Court ruling was indeed a blow to the Narmada Bachao Andolan. Hence, the movement, although initially had an impact on the judicial decision-making, whereby the Court ruled in favour of the Andolan by imposing stay on Dam construction, at a later stage, the decision of the court took a U-turn, smashing the movement altogether and ruling in favour of the

construction of the dam with the proposed increase in Dam height. Thus, the situation led to the understanding in the movement that the review politics and the corresponding strategy of legal action could not secure the objectives outlined by the movement, leading it to divulge with full energy towards the politics of alliance formations for strengthening the movements support base both at the national and international levels on the one hand and to the micro-politics of championing the self rule at the local level.

#### **6.4.5. Ideology and Movement Dynamics**

Ideology is considered as one of the most important components of a protest movement. This is because the ideology is the legitimizing force of a movement and it is the ideological orientation of a movement that determines the objective of protest, and the strategy it needs to adopt to secure the goal so defined. Therefore, every social movement is characterized by a set of ideology or sets of ideologies. The Narmada Bachao Andolan, like any other social movement has its own ideological premise based on which it develops its movement strategies and techniques. The NBA consists of individuals from diverse professions and ideologies-from right wing political party like the BJP to extreme left wing Maoists (Raina: 2003 ). Hence, one could very well say that socialist and Gandhian thought dominates the ideological orientations of the movement. Although the ideology has not been comprehensive, yet its basic tenets are premised on Gandhian idea of Satyagraha.

The NBA has been driven very Gandhian belief that modern developmental projects supported by the state run roughshod over the needs of the rural poor, and that the only way to counter such a move of the state to safeguard the civil and economic rights of the people is through a non-violent mass resistance against the state. Hence it employs the Gandhian style Satyagraha as its strategies, and therefore, ideologically Gandhian.

Satyagraha is the chief weapon of the NBA in its struggles against the state. Hardiman (2003) has explained this Gandhian notion of Satyagraha as:

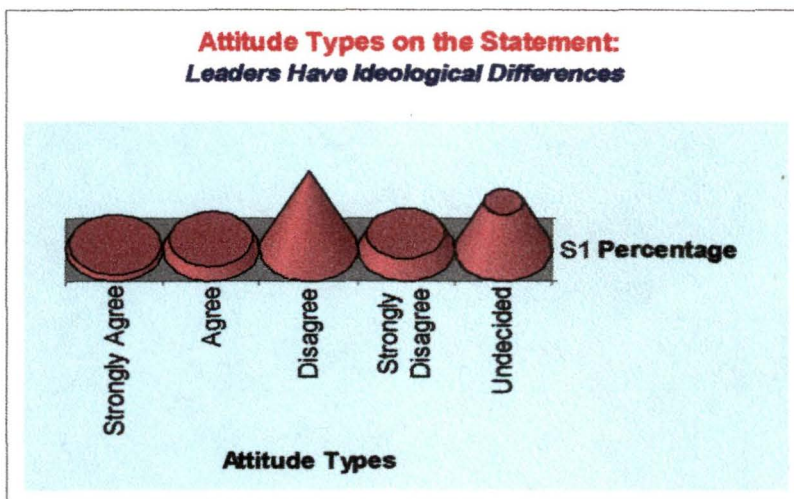
*“Satyagraha... is an amalgamation of two Gujarati words, Satya (truth) and Agraha (taking, seizing, holding), the implication being that one seizes hold of the truth...Gandhi understood that truth/ satya was reached through a complex dialogue in which reasoned argument had often to be reinforced through emotional and political pressure. He knew that in many cases, reason by itself would not win an argument, for people tend to be swayed as much by emotion as by rational argument. This was where self inflicted suffering such as fasting could be important...Even then, additional political pressure was often needed entailing mass demonstrations, non-cooperation, tax refusal, hartals and the like”.*

Hence, Satyagraha is an integral and defining element of Gandhian ideology and its consequent strategy of dialogic resistance. Hence, simple application of the Gandhian style of Satyagraha implies a dialogic and discursive practice, something dynamic and non-static. It means that the ideology of the NBA which is largely Gandhian speaks for the fact that the movement is dynamic in nature.

However, the ideology being non-comprehensive and undefined, the movement has not given opportunities for manifest ideological differences on ideological premises, which is evident from the following figure (figure 6.3).

**Figure 6.3**

**Attitude Types on the Statement: Leaders Have Ideological Differences**





It is but not to suggest that the lack of comprehensive and well-defined ideology has limited the scope of contradictions in the movement pertaining to ideological differences among the leaders. The nature and course of the movement and the movement strategies are also affected by the fact that there is an acute awareness in the movement regarding the need for a more inclusive, comprehensive and well defined ideology, and the Janashayog Trust set up from the funds received by the NBA from the Right Livelihood Award given to Medha Patkar has been organizing annual brainstorming meetings for the purpose. Hence, the ideological inadequacies of the movement also have provided the movement with motive force to move and transform with the development of an ideology acceptable to all actors in the movement.

#### 6.4.6. Funding Problems and the Movement Dynamics

Fund is an essential component necessary for movement organizations. Sufficiency or otherwise of the fund is likely to determine the effectiveness of movement mobilizations and hence its nature and course. There has been a lot of controversy regarding the sources of funds of the Narmada Bachao Andolan. For instance, *The Indian Express* dated November 10 and 11, 2000 carried an advertisement titled “*True Face of Ms. Medha Patkar and her Narmada Bachao Andolan*”, by an Ahmedabad based National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL), which alleged that the NBA is not a registered body and that it meets the expenses of the movement through Hawala transactions. Furthermore, it is also said that Jayanarayan Vyas, the then Minister for Narmada, Government of Gujarat asked for a CBI enquiry into the foreign exchange violations by the NBA. In 2001, Jamuna Devi, the then Deputy Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh alleged NBA of foreign funding (*Lokmat*-The Marathi Daily, dated 09.02.2001). *Nai Duniya* (dated January 18<sup>th</sup> 2001) also alleges NBA of working in unison with foreign people, environmentalists and other social organizations, both domestic and international like Coal India Projects, NTPC Power Projects, Umargaon Port Project etc which help the NBA with funds. It also asserts that the NBA is given the logistic support by Earth Justice Legal Defence Fund, especially as travel costs to Medha Patkar and Arundhati Roy to visit foreign countries for attending workshops and conferences on Large Dams. These apart there are several like allegations towards the NBA alleging it of working on foreign funds. However,

the activists differ on it and so do some *insider* authors like Sangvai (2002) and other scholars who have worked on the Narmada Movement.

The activists have strongly opposed that they have accepted any foreign funding. They have regarded these as baseless allegations. For instance, as a response to the advertisement in The Indian Express (dated 10 and 11 November 2000), the NBA published a press note, in which it claimed,

*"NBA, which is opposing to the gigantic Sardar Sarovar Dam, has manifold ways to raise funds for its activities. The foremost is the collection of grains during the harvests from the affected villages itself. People from different walks of life like artists, writers and other professionals have contributed to the cause. Village contributions and voluntary donations are the main sources of funding for NBA. Sale of literature, mementos, etc too are done from time to time...The amount of foreign awards (totaling nearly Rs. 32 lakhs) was never accepted by NBA." (NBA Press Note "True Face of a Patriot-Response to an Advertisement, dated November 24, 2000)*

Yet in another press note published as a response to Gujarat Governments Minister for Narmada Shri Vyas' demand for CBI enquiry, the NBA claims that it is open for CBI enquiry on its sources of funds. The Press Note says,

*The NBA, as has been earlier, is open to any enquiry, constituted by any authority. But on one condition. If the allegation is proved wrong, Mr. Vyas, apart from apologizing publicly, should resign from Ministership and take sanyas from politics. ...The NBA reiterate that, we take no foreign funds, nor are we taken the award money of any of the foreign awards." (NBA Press Note "NBA Open for any Enquiry on Funds...Conditionally; Fast enters the third day" dated October 27, 2000).*

As a response to the observations made by Jamuna Devi as as been pointed out above (see *Lokmat*- dated 09.02.2001), the NBA in a press release said,

*The Madhya Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Jamuna Devi was served a legal notice to publicly retract the baseless and untrue allegations levelled against Narmada Bachao Andolan and Medha Patkar and tender an unconditional apology within a week of the receipt of the legal notice....The legal notice to Ms. una Devi made it clear that the NBA has never received any foreign funding in last approximately seventeen years of its existence. In fact the money associated with various national and international prizes conferred on Medha Patkar had either been declined acceptance by Ms Medha Patkar or donated by her for the benefit of the general public purposes/causes. (NBA Press Note "Legal Notice Served to M. P. Dy. Chief Minister Jamuna Devi by NBA and Medha Patkar: 'Apologize or Face Legal Action'", dated April 14, 2001).*

The NBA also has made similar statements in other press notes denying any foreign funding for the movement activities. For instance, the Press Note entitled "*Criminal Case of Defamation Case Against 'Advertisement' filed; Comparison of the Struggle with US Presidential Election is Absurd; NBA Challenges the Accusers to Prove the Allegations of Foreign Hands and Treachery*" dated January 20, 2001, and many others claim that it as not recived any foreign funding, despite repeated allegations being made to that end from several quarters.

The Narmada Bachao Andolan, like the Chipko movement, claims to have relied entirely on Indian sources of fund. According to Sangvai,

*"It has not accepted any foreign funding of any kind. The Right Livelihood Award (given to NBA in 1992) and the Goldman Environmental Prize (given to Medha Patkar in 1993) were accepted as a mark of recognition of the people's struggle, but not the money. The funds from the Right Livelihood Award were invested in Jansabhayog Trust, to help the Indian people's struggles and efforts for for alternatives, with the express condition that the*

*amount would not be used for the Narmada Valley struggle. The funds from the Goldman Prize were given to the India Development Society (IDS) in USA-to be used for actions against the world bank and multilateral agencies by organisations from all over the world, except NBA. .” (Sangvai: 2002).*

Sangvai (2002) further reasserts that the funds for the movement are collected from the local sources. According to him,

*The struggle is carried out with active help from supporters spread all over India, by way of funding and other resources. The full time activists are provided an honorarium from a number of supporters. The villagers contribute, particularly in Nimad, at the time of harvests. For major programmes, special fund drives are organised in the valley and adjacent towns. The Nimad farmers contribute their resources, time and efforts in mobilising the entire valley.*

The fact the Narmada Bachao Andolan did not receive any foreign funding has also been highlighted by Lotten Hubendick and Joakim Lindberg (2002). According to them,

*NBA does not accept any foreign funding, but wants to remain independent from other countries and thus avoid critics from the dam authorities, which could blame the NBA for aiding with non-Indian interests if they would receive such funding. (Lotten Hubendick and Joakim Lindberg: 2002:14).*

Hence, it needs to be pointed out that for reasons unknown that needs further research; there have been series of controversies on the nature and sources of fund for the NBA. However, as boldly put by the movement itself at different points of time, as revealed through interviews and discussions with activists and supporters of the movement during the course of the present research, and further established by the researches already done on the movement by both Indian and foreign scholars, there is little reason to doubt that the chief source of the NBA funding comes from different quarters of the

country itself. However, there is also no reason to be complacent about it and there seems to be a grain of truth in the statements made by various local newspapers that at least a fraction of the fund comes from outside the country in different forms, for instance, in the form of personal donations by scholars who have worked on and with the movement, etc. The movement does not suffer from the dearth of funds because the activists, based on their rank in the leadership hierarchy, are also paid an honorarium for their contributions to the movement ranging somewhere between rupees seven hundred to two thousand a month, apart from maintaining the various offices, and sustaining various programmes of the movement. But what has shaped the movement is the controversy of the sources of fund that we have discussed above, because, it has quite often than not created a sense of distrust on the movement before the movement spectators which have tended to downplay the movement itself. The movement had to respond to such threats as CBI investigations etc of its fund sources for which the movement had to develop a counter discourse and a material basis for the justification tat it is not supported by any outside agency with nefarious designs that would hinder national security and sovereignty, but that it is genuinely a grassroots protests against deprivation of their livelihood resources. Hence, the controversy has affected the movement both adversely (by weakening it through creating a controversy about the nature of the movement itself) and positively (by creating the necessity on the part of the movement to develop counter expertise at both material and discursive levels to justify its stand). Hence, the movement of the movement has been impacted by 'fund' which became a centre of debate between the proponents and opponents of the movement.

#### 6.4.7. Leadership and Movement Dynamics

Leaders are central to social movements, yet a negligible attention has been paid by scholars to understanding the concept of leadership or its effects on movements. Since leaders play a critical role in collective action, shaping movements in numerous ways like defining goals and advancing strategies, mobilizing followers, galvanizing organizations, and forging coalitions, they significantly influence responses to external repression. Moreover, the actions of the leaders, and their rhetoric and style affect the conflict outcomes in

movements. Some studies define leaders as those who perform key tasks in a movement such as recruitment, mobilization of resources, and formation of movement organizations (McCarthy and Zald: 1977), or tactical innovation (McAdam: 1983), it also needs to be emphasized that movements make leaders as much as they are made by them. Some studies of the past also have focused on the leadership change that occurs during the course of a given movement. Blumer (1969) posited that leaders must shift roles acting as prophets during the first stages of protests, then as official representatives during the formalization of the movement, and finally as administrators as the movement institutionalizes. Rothman (1974) argued that different types of leaders may become prominent at various phases of protest, for instance, militant leaders dominating during the initial phases of protest while more accommodationist leaders coming to the forefront as the movement negotiates with its opponents. Although issues pertaining to the types and styles are not alien to the NBA, yet the NBA poses a question not so much of types and styles of leadership in the above sense *per se*, but a more complex issue of who constitute the leaders of the movement, the leadership conflicts arising between the adivasis and the urban activists who have taken the leadership positions in the movement, and finally, the question of representation of the interest of the affected community by the movement leadership. These issues surrounding the leadership have significantly determined the nature and course of the movement.

The leadership of the movement is provided by a group of urban, educated, middle-class intellectuals from outside the Narmada Valley. The most prominent of the movement leaders are the charismatic Medha Patkar, followed by others like Chittaroopa Palit in the line of hierarchy, and more recently Arundhati Roy- a novelist turned activist, who is only second to Medha Patkar. The issues raised about the problem of leadership pertains to the personification of the movement in its leaders, absence of high ranking tribal leaders in the movement (Omvedt: 2004), and the question of representation of the tribal interest by the NBA leadership (Dwivedi: 1997 and 1999; Omvedt: ; Baviskar: 1995; Mehta: nd ).

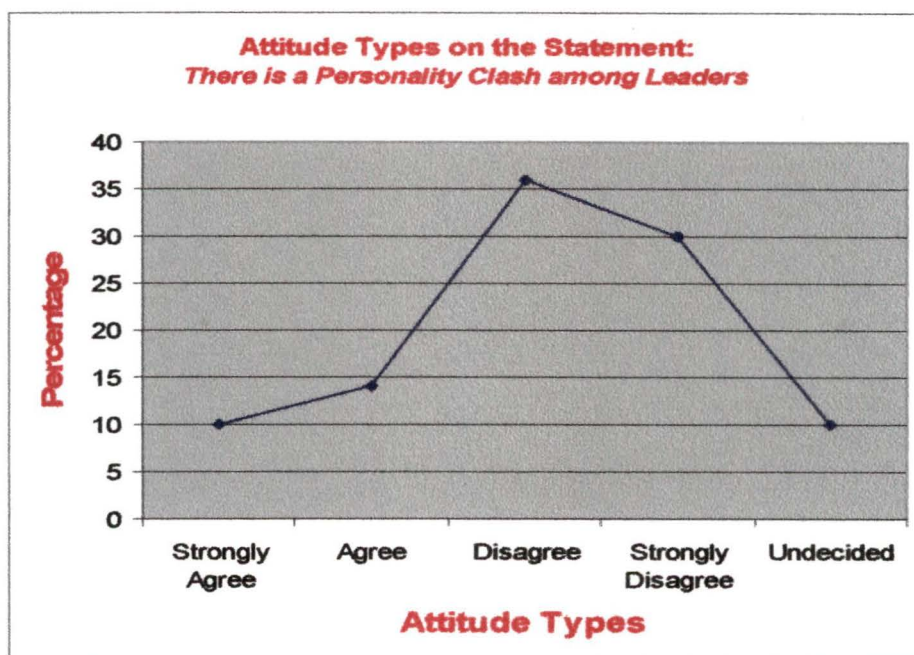
The NBA leadership under Medha Patkar has been criticized for having created a situation of perceiving Medha as NBA and vice-versa. Thus the movement has been personified in its leaders. This has led to identifying the movement to a single leadership and therefore, has eclipsed the role played by others (adivasi) leadership in the initial phase of the mobilizations against the project. Gail Omvedt (2004 ) points out that the NBA leadership has failed to adequately acknowledge the contributions made specially by the tribal leaders like Wahuru Sonavane, who was once a leading young adivasi activists of Shramik Sangathana in Maharashtra, and who had played a leading role in mobilizations in the initial phase of the movement since 1971-1972. Omvedt has pointed out that Medha Patkar has not given the credit of those tribal leaders who had organized on the issue before her. Omvedt built her criticisms on this failing of the NBA leadership from one poem entitled 'Stage' written by Wahuru on the non-assignment of any role to the tribal leaders like him. The poem reads:

*We did not go on to the stage,  
Neither were we called  
We were shown our places,  
Told to sit  
But they, sitting on the stage,  
Went on telling us of our sorrows,  
Our sorrows remained ours, they never became theirs.*

This short poem throws a deluge of light on the feeling of being neglected and being manipulated in the minds of the aspiring tribal leaders. This in fact reveals the existence of a rift, a conflict or rather an alienating gulf between the present urban activist leadership of the NBA and the aspiring tribal leaders who would better represent the tribal interests than by the activists from 'outside'. This leadership conflict that is emerging of late has posed a serious question of legitimate representation of tribal interests by the urban born activists. As such, therefore, one does not come across a confrontational personality clash among the leaders in case of the Narmada Bachao Andolan, unlike what we have seen in case of a conflict between Sunderlal Bahuguna and

Chandi Prasad Bhatt in the Chipko Movement (Chapter 5). This is reflected from the attitude of the activists on the question as given in the figure (6.4) below.

**Figure 6.4**  
**Attitude Types on the Statement: There is Personality Clash among Leaders**



The conflict here is of a different nature—between the psychological experience of neglect in the aspiring tribal leadership and the iconic status of the urban educated middleclass activists who have been spearheading the movement. Moreover, there is also an emerging conflict on leadership questions between the young activists and the senior leaders of the movement. Most of the times, the young leaders feel neglected despite their hard struggles because of media coverage of the senior leaders. Young, aspiring leaders of the movement feel psychologically depressed as their names do not figure in the media coverage. This has been accepted even by the senior leaders like Medha Patkar herself. For instance, in an interview by Ashutosh Bhardwaj (nd.), Medha Patkar says,

*“...once movement gathers strength they treat leader as celebrity. Media needs a face to project its stories... It at times hurdles growth of movement. There are so many activists involved in movement but projecting only one leader comes only at cost of other. I always tell my colleagues, who are younger to me,*



*not to take note of such situation. Yet, young activist gets depressed at times  
& in fact run into argument with me over entire situation."*

From the statement, it is obvious that the senior leaders have failed to project the young leaders as a '*face to project (its) stories*' to the media, but rather keep the situation get going at the cost of the aspirations of the young leaders by just asking them '*not to take note of such situation*'. Thus not only hurdles the movement but acts as a constraint on the way of generating a second and third generation line of dynamic leadership for the movement.

Another factor that provides the movement the energy to move and transform with the leadership is the role played by the knowledge class as the leaders of the movement, which too, is not without its associated tensions. One aspect of this tension is evident between the interest of those who directly experience environmental despoliation (the dam affected population in the present case) and the knowledge class who help to represent these interests in the political terrain. The potential tension between the two types of actors, as (Dwivedi: *ibid*) points out, is a major problem area as environmental struggles increasingly pervade a scientized domain, because such instances lead movements to value experts as more important resources than the locally affected people on whose behalf the struggle is being waged. In such situations, we can perceive at least two implications for the movement. First, the local links of the movement can get slackened, and second, it may lead to the alienation of the affected people from the movement itself (both these implications are evident in the present study, say for instance, the movement has been experiencing undulating developments in its support base, sometimes the local support from a part of the movement falling apart, and sometimes the movement moving outside the submergence area in the process of mobilizing support), thereby affecting the support base, strategy, demands and finally the nature of the movement itself.

#### 6.4.8. Party Politics and Movement Dynamics

In this section, we would like to discuss the role of the agencies like the political parties in the ant-dam campaigns in the Narmada valley and its consequent impact on the dynamics of and transformations in the movement

(see Hypothesis 1). Political parties are the important agencies of interest articulation and aggregation. However, in the Indian context, one experiences a glaring alienation developing between the representatives of the political parties and the people at the grassroots. This is because, with the globalization and liberalization sweeping the world, the local issues have been marginalized from the legislative forums of both the national and state governments, leading to the denial of social justice to the people. As a response to this situation, India has experienced the emergence of a wide range of voluntary organizations and social movements specially since the 1970s and their interventions, leading to what Rajni Kothari calls 'non-party political process' in India. This has produced a double impact: first, led to the emergence of green party on the one hand, which aspires to address the issues confronting the marginalized with a focus on green agenda on the one hand, and second, to the necessity of rethinking the relationship between protest movements and the role of political parties.

In the recent years there has been a proliferation of 'Green' political parties throughout the globe, and most with a good repute in electoral performances. In India too, recently the Indian National Green Party is born (it was registered with the Election Commission of India on 7 January 1999). It has an elaborate list of envisaged national policies pertaining to environment and a couple of pages discussion on water and water management. It also vows to "cancel all plans to build large scale new dams" as a short-term target of the Party (<http://www.ecology.edu/greens>). However, unlike the western experiences as in Germany and elsewhere, the Green Party has little or no room in Indian political dynamics as of now. So far, the Green Party has not even contested a single election. Hence, Green issues have been taken over by the mainstream political parties in India. Most of the political parties have come out with manifestos containing wide lists of ecopolitical issues (Mahalanabis: 1997). Hence, it is imperative to undertake an analysis of the role played by political parties in shaping the nature and dynamics of an environmental movement in general, and in case of the Narmada Bachao Andolan in particular. To this end, we begin with the electoral history of the three riparian states in the following sections, beginning with the State of Madhya Pradesh. However, we have provided the details only since 1977 because it was in the post emergency period roughly

coinciding with the 1977 elections that the traces of protests were emerging in Narmada valley (see annexure on the chronology of the movement).

**Table: 6.5**

**Electoral History of the State (Madhya Pradesh-Parliamentary Constituencies)  
1977-2004**

| Year | Leading Party | Seats Won | % Votes | Runner-Up Party | Seats Won | % Votes |
|------|---------------|-----------|---------|-----------------|-----------|---------|
| 1977 | BLD           | 37        | 57.9    | INC             | 01        | 32.5    |
| 1980 | INC           | 35        | 47.2    | JP              | 04        | 31.3    |
| 1984 | INC           | 40        | 57.1    | BJP             | -         | 30.0    |
| 1989 | BJP           | 27        | 39.7    | INC             | 08        | 37.7    |
| 1991 | INC           | 27        | 45.3    | BJP             | 12        | 41.9    |
| 1996 | BJP           | 27        | 41.3    | INC             | 08        | 30.9    |
| 1998 | BJP           | 30        | 45.74   | INC             | 10        | 39.4    |
| 1999 | BJP           | 29        | 46.58   | INC             | 11        | 43.91   |
| 2004 | BJP           | 25        | 41.13   | INC             | 04        | 34.07   |

Source: MS. S. Rana (2006). *India Votes*, New Delhi, Sarup and Sons.

From the above table it is seen that in Madhya Pradesh, the main hub of the NBA activities, the two main political parties have been the Congress and the BJP. However, the Congress Party seems to be gradually losing to the BJP in the recent years. Since the year of the consolidation of the movement, that is roughly 1988, the Congress Party has led only once and the rest four elections saw a favourable victory for the BJP in the state. Other smaller parties and even the Left do not seem to have made any difference in the electoral politics of the state.

Let us now turn to Maharashtra, another riparian state, where the movement is equally strong as in Madhya Pradesh. The Table below shows the electoral history of the state.

**Table: 6.6**  
**Electoral History of the State**  
**(Maharashtra-Parliamentary Constituencies) 1977- 2004**

| Year | Leading Party | Seats Won | % Votes | Runner-Up Party | Seats Won | % Votes |
|------|---------------|-----------|---------|-----------------|-----------|---------|
| 1977 | INC           | 20        | 47.0    | BJP             | 19        | 31.4    |
| 1980 | INC           | 39        | 53.3    | JP              | 08        | 20.4    |
| 1984 | INC           | 43        | 51.2    | ICS             | 02        | 12.1    |
| 1989 | INC           | 28        | 45.4    | BJP             | 10        | 23.7    |
| 1991 | INC           | 38        | 48.4    | BJP             | 05        | 20.2    |
| 1996 | BJP           | 18        | 41.8    | INC             | 15        | 34.8    |
| 1998 | INC           | 33        | 43.6    | SS              | 05        | 19.7    |
| 1999 | SS            | 15        | 26.86   | BJP             | 13        | 21.18   |
| 2004 | INC           | 13        | 23.77   | BJP             | 13        | 22.61   |

Source: M. S. Rana (2006). *India Votes*, New Delhi, Sarup and Sons.

The Table shows that for more than forty years the Congress enjoyed a superior position in the state vis-à-vis other parties. However, in the recent years, the BJP seems to be gradually picking up in the state. Since 1999, the BJP is giving a tough competition to the Congress and the last parliamentary elections saw the Congress leading in the state with hardly 1% of votes ahead of the BJP. Infact, it is quite interesting to observe in this connection that the BJP has been emerging either as a leading party or as a runner-up party in the state since the 1989 Parliamentary elections. Again, this period coincides with the consolidation of the NBA as a pan-state environmental movement in the Narmada Valley. Therefore, it necessitates the proper examination of the relationship of these political parties with the movement in question.

Gujarat government has always supported the dam building project in the Narmada Valley. This has quite often led to the confrontations between the NBA and the state of Gujarat at different levels, both material and discursive. Let us explore the electoral history of the state since 1962 (we could not obtain the

details prior to 1962 in case of Gujarat) and see the performance of different political parties in different Lok Sabha elections since 1962.

**Table: 6.7**  
**Electoral History of the State**  
**(Gujarat Parliamentary Constituencies)**  
**1977-2004**

| Year | Leading Party | Seats Won | % Votes | Runner-Up Party | Seats Won | % Votes |
|------|---------------|-----------|---------|-----------------|-----------|---------|
| 1977 | BLD           | 16        | 49.5    | INC             | 10        | 46.9    |
| 1980 | INC           | 25        | 54.8    | JP              | 01        | 36.9    |
| 1984 | INC           | 24        | 53.2    | BJP             | 01        | 18.6    |
| 1989 | BJP           | 12        | 30.5    | JD              | 11        | 27.8    |
| 1991 | BJP           | 20        | 50.4    | INC             | 05        | 29.0    |
| 1996 | BJP           | 16        | 48.5    | INC             | 10        | 38.7    |
| 1998 | BJP           | 19        | 48.3    | INC             | 07        | 36.5    |
| 1999 | BJP           | 20        | 52.48   | INC             | 06        | 45.44   |
| 2004 | BJP           | 14        | 47.73   | INC             | 12        | 43.86   |

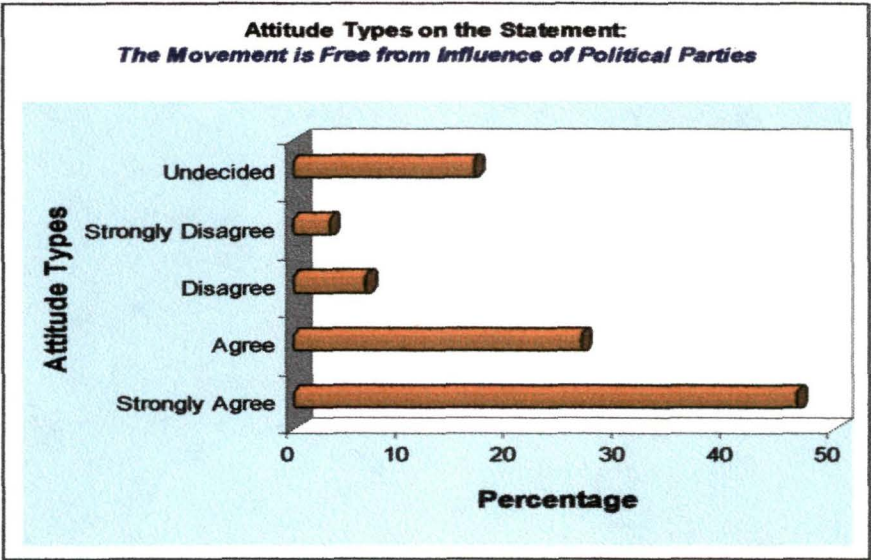
Source: M. S. Rana (2006). *India Votes*  
New Delhi, Sarup and Sons.

In Gujarat too, BJP shows no sign of retreat since it established its stronghold in the 1989 general elections. Since then, it has always been the leading party in the state as revealed by the Table above. However, the INC also does not seem to be farther away from the BJP; it's trailing the BJP, with steadily decreasing margin of difference in terms of the percentage of votes obtained over the last ten years. As pointed out in the previous chapter (Chapter 5 in the section on Party Politics and Movement Dynamics), one possible reason for the BJP leading the list may be that it is the only party with an impressive environmental agenda in its election manifesto, however, not suggesting that this is the absolute reason for its successes. This is because, if we see in terms of influence of the movement by the political parties, it is quite paradoxical that even in the states like Madhya Pradesh and Maharastra where the movement has been strong, it has not been able to make any difference to the party in terms of

the party's electoral results, despite the movement having a sharp difference specially in Gujarat with the BJP. Hence, there is a necessity to explore the relationship between the role of parties and movement dynamics, which of course, we undertake very cursorily in the sections to follow.

Although the Narmada Bachao Andolan has not been influenced by any political party or its ideology, atleast apparently, as it is claimed by the movement (by movement here I refer to the actors of the movement specially the leadership and the activists). This is evident from the result of the attitude scaling we conducted of the people involved in the movement, as presented below in Figure No. 6.8 entitled 'Attitude Types on the Statement: : The Movement is Free from Influence of Political Parties'.

**Figure: 6.8**  
**Attitude Types on the Statement: The Movement is Free from Influence of Political Parties**



However, this should not give the impression that the political parties have had no influence whatsoever in the movement. It is true that the political Parties have not actively participated in the movement or opposed it at a significantly high level, catching the attention of the media both at the national and international levels. It is also true that the political parties have not influenced the movement ideologically, either by imposing their ideology or by

way of distancing from it on ideological grounds. Political parties have not been insignificant players in the movement in the sense that they have had an ambivalent relationship with the movement throughout. Let us briefly survey some of the instances from the movement.

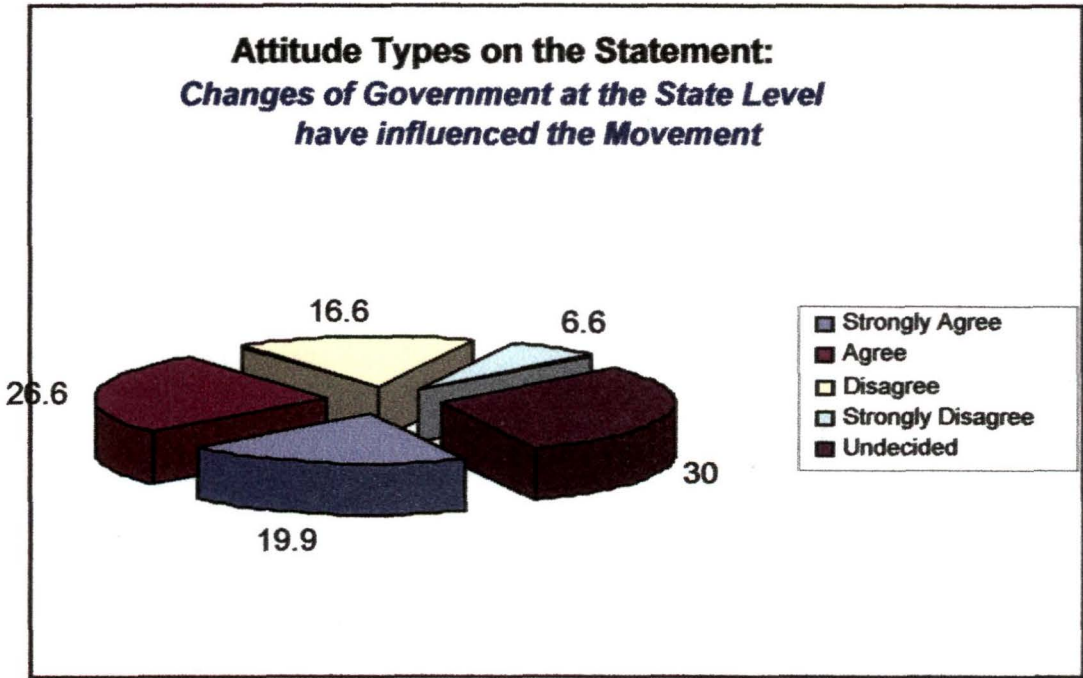
West Nimad District in Madhya Pradesh, a site of active NBA mobilization was supposed to be the bastion of the BJP and allied communal outfits right from the late 1940s. However, the constant process of Andolan created a new psyche in the villagers and main activists. Though some of the villages were considered to be areas of BJP stronghold, the Ayodhya issue and the subsequent communalisation did not have much impact there. Not a single communal event is recorded in the Andolan villages. Moreover, political parties like Congress and the BJP in Madhya Pradesh at rare instances have supported the Andolan's demand of review of the dam but quite often the political parties have been in favour of a dam and they are sharing their concern with the NBA on the question of better resettlement. In Gujarat too, the political parties like the Congress and the BJP have at times are said to have supported the NBA's demands but it was noticed that the political parties and especially the BJP seems to be favouring the dam, and hence stands opposite to the NBA stand. In Maharashtra, the political parties have been basically pro-dam. Hence, keeping aside the occasional support of the NBA anti-dam stand, the major political parties in the three states have been in favour of a dam. This creates an impression that the political parties have been getting enough room to maneuver, sometimes supporting the movement (as in case of the Nimad and Alirajpur regions in Madhya Pradesh and the tribal/adivasis areas in Maharashtra, but quite often than not supporting the project (as in case of Gujarat) where the electoral compulsions dictate the parties to talk in favour of the project. This is a serious challenge to the Narmada Bachao Andolan in its anti-dam struggle in the valley.

The Andolan itself, as a part of its strategy, is approaching the political parties in pursuit of solutions to the Narmada crisis. The Narmada Bachao Andolan has been viewing the Narmada and the related issues in the context of the present political structures and power relations. It is therefore, attempting to bring about a change in these processes. To this end, the NBA has been trying to

convince both the party and non-party political formations about the urgency of the issues it is raising. Since 1986, the Narmada Bachao Andolan has been interacting with the leaders of different political parties, legislators and ideologues in the three states of Gujarat, Maharastra and Madhya Pradesh.

For the movement, therefore, the attitude of the political parties is mostly on expected lines (Raina: 2003). They view the movement largely as anti-developmental. Traditionally the left parties have been wary, or even opposed, to non-party groups, whether NGO or movement type, and in particular those espousing environmental causes. This was because the left parties saw them to have the potential of impeding the development projects and hence, seen as anti-worker. However, the degree of mobilization under the NBA banner has been difficult for most of the mainstream political parties, and individuals from these parties have overtly or covertly supported the movement from time to time and have increasingly expressed a desire to initiate discussions at party forums.

**Figure: 6.9**  
**Attitude Types on the Statement: Changes of Governemnets at State Level Have Influenced the Movement**





This ambivalence in the relationship between the movement and the political parties was further sought to be clarified by the present study through scaling of attitudes on the statement: Changes of Government at the State Level have influenced the movement both favourably and unfavourably. The results of the exercise also showed that the perception on the relationship between the two is also not very clear. This can be obtained from the figure (6.4) presented above: In the figure we find that whereas 19.9 percent of the respondents strongly agree to the statement, 26.6 percent of them agree to it. Similarly, 6.6 percent of the respondents strongly disagree and 16.6 percent of them disagree. But still, a large chunk of them, that is, 30 percent of the respondents are undecided. This further makes it clear that the movement has confusing and ever changing relations with the political parties and hence, the influence of the political parties cannot be clearly ascertained in the movement.

Hence, although activists deny that the movement is influenced by any political party, yet there is considerable acceptance of the fact that the changes of government at the state and centre have had their impacts on the movement.

#### **6.4.9. Role of the NGOS and Movement Dynamism**

A number of non-governmental organizations have been in alliance with the Narmada Bachao Andolan in its struggle against the Sardar Sarovar project. Some important organizations which been with the NBA are the Civil Liberties, Kisan Sangharsha Samiti (Madhya Pradesh), Adhikar Sangh (Gujarat), Manav Kalyan Trust (Khedbrahma), Navsarjan Trust (Surat), Utthan Trust (Ahmedabad), Sahiyar (Women's Organization-Baroda), Olakh (Women's Organization-Baroda), Punarutthan Trust, Inquilabi Communist Sangathan (Baroda), Dankuni Mines Virodhi Sangharsha Samiti (Anti-Mines Struggle), Hawkers Union, Shramik Parishads, Anti-Resorts Committee, Students' Christian Movement (Kerala), Rastriya Yuva Sangathan, Smile (Delhi), Samnvay (Ahmedabad), etc. All these organization has organized and participated in various solidarity programmes in support of the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

The NBA vividly illustrates the power of building alliances with the international actors. The NBA has created solidarity groups globally. It has been

receiving support from the Grassroots movements in Europe and Latin America fighting against neo-imperialism, WTO and Globalization. Besides, NBA has articulated its resistance through environmental groups such as International Rivers Network (IRN), Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), The Friends of the Earth, Human and Indigenous Rights Organisations, etc. NBA has created what Keck and Sikkink (1998) called the '*Transnational Advocacy Networks*' (TAN) or globally linked collectives of social movements. By sending faxes to international NGOs such as EDF in Washington DC, Survival International (SI) in London, Friends of the Earth in Tokyo, the NBA was able to solicit support from these organizations, which in turn put pressure on politicians in the respective countries to stop the Bank from further funding for the Narmada Project. In this connection, Akula (1995) rightly states:

*"According to World Bank officials in charge of Narmada, the international links were crucial in forcing the Bank to drop funding for the Project"*

International lobbying against the Narmada Project has changed the character of negotiation between state and the domestic actors in complex ways. For instance, the NBA's alliance with the international NGOs, significant lobbying by the international NGOs against the Narmada Projects, and their pressure on the donor agencies eventually led to the withdrawing of support for Narmada Project by the World Bank and the Japanese Government in the later half of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s (Udall: 1998). In turn, this lack of major donor funding has repeatedly stalled the government project on dam construction.

Initially the protests concentrated on issues of just compensation for the loss of land and livelihood, air resettlement and rehabilitation policies and their implementation. The transnational linkages of the movement with the campaign against multilateral banks led over time to a shift of agendas and priorities of the movement. Hence, the issues of the movement have transformed over time. The local mobilization and strategic action came to be focused increasingly on ending the World Bank funding for the project. Local grievances came to be articulated increasingly in terms of an environmental discourse which would have had

international legitimacy and legibility. Gradually, it led to the emergence of a no large dam agenda, for which there was large transnational support. Today, the strategic issue is opposition to large dams and espousing for alternative sustainable development strategy. Hence, the NGOs at the local/ national level as well as at the international level have contributed towards the movement affecting its objectives and strategies.

## 6.5. TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE MOVEMENT

From the standpoint of social organization, resistance efforts often initiate a process of redefinition of a variety of internal and external relationships and institutions (as revealed from our discussion on various parameters of the movement and their implications for movement dynamics in the foregoing sections). The need to organize for resistance will exert a new form of pressure in the internal organization of the community. The organization of the resistance movement may sharpen both internal and external pre-existing conflicts and vice-versa. The existence of patterns of internal differentiation based on ethnicity, caste, or class in a community may constitute obstacles to the formations of the necessary levels of solidarity and cooperation (see for instance, the section on caste and movement dynamics) for effective resistance and may require efforts to alter local social structural patterns to enable the formation of an organized movement (see for example, the efforts made by the NBA to promote caste solidarity in caste differences infested villages in Nimad, Madhya Pradesh), sometimes even by isolating or banishing the dissidents (for example, the description of the erstwhile activists as not being an activists by the NBA), or by attempting to redefine the social, structural elements themselves. This in turn requires the shift towards new goals, with newer sets of strategies and tactics, and even shifts in the scales of mobilizations (because when the resistance movements develop, they tend to generate contacts and linkages with social actors that operate at the local, community level, the national political context, and the international or the global levels), resulting in the transformations in the support base and the nature of the movement itself. Hence, in the sections that follow, an attempt has been made to map the transformations in the movement under study.

### 6.5.1. Transformations of issues, objectives and demands

Although along the course of the movement we see shifts in the nature of the issues addressed by the NBA as has been discussed in the sections that follow, yet it is not to suggest that the movement picked up a single issue at a particular point of time. One issue might have gained significance at a given point of time due to compulsions emanating from either within or without the movement or both, yet a host of interrelated and interconnected issues always flooded the agenda of the movement. This fact as been pointed out by the NBA itself. The NBA points out the multiple and yet interrelated issues thrown up by the movement as:

*“The issues raised by the Andolan are inter-related, interwoven. They emanate from the same system and reinforce each other. All of them exist in the larger reality of Indian political culture, increasing socio-economic deprivation and inequality, depleting natural resource base, increasing centralization, capitalistic tendencies and vulgar consumerism depriving tribals and other socio-economic disadvantaged sections of population, robbing them and their right to natural resources, with increasing international debt...”*  
(NBA: 1992)

However, despite having a myriad of issues before it, the NBA focused on some specific issues at specific points of time during the course of the movement. These issues too have their roots touching the broad issues of deprivation, social justice and the necessity to change the present state of affairs. The following sections how the movement experienced the change in the nature of priority issues at different phases of the movement.

Initially, the Narmada Bachao Andolan concentrated on realizing its objectives on issues of just compensation for the loss of land and livelihood, fair resettlement and rehabilitation policies and their implementation. The basic demand at this stage of the movement was better implementation of policies and programmes for a just and amicable resettlement of the displaced and their proper rehabilitation. The linkages with the transnational network groups in course of the movement, and their campaign against multilateral banks led over

time to a shift of agendas and priorities. Hence, a new set of issues emerged as pertinent for the movement.

The issue that took root after the NBA established its international linkages is that of ending the World Bank funding for the Project. Hence, local mobilizations and strategic actions came to be focused to this end. The objectives of the movement at this phase were to end the funding to the project by the multilateral lending agencies and institutions. The NBA advocacy of a no-dam stand started taking root since this stage of the movement.

The next shift that is observed in NBA's issues is that gradually the local grievances came to be articulated increasingly in terms of an environmental discourse which would have had international legitimacy and legibility. Hence, in keeping with the previous stand, at this stage, the movement placed a demand for the review of the project in terms of the social, economic and environmental benefits and costs. This shift in the demand of the NBA in favour of a review of the project can be comprehended in terms of the counter expertise produced by the NBA itself. This was because the NBA produced evidences of flat contradictions to the official claims, and also produced evidences to its own claim that the construction of the dams had violated the domestic and international law. Thus, the review was sought and the NBA demanded that in case the review proved the project to be unfeasible, it should be abandoned.

The transformation of the issues is perennial to a living movement. The issues then transformed to the question of a '*No Dam*' agenda for which there was an international support.

Finally, although tied up to the issue discussed above, today the NBA talks in the line of abandoning big dam projects and developing an alternative development paradigm that is locally situated and locally participated.

#### 6.5.2. Transformations of the Strategies

In this section we dwell on an analysis of the different phases of the movement with a focus on the changes in the strategies and the nature of the

'repertoires of contention' (Tarrow: 1998), focusing on the argument that the strategic changes and movement transformations relate to the '*cycles of struggle*' and the '*cycles of learning*', referring to feedback loops between theory and practice. This feedback loop is animated by a pattern. For instance, the lack of a suitable strategy or tactic in a movement may be experienced through a failure in achieving the desired goals in a particular phase of the movement. This failure leads to the development of a new strategy, and the process goes on, sometimes with the failures experienced by the movement, and sometimes with an incremental success, with a desire to achieve more comprehensive goals through more appropriate and adequately efficient strategies and tactics. This dynamism is produced in a process in which movements design a set of strategies to pursue preconceived objectives and demands, discover the inadequacies and inaptness of the initially employed repertoires of contentions in its interactions with the opponents, leading to the understanding for the need of better strategies, and so on. In the process of such cyclic confrontations and resultant changes in strategies, the movement itself undergoes transformations, for instance, because of the changes in the nature of the support base, which in turn lead to the rethinking of experiences and further changes in strategies.

The NBA's opposition to the dam stems from a sophisticated critique of the project as a whole, and therefore, its approach has required a response that is similarly complex. Acknowledging this complexity, Medha Patkar, the leader of the NBA stated that,

*"We in India feel that the people's movements who take up these issues must have a comprehensive politico-economic, social ideology, which may not come merely from Gandhi or Marx, but a combination of various analysis, tools that all of them have offered to us"* (Interview of Medha by Venu Govindu, August 7).

Hence, the NBA has used not one but a host of strategies and still a greater number of tactics within these strategies in the movement, giving a driving force to the movement to grow and move. We have attempted a discussion on the various strategies and tactics used by the movement at different

stages and the consequent dynamism and transformations in the movement in the sections that follow.

During the initial phase of the movement, especially up to 1989, the NBA resorted to the strategy of lobbying and petitioning the officials of the state. This strategy had proved to be an effective strategy in case of the Silent Valley Movement in Kerala in the 1970s and up to the mid-1980s (Jayal: 2000). However, this strategy proved to be a failure in case of the Narmada Bachao Andolan against the SSP. Hence, the strategy of the movement transformed in its interactions with the state responses to its demands. Hence, the movement was required to draw up a new strategy for the rest of the life of the movement. Thus, the movement chose a non-violent direct action strategy. As Baviskar (1995) points out, the NBA chose the non-violent strategy to ward off police action that could completely crush the movement. However, a detailed description of the rationale for choosing non-violent direct action by the NBA has been explained by Chittaroopa Palit, an activist of the Movement (Palit: 2003)

Hence, one of the primary strategies of the NBA in the period especially after 1989 has been the non-violent direct action strategy, guided by the tenets of Gandhian philosophy. Within this broad strategy of this non-violent direct action, the NBA has been employing various tactics like satyagraha (non-violent peaceful marches), rallies, *dharnas* (sit-ins), and *aansans* (hunger-strikes) to voice their opposition. The most notable of the non-violent direct action used by the NBA include the Harsud Rally (1989), the Manibeli *Satyagraha* (1991), and the Dhomkhedi *Satyagraha*; and, one of the most successful tactics employed by the NBA has been the creation of the *jal samarpan dal* (the suicide squad), who have pledged not to leave the valley and instead to drown along with their fields, cattle and their houses. The *jal samarpan* group has internalized the tactic so much so that a villager in Manibeli observed,

*“Why should I leave my crops and cattle to live in the slums of Bombay? If I must die, then I will die here...”* (Dharmadhikary: 2000).

From this it is evident that the movement has been able to inculcate in its followers the necessity of employing such non-violent direct action strategies and tactics to pressurize the government on the issue. Inasmuch as the movement acquired newer skills through strategic learning, the movement also failed to achieve its demands and objectives of its adamant no dam position through non-violent direct action tactics. Hence, it had to develop a newer repertoire of action within the broad framework of Gandhian non-violence for the upcoming phases of the movement.

Although in keeping with the strategy of the non-violent direct action, the NBA has resorted to '*legal action*' as a strategy in the 1990s. The NBA took to legal action by petitioning the Supreme Court of India to suspend the construction of the SSP in 1994. The movement at this point adopted a more moderate position of demanding the review of the SSP (Sen: 2000a, 2000b, nd.). According to Sen, this move was a tactical one made probably to restore the movement's declining credibility, although the justification was that the review was necessary because of the adverse cost-benefit ratio, the underestimation of the number of the oustees, the underestimation of the environmental impacts, the exaggerated hydrological data on the water available in the river, and the skewed regional and social distribution of the benefits of the dam (Patkar: 1995). The NBA was able to provide much evidence to back up its claims about the social and ecological assessment of the project. The NBA experienced the success of the use of this strategy of legal action when the Supreme Court ordered a halt in the further construction of the dam. However, the success was only temporary and short lived as the court finally allowed the construction with the proposed increase in dam height. This came to the shock of the NBA and the recourse to legal action as a strategy of the movement too proved to be futile with the verdict of the Court. The failure of review and jury politics owes to the influence of the social structure, that is, the influence of the Patidar landowning class of central Gujarat over the state, which was compelled to restrain any move of the centre that could amount to conceding to the demands of the NBA.

However, one of the most important strategic and tactical frames employed by the NBA in its struggle in the valley is the strategy of alliance



building. The NBA has successfully built alliances with the 'affinity groups' at home and abroad, thereby contributing to its support base and strength. At home, the NBA has become a key member of the National Alliance of the People's Movements (NAPM), a coalition which deals with issues of social and ecological justice. At the international level, the NBA has networked with a California based NGO called the International Rivers network (IRN), the World Commission on Dams (WCD), the Environmental defense Fund (EDF) etc, which have played an important role in the internationalization of the movement.

However, it needs to be noted at this point that these strategies have not been used by the movement in a linear sequence, each representing the particular phase of the movement. What is true is that each of these strategies has become important individually at different phases of the movement with the nature of the issue at stake. Whereas lobbying and petitioning was significant only in the formative stage of the movement and the use of legal action was bold in the mid 1990s, the non-violent direct action have been used by the movement at almost every stage of the movement, of course, with varying degrees of intensity as dictated by the necessity of the time, context and issue in question. For instance, there were *satyagrahas* even before the institutionalization of the movement as a monolithic, pan-state movement. In a similar way, the alliance formation strategy, although limited in scope, led to the formation of the broader coalition called the NBA out of the fragmented and localized organizations which initiated the stirrings in opposition to the dam. Even today, *satyagrahas* and rallies are held at frequent intervals in the valley (Rajghat Dharna-1998; Rally in the Valley-1999); with an ever increasing process of alliance formation with the like minded organizations both nationally and internationally.

Apart from using the strategy of Gandhian non-violent direct action and its allied tactics, the movement has also devised and employed a wide range of *naras* (slogans), which have acted not only as methods of resistance by succinctly articulating movement demands within demonstrations and rallies and on protest banners. *Naras* have acted as the pulse of the movement in lifting the energy of the meetings, they have been used to punctuate the speeches of leaders, to incite moments of participation and inclusion amongst the audience, to end a person's

speech or to conclude a meeting, to weave a meeting crowd together, to propagandize the goals and demands of the movement, to act as a greeting or a farewell when an activist arrives or leaves a meeting, as a call and a response mechanism unifying the speaker and the audience in a meeting, and also to add voice to particular points made by a speaker as an amplification of the voice and arguments of the speaker. The *naras* represent the confluence of different and yet braided counter-hegemonic discourses. For instance, *naras* like *Kohi Nahi Hatega, Baandh Nahi Banega* (We Shall Not Move, The Dam Will Not Be Built) articulates the participants' political intent in the face of threatened submergence and attempted eviction; *Jangal, Jameen Kuni Chee, Amri Chee, Amri Chee* (To Whom Does the Forest and Land Belong—It Is Ours, It Is Ours) articulates the customary rights of the adivasis over the forest and land; *Jangal, Jameen Dubaata—Rupa Thanin Kay Karta ?* (You are submerging forests, What is the point of planting trees?), *Vikas Chahiye, Vinash Nahi* (We seek Development, Not Destruction) lay naked the failures of the developmental state to deliver common good; *Hamara Gaon Mein Hamara Raj* (Our Rule in Our Village) articulates the politico-cultural project of self rule within the adivasis areas; and *naras* like *Doobengeh Par Nahi Hatengeh* (We will drown but we shall not Move) articulates the attachment of the people to their ancestral land (see the section on cultural legacies and movement dynamics in the present chapter for details) and the idea of self sacrifice inherent in the practice of satyagraha—the kingpin of the movement's strategy.

The use of *naras* is made in such a manner that they suit the contextual requirements of the movement. Although some *naras* are chanted almost universally in all occasions of the movement, yet most of them are created to highlight and articulate specific issues confronting the movement at specific phases of the movement. The birth of a particular *Nara* owes to the mutual and dialogical interactions between the structural parameters of the movement and the movement agents like the activists and the leaders of the movement. Hence it is noticed that with the transformations in the nature of the issues and demands of the movement, similar shifts have taken place in the themes of the *naras*. The *naras* have been moving and transforming with the movement of and the transformations in the movement.

### 6.5.3. Transformation in the Nature of the Support Base

A movement's life course is also determined by the changing nature of its support base. The NBA still holds a strong support base in the three riparian states of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, with an ever increasing support base outside the valley, in India and abroad, through networks and alliances. However, the movement is characterized by a contradiction from within in terms of its support base. Whereas it has a broadening support base outside the valley, there has been a continuous shrinking of the support from within, that is, the affected people. This has been pointed out by several scholars on and ex-activists with the movement.

Gail Omvedt (2004) holds that the NBA is not the most mass-based movement or even the most effective kind of environmental movement today. Her survey of the movement reveals that in the initial phase of the movement and particularly up to 1987 when Medha Patkar and the NBA pointed out that it was not possible to rehabilitate all the people displaced by the project and as such the project had to be opposed, the NBA had a readymade support base both in India and abroad. The readymade support base with the movement gave an impetus to the NBA to enthusiastically organize the first major mass rally called the Harsud Rally in October 1989. The rally consequently helped the NBA to gather a mass following. However, the trend was short lived reaching its zenith with the Sangharsha Yatra of December 1990 to January 1991. The process climaxed with the Ferkuva Rally (1991) and became static at this point with the Gujarat government standing adamantly against it by winning and mobilizing a huge population of farmers and adivasis on its side. This began the gradual process of NBA losing its support base from within the Narmada valley.

From the point of view of the support base of the movement, this Ferkuva Rally became the turning point as in its aftermath, the dam evictees of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra thought it prudent to opt for rehabilitation as they felt that the construction of the Dam could not be stopped. Omvedt (ibid) points out that even fifty percent of the dam oustees decided to take land offered in Akkalkua by the Maharashtra Government. With this, a chunk of the

Maharashtra component of the NBA support base fell apart of the movement, a large majority of the tribal oustees of Madhya Pradesh also opted for rehabilitation, the participation of the backward caste farmers of Madhya Pradesh in the NBA started showing signs of decline (Rahul: 2000), and activists erstwhile with the NBA started coming out of the NBA (for instance, people like Khajiabhai of Savia village who had been in the 21-day fast with Medha Patkar deserted the NBA). Thus, since 1991, the NBA has gradually lost its support base in the Narmada valley.

Dwivedi (1999) has also made an in-depth academic study on the nature of the NBA support base. He concludes that the NBA has in course of time witnessed the significant erosion of the adivasi support base in the valley. To this effect, Dwivedi quotes an activist of the NBA from Madhya Pradesh who has left the movement, as:

*"In the last three years, I have left the NBA. I have no relation with the local NBA leaders in the villages and they blame me for splitting the village on this issue..."*

From this it is evident that there are not only the instances of the activists of the NBA desert the movement, but also the process of splits and factions coming up within the support base of the movement. This gradual loss of the mass base of the movement has been more or less acknowledged even by Arundhati Roy who has been working with the movement not only as an activist but also as an inspirational force. She says:

*"But fighting people tire. They fall ill, they grow old. Even the young age prematurely. For twenty years now, since the tribunals award, the ragged army in the valley has lived in the fear of eviction..."*

Even Sanjay Sangvai, an 'insider' activist of the movement acknowledges the decline in the support base of the movement who regards it as natural phenomena. According to him,

*"There have been many ups and downs, as in any other movement. Many people have deserted the movement, which is but natural given the tremendous pressure on the people, the repression, insecurity and the threat of submergence."* (Sangvai: Rejoinder-How to strengthen the struggle in the Narmada Valley).

However, the NBA has been trying to keep its support base as strong as ever and it's mobilizing the populations outside the valley. According to Sangvai,

*"The Andolan has been creating a support base in areas adjacent to the valley --in Shahada, Taloda, Nandurbar, Dondaicha and of course Dhule. The NBA has been interacting with mass organisations in MP like the Ekata Parishad, the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha, Bhopal Gas Pedit organisation, Kisan Sangharsha Samiti etc. In Maharashtra, the NBA has been an active partner in the struggle of adivasi organisations in the Konkan through the Shoshit Jan Andolan, a loose forum of organisations. Right from Nandurbar, Dhule district to Vidarbha, South Central Maharashtra and Konkan, Marathwada, there are organisations which have an active co-ordination with the NBA. The NBA is also associated with adivasi organisations in the Dangs, Panchmahals and Chhota Udepur in Gujarat, and onstees in Rajasthan and north-east Gujarat."*(ibid)

#### 6.5.4. Transformation in the Nature of the Movement

The NBA, which started as a struggle of the innocent, simple tribals has undergone a sea change in its course of over twenty years. Initially, when the movement began with its demand of the right to information about the costs and benefits of the dam and how the trauma of displacement would be compensated, the movement was a scattered one, with a series of sporadic protests by different organizations, dotting the three riparian states. This phases of the movement used lobbying and petitioning as its principal strategy.

In 1988-1989, with all the organizations protesting adagainst displacement by the Narmada Project and against the improper and inadequate resettlememnt and rehabilitation schemes coming together, the emerging collective was christened as the NBA. The nomenclature of the NBA as an emerging collective

signified the transformation in the nature of the struggle from the scattered to a more coherent and a monolithic collective, with well defined objectives, demands and strategies. Apart from the issues of displacement, resettlement and rehabilitation, the movement also started questioning the project in terms of its social, human and environmental costs.

The turning point in the transformation of the nature of the NA was the entry of the World Bank in to the scene and the campaigns of the movement to pressurize the Bank to withdraw from the project. Because, it was as a result of this that the movement transformed from a nationally recognized movement to a movement of international recognition and repute. This transformation was brought about by the changed nature of its objectives, issues and demands and the corresponding change in its strategy. The movement at this stage began to play the politics of alliance building with transnational groups, networking with various international NGOs and pressurizing the Bank to withdraw funding to the project. It stood with its agenda of total opposition to the dam and advocated a strong no- dam position.

Although the Bank withdrew, the movement realized the limitations of the utopian no-dam position and softened its position to the review of the project. This was facilitated by the production of the counter-expertise on the project by the movement which could expose the hollowness of the government claims such as of rehabilitation, on hydrological data of the project, on cost-benefit matrix, and of land availability for resettlement, among many others.

In its next phase, the movement turned towards the villages again, keeping alive its spirits of alliance formations and networking at the national and international levels. *Hamara Gaon Mein Hamara Raj* became the theme of the movement. The movement attempted to garner support and reach deep to the villages, adopting the methods of village non-cooperation (*Gaon Bandh*), preparing for monsoon satyagrahas by forming *samarpit dals* in the village. However, its review politics and jury politics continued even at this stage of the movement.

The movement also showed a shift in terms of its goals and objectives. Its next strategy was to advocate a reconstruction of the society, economy and polity by way of *Nava Nirman* in the valley. *Nava Nirman* was an experiment of the movement to develop an alternative system of participatory governance and sustainable development in the valley. One of the objectives of the movement behind the *Nava Nirman* strategy was to expose the futility and inefficacy of the governance system and development paradigm thrust upon the people by the state. The *Nava Nirman* centered on activities like opening up of the schools like the *Jivan Saalas* and developing micro-credit facilities for the local poor.

NBA's jury politics failed with the Supreme Court verdict in 2000. The NBA protested against the decision leading to the arrest of many. Despite the blow meted on the NBA, it is still adamant and is striving for a more comprehensive and authoritative review of the dam by a new tribunal. Although the verdict has sounded the death bell for the movement, yet the movement is thriving with an arduous toil, harping primarily on the issue of full and just rehabilitation of the already ousted people, and surviving as a part of the broader canvass of peoples' movement in India.

Hence, in course of its evolution and development, the movement has undergone metamorphosis several times, with changes in its thematic orientations, changes in strategies, changes in support bases, and finally changes in the structure of the movement, from a local movement to a national one, and finally becoming a movement of global significance.

## 6.6. IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Articulated as a discourse of oppositional populism, the social movement in the Narmada valley indicts the ways in which India's developmental trajectory has been moulded by the interest of the dominant groups, leading to the perpetual marginalization of the poor and the needs for social justice, participatory democracy and environmental sustainability. The movement, through its vision of alternative development and *Nava Nirman* activities has been attempting to bring about a change in the meaning of development and social transformation. This articulation of the vision of alternative development by the movement stems from the counter-expertise developed by the movement vis-à-

vis the claims of the governments about environmental sustainability and the benefits of development through the project, and the movement's attempt to expose the false claims of the government. Hence, it's reconstructive and *Nana Nirman* activities relate to the shifts in strategies of the movement, as a response to the state's failure to deliver public good in forms of decentralized development, social justice, equity and rights of the poor to their legitimate livelihood opportunities. Hence, the changes and/or a combination of the changes in the parameters of the movement, its objectives, goals and strategies bear positive implications for sustainability in the Valley.



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