**State (Under)development, Transnational Activism, and Tribal Resistance
in India's Narmada Valley**

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January, 2002

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial
fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts

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0-612-79006-1

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# Acknowledgements

In the Department of Anthropology at McGill University, I sincerely thank Professor Colin Scott and Professor John Galaty, both of whom have patiently and enthusiastically seen this project through from conception to realization. Professor Don Attwood provided welcomed input into the fieldwork component, and at critical moments during the writing-up period. Fieldwork could not have occurred without the aid of Dr. Jan Brouwer of the Centre for Advanced Research on Indigenous Knowledge Systems (CARIKS) in Mysore, who facilitated research affiliation with CARIKS, and provided useful advice before and after my India excursion. For stimulating conversation during fieldwork, and invaluable assistance afterwards, thanks go to Dr. Lyla Mehta at the Institute for Development Studies in Sussex, and Dr. Pablo Routledge of the Department of Geography at the University of Glasgow.

I owe a great debt to activists in the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (NBA) and *adivasis* living in the Narmada Valley. At the NBA, I must especially thank Pravin Shivashankar for generously allowing my participation in his fascinating and important work. Numerous Andolan activists in the Narmada Valley, Baroda, and Pune shared their experience and knowledge with me, among them Medha Patkar, Joe Athialy, M.K. Sukumar, Sathna Diddech, and Sanjay Sangvai. I cannot hope to enumerate the small and great gestures of friendship extended to me by *adivasis* under extreme conditions, both physical and political. In particular, I am grateful to the *adivasi* communities of Domkhedi, Jalisindi, Nimgavhan, Sikka, Amba, Chinchkhedi, Surung, Maal and Dhoopkheda located in Alirajpur district.

Many friends have made the past two years greater than the sum parts of this thesis, although they have certainly shaped its outcome. Like-minded souls in academia and advocacy include L.S. Aravinda, Ali Sauer, Vibodh Parthasarathi, Vijayan Joseph, Anand Punja, and Minakshi Menon. I leave McGill with fond memories of work and play with department colleagues, especially Ari Gandsman and Chloe Frommer, as well as Beatriz Oliver, Karine Vanthuyne, Jessica Leech, Reiko Yoshida, Niloo Ahmadzadeh, Sabrina Doyon, and Saulesh Esenova. An extra thanks goes to Sabrina Doyon for assisting in the French translation of my abstract.

Finally, my deepest gratitude and affection is reserved for my family, who in many different ways have made this thesis and much else possible. Thank you Mom, Dad, and Pooja.

## Abstract

This thesis examines how the Narmada damming project in India is constituted and contested by the state, affected tribal peoples (*adivasis*), and a transnational advocacy network led by the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (Save the Narmada Movement). Based on ethnographic fieldwork, and employing critical anthropological perspectives on development and globalization, the power relations underlying dominance and resistance are mapped out. The conflicting discourses, strategies and practices of Narmada proponents and opponents are conceptualized within local, regional, national, and transnational sites and modalities. Further, the negotiation of state dominance and *adivasi* resistance is analyzed through contradictory practice and shifting political alignments. Lastly, this thesis delineates how the Narmada conflict is permeated by complex symbolic and moral mechanisms activated by both state authorities and activist resistors.

## Résumé

Cette thèse examine comment le projet de barrage du Narmada en Inde est constitué et contesté par l'État, les peuples tribaux (*adivasis*) affectés par le projet de barrage, ainsi que par le réseau du groupe de pression transnational mené par le *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (Sauvons le mouvement de Narmada). Sur la base d'un travail ethnographique et de l'utilisation de perspectives anthropologiques critiques du développement et de la mondialisation, les relations de pouvoir, marquant les dynamiques de dominance et de résistance, ont été mises en évidence. Les discours conflictuels, les stratégies et les pratiques des partisans et des opposants du projet de barrage du Narmada sont conceptualisés dans les différents lieux et modalités des niveaux local, régional, national, et transnational. De plus, la négociation entre la dominance de l'État et la résistance des *adivasi* est analysée à travers les pratiques contradictoires et les changements d'alignement politique. Enfin, cette thèse trace comment le conflit du projet de barrage du Narmada est imprégné par des mécanismes symboliques et moraux complexes enclenchés par les autorités d'État et les activistes résistants.

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**Chapter 1: Introduction**

This thesis departs from a concern with how social processes, and the power relations sustaining them, are manifested through local agency, regional and national interlocutors, and international discourses. How can we conceptualize social relations marked by forces such as nation-states, transnational corporations, and social movements, where conflict must both be situated within particular temporal and spatial fields and larger trajectories of social and political interaction?

This central concern is explored by examining the ways 'development' – the Narmada damming project in central India – is implemented and opposed. I examine how actors and organizations in varied sites employ particular discourses and practices to constitute and contest the Narmada project. I trace out how these elements of dominance and resistance become intertwined within a complex matrix of power, rebounding, mutating, and often unpredictably transforming the substrata of relations between involved parties. Descriptive points and substantive commentary focus on three constituents in the Narmada issue: the three riparian states implementing the project in central India: Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat; a social movement, the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (NBA; Save the Narmada Movement), and affiliated advocacy organizations; and affected *adivasi* (tribal) communities in the Narmada Valley.[1] How do states, activists, and *adivasis* come to understand and forge dominance and resistance as framed through 'development'?

I attempt to systematically explore this question through three main lines of inquiry. First, the Narmada project is situated within multiple layers of power relations, through which it is manifested and opposed. The Narmada project's maintenance and

destabilization is evinced in a range of processes, ranging from conflict over scarce resources in village settings to national and international discursive, scientific, and social debate surrounding development. The interpenetration of spatial locations and social agency, as well as the mobility of discourses, practices, and images that circulate through transnational networks of unequal social and political relations is foregrounded throughout this thesis. Sketching out how dominance and resistance turn on an axis of state development intervention and mass based opposition to it, I emphasize the complex spatial, social, and moral links – distorted, reworked and unanticipated though they might be – existing between different practitioners of development and actors involved in acts of anti-Narmada resistance.

The second substantive point unfolds out of my first. The fractious interconnection of actors who wish either to implement the Narmada project or oppose it both highlights the contingent nature of power and collapses simple analytic binaries of dominance and resistance. In other words, in what ways can actions of the state, social movements, and civil actors such as tribal people be seen as dominance or resistance, and how are these two concepts realized in actual practice? Is power a commodity that is exerted in a predictable fashion by the dominant, as many conventional formulations of development and globalization suggest, or is it a more complex phenomenon, open to manipulation and agency? Suggesting that there are only two possible modalities through which to slot involved actors – most conveniently, tribal peoples[2] and activists on one 'side', state development and international capital on the other – seems to ignore the spectrum of choices that such actors undertake and manipulate, in some cases enhancing state hegemony and subjugation, in others asserting increased subaltern voice, legitimacy

and material power. How can choices, prosaic and grandiose – lending money, implementing a dam-related program, accepting compensation, participating in a rally – be encapsulated within a static framework counter-positioning dominance versus resistance?

The third main argument developed in this thesis employs recent anthropological analyzes on the "cultural politics" of development (Alvares and Escobar, 1998; Moore, 2000) to argue that if the implementation of the Narmada project is a platform for consolidating state power over marginal communities, then this process – and resistance to it – is permeated by complex cultural, symbolic and moral elements. I attempt to flesh out the texture of state and NBA practices, highlighting the moral and symbolic elements at the heart of actions and discourses produced by involved participants. Particular moral and symbolic elements lie at the center of conflicting discourses and practices, and thus inform how actors make sense of these situations and find motivation for their actions. I outline this assertion by focusing on NBA strategies of resistance that invoke the power of *adivasi* testimonials and utilize displays of physical sacrifice. Concurrently, the state's justification for the project is coded in its own moral discourse saturated with nationalism, and elite norms of sacrifice and righteousness.

## Outline

My attempt to explore these issues is structured as follows. In the remaining section of this first chapter I provide an analytic framework for conceptualizing development (and also environmental conservation and economic globalization) in the context of the Narmada project. I then briefly sketch out the Narmada issue, including

relevant details of the involved actors and the trajectory of state-NBA-*adivasi* conflict over the project. Lastly, I provide a note on the methodology and implementation of the fieldwork component upon which this thesis is based.

The remaining chapters of this thesis are organized such that I depart with an examination of the Narmada conflict's most local manifestations, and move towards a discussion of regional, national, and finally international dimensions. Of course, as each frame of my discussion is interrelated, I emphasize at the outset that these divisions are made for reasons of analytic clarity rather than tacit acceptance of their 'natural' existence. In chapter 2, I explore the local articulation of this conflict, mainly through *adivasi*-state bureaucratic relations in Narmada Valley villages. I discuss the discourse and practice of project-related compensatory afforestation and how this is intertwined with international policies and shaped through *adivasi* agency. In the third chapter, I examine the regional manifestation of the conflict by analyzing activist-initiated demonstrations and displays of dissent, examining how these articulatory practices, as well as those of the state, depend on particular moral and cultural idioms for their effectiveness. In the fourth chapter, I examine the national level, in particular how the pressures and abilities bearing on the nation-state come into conflict with a social movement and *adivasis*, analyzing the interplay of dominance and accommodation as it inflects both the global and the local. In chapter 5, I examine the Narmada project's most distant point of articulation in the interplay of western advocacy networks aligned with the NBA, and the international financial and corporate interests aiding the state implementation of the Narmada project. In chapter 6, I summarize the issues explored in the preceding chapters and synthesize them into a conclusion.

## Conceptualizing Development, Conservation and Globalization in India

My intention on examining the Narmada issue has grown out of an interest in what Gupta describes as "macrologies" (1995) and Tsing terms "globalisms" (2000), large scale, globally dispersed formations or discourses such as colonialism and capitalism. In particular, I am interested in how contemporary macrologies or globalisms, such as development, environmental conservation, and economic globalization come to be consistently deployed throughout the world yet are manifested in highly differentiated ways. Gupta frames this tension such that analysts are encouraged to foreground "far-reaching and systematic consequences" of macrologies at the same time as their different forms in multiple locations "arise from contestation, reworking, and rearticulation" (Gupta, 1995: 24). Tsing's formulation of "globalisms" echoes this notion: "Cultural processes of all 'place' making and all 'force' making are both local and global, that is, both socially and culturally particular and productive of widely spreading interactions" (Tsing, 2000: 352). Lastly, Appadurai's conception of "global cultural flows", in particular ethnic, media, technological, financial and ideological "scapes", also emphasizes the fluidity of social processes while acknowledging the multitude of cultural articulations: "[scapes] are deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors... these landscapes are eventually navigated by agents who both experience and constitute larger formations" (Appadurai, 1990: 7).

Gupta, Tsing, and Appadurai examine how this interface can simultaneously reproduce existing political and economic structures, be integrated with existing cultural

practices in a hybrid formation, and contest the hegemony and legitimacy of dominant structures and discourses. Given my topical interests in development, the environment, and indigenous peoples, I began to explore the dramatic shifts in development and globalization in India enacted through the mobilization of social movements and advocacy organizations. Of these, the NBA's long campaign against the Narmada dams has been the most prominent.

The historical trajectory and institutional features of development from the post-Second World period to the present have been exhaustively traced out, probed, and debated elsewhere (Sachs, 1992; Escobar, 1995; Peet and Watts, 1996; Cooper and Packard, 1997). Here, I explore those features of development's constitution and contestation that are relevant to my analysis. I then move on to explore related issues surrounding environmental conservation and economic globalization which are of lesser significance than development in framing the Narmada conflict, yet salient in the understanding of the state-NBA struggle over the project. Finally, I sketch out the implications of these three large-scale processes in the Indian context.

A growing body of anthropological research has utilized poststructuralist concepts in the ethnographic analysis of international development, drawing often from Michel Foucault's work on "discourse" (a regulated formation of statements, practices, and knowledge), "power" (dispersed, multiple operations on both individuals and populations), and "subjectivity" (both subservience to a power-knowledge regime, and a mode of self-identification) (Foucault, 1972, 1979, 1980, 1983; Ferguson, 1990; Escobar, 1995; Gupta, 1998). Commentators have traced out development's sudden emergence and ascendance as a primary mode of global regulation and organization in the post-war

period (Escobar, 1995), while others have emphasized its articulation with pre-existing modes of domination, such as colonialism, as well as local cultures (Moore, 2000). I am more sympathetic towards the latter formulation, which foregrounds power and history as central to development's constitution:

> The post-World War II apparatus of development did not create global inequality at a stroke but only provided a new means of organizing and legitimating an only-too-real inequality that was already very well established... 'Development' was laid on top of already-existing geopolitical hierarchies; it neither created north-south inequality nor undid it but instead provided a set of conceptual and organizational devices for managing it, legitimating it, and sometimes contesting and negotiating its terms (Ferguson, 1999: 248).

Indeed, much analysis has noted the ways in which the Indian development regime is a product of the British colonial apparatus. With the notable exception of Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian nationalists who led the drive for independence in 1947, and who afterwards shaped the formation of the development state adopted the colonialist teleology of modernity, with its attendant notion of unidirectional progress and affirmation of the centralized nation-state's authority (Ludden, 1992; Gupta, 1998). A recent body of Indian agrarian and environmental history has begun to examine how this colonial apparatus was both inflected by, and itself constitutive of transformations in development regimes, environmentalist discourse, and social and natural landscapes (Gadgil and Guha, 1992, 1995; Gilmartin, 1994; Arnold and Guha, 1995; Grove et al., 1996; Arnold, 1996; Skaria, 1999; Sivaramakrishnan, 1999; Ludden, 1999; Agarwal and Sivaramakrishnan, 2000).

Among other elements, development is seen to reproduce idioms of western modernity condensed in colonial discourse, namely teleologies of personal and social growth, unidirectional social and environmental evolution, and irreversible progress (Rist,

1997: 27; Gupta, 1998: 36-37). Development employs science and economics to construct the 'underdeveloped' subject; "professionalization" (Escobar, 1995: 45) as a system of institutionalized regulation and discipline legitimates experts and planners and their formulations of 'underdevelopment' (Ferguson, 1990; Ludden, 1992). Such a system functions as a "power-knowledge" regime, effectively regulating both individual and collective behaviour, making individual bodies docile and administering large groupings of people (Foucault, 1980: 125). The power of the colonial and development state is predicated upon a body of experts and scientists who have control over concepts, definitions, and prescriptions that serve to maintain the dominant discursive regime (Ludden, 1992). Not surprisingly, development's ascendancy as the primary mode of speaking about the 'Third World' subject involves the exclusion of alternative paradigms (Foucault, 1972: 219), what Foucault terms "subjugated knowledges", "a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity" (Foucault, 1980: 82).

Thus, it follows that from the very beginning of India's development regime in 1947, science and the development bureaucracy in India were intimately connected: "By the very nature of its instrumental-managerial orientation to Indian society, modern science has established a secure relationship with the philosophy and practice of development in India" (Nandy, 1988: 9). Development's purported ability to 'control', 'dominate', 'stabilize', and 'transform' both cultural and material environments guides large interventions. The most prominent of these is the "Green Revolution" beginning in the 1950's, involving the intensification of Indian agriculture through high yielding seeds,

chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and mechanization (Anderson et al., 1982; Gupta, 1998). Such interventions have been more recently criticized for disrupting social relations, causing environmental degradation, and deepening political stratification (Shiva, 1998).

It would not be an exaggeration to state that development has been the primary mechanism for structuring political relations, producing and negotiating cultural knowledge, and transforming material environments in post- independence India (Parajuli, 1991; Ludden, 1992; Brass, 1994; Visvanathan, 1997; Gupta, 1998). Yet development as a 'globalism' is manifested not in a uniform manner that subjugates and displaces all that it encounters; as a system of power and discourse, development is embodied in fragmented, dispersed modalities existing in multiple sites. Rather than being a commodity that can be possessed and exercised, development, as with any large-scale process, must be examined through "microphysics of power", unfolding sets of strategies, positions and conflicts that can articulate or disarticulate with existing cultural and political processes (Foucault, 1980: 174). As Moore notes,

> Contemporary analyzes eclipse the micro-politics through which global development discourses are refracted, reworked, and sometimes subverted in particular localities. It is too often assumed that development rigidly determines rural politics; such assumptions divert from the investigation of how particular interventions articulate with deeper histories of government attempts to regulate and disciplines landscapes and livelihoods. The specificity of these struggles belies any single, totalizing development discourse. Such a unitary formation conceals spatial, historical, cultural differences... contemporary global processes layer over previous historical connections, particularly those forged through capitalism and colonialism (Moore, 2000: 655).

This formulation of development necessarily emphasizes the creation of "subjectivity". The individual and population are subject to a particular discursive formation, and also the process of self-identification and self-reproduction of discourses

and power relations: "both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to" (Foucault, 1983: 212). Subjectivity is divided into three modes of operation, the first two, "scientific classification" and "dividing practices" primarily operating to subject to, while "subjectification" creates an identity and affinity with conventional power relations.

Development also scrutinizes its objects through panoptic gazes and "visualization technologies" (Escobar, 1995: 156) that colonize life areas, and incorporate them into expert categories (Foucault, 1983: 208). Yet these are never uniform or entirely successful; development and its categories mutate and acquire new resonance in different cultural contexts (Pigg, 1992). "Dividing practices" operate in development discourse through modes of social, spatial, temporal, and moral classification, definition, and exclusion. Formerly contained in the west's colonial projects, development's rapid growth into a political and economic apparatus also objectifies individuals and populations into categories such as 'villages', 'communities' and 'nations', assumed to be territorially bounded and internally coherent. Development interventions, for most of the post-war period, were mainly conducted through the nation-state, seen as the sole "point of entry" (Ferguson, 1990: 71-72) for enacting development (Gupta, 1998: 36-37). Among these 'underdeveloped' countries constituting the 'Third World', India occupies a prominent place as the archetypal development state (Visvanathan, 1997), revealed in the enormous political and financial resources invested in India by organizations such as the World Bank, the Ford Foundation and Britain's Department for International Development (DFID). While the Indian state is the primary agent empowered to produce 'development' (Rangan, 1996: 208- 209), its own legitimacy depends on the ability to

impart the fruits of modernity to its population, a populist ethos easily appropriated by groups contesting the state's legitimacy (Gupta, 1997,1998).

The practice of distinguishing social units according to geographies of the nation-state itself depends upon a dividing practice distinguishing the developed, 'First World' (literate, rich, industrialized, scientific, modern, rational, powerful, urban, active, independent) from the developing, 'Third World' (illiterate, poor, agrarian, 'traditional', 'backward', powerless, rural, passive, dependent). This dividing practice serves to impart an identity on the 'underdeveloped', thus fulfilling what Foucault terms "subjectification", the ways in which "a human being turns him- or herself into a subject" (Foucault, 1983: 208):

> 'Developed' and 'underdeveloped' are not just terms that indicate the position of nation-states in an objective matrix defined by quantitative indicators... They are also... forms of identity in the postcolonial world. To be 'underdeveloped' is to be a national community that is inferior, backward, subordinate, deficient in capital and resources, an inadequate member of the international order, and (by extension) a shabby imitation of the 'developed' (Gupta, 1998: 39-40).

Development gives the 'West' an identity based on the inverse of these 'facts', reproducing its self-understanding as modern (Gupta, 1998). These dividing practices and modes of subjectification not only perpetuate a mode of self-understanding, but also constitute a primary trajectory by which development is conceptualized, through material practices of 'mimicry'. Development is construed as the mechanism by which the developing world – through replication of the 'West' – becomes the developed world (Gupta, 1998: 40-41).

Development is above all a social process subject to changes and transformations; while its elements and origins may be similar, it is a 'multivalent' rather than unitary formation. Not surprisingly, depending on the time and context, one can speak of (among

others) 'industrial development', 'participatory development', 'sustainable development', and more recently 'post-development'. These sub-discourses have been heavily influenced by western environmentalism, itself a large-scale macrology. Environmentalism emerged as a coherent discourse in the 1960s in western, industrial countries as a response to unprecedented levels of resource extraction, industrialization, and pollution (Guha, 2000). Emphasizing conservation of resources, preservation of 'natural' areas and species, and lower levels of consumption, environmentalism is also constituted by divergent discursive strands, and present in both environmental advocacy discourse and global inter-state treaties. Environmentalism has variously combined and clashed with development, depending on the emphasis placed on resource consumption versus environmental mitigation, as revealed in fissures between first and third world activism (ibid.).

More recently, theorists have posited a new phase of development shaped significantly by economic globalization. An emerging global financial architecture, composed of free trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), multinational corporations, nation-states, and institutions such as the World Trade Organization is changing processes of interaction, production and consumption. Through free trade, corporations are able to take advantage of weaker labour markets, diminished tariff barriers, simplified regulatory conditions, and easier resource access to manipulate economic conditions for profit (Klein, 2000). Increasing flows of images, capital, goods, and people across national boundaries and the ascendancy of consumerism are posited (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000; Appadurai, 1990, 2000). Those actors collectively resisting the social and environmental effects of globalization policies are

termed "new social movements" (NSMs), the cross-border networking of which constitute "transnational advocacy networks" (TANs) (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Klein, 2000; Kala, 2001).

As a result of these processes, the state is seen to undergo ambiguous transformations. It loses its pre-eminent power over national populations due to the abdication of control over capital and trade flows, resulting in dramatic shifts in human mobility, images and technology; yet the state is still of crucial importance in a world where economic and other agreements are configured to the post-war inter-state system (Appadurai, 1990, 2000; Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000; Ludden, 2000). Though material struggles for power and resources have always been animated through cultural idioms of injustice and expressed through moral dissent (Scott, 1976: 20), transformations in conventional political life dictate that culture is increasingly the terrain upon which conflicts over power are waged, as those employing "cultural politics" theory emphasize (Li, 1996; Alvarez et al, 1998; Moore, 2000).

Indeed, over the past two decades, interconnected environmentalist, indigenous rights, and ecofeminist movements have become increasingly important actors in the shaping of the Indian development apparatus (Parajuli, 1991; Agarwal, 1998). Prominent among mobilizations representing (or construed as representing) anti-development movements are the Chipko movement in the Indian Himalayas, initially a mobilization led by urban activists, along with aggrieved small scale harvesters against state policies favouring large market players (Rangan, 1996; Parajuli, 1996; Sinha et al., 1997); and the conflict between state and *adivasi* peoples in the Jharkhand region of eastern India, mainly over the costs and benefits of state-led resource extraction and development

projects (Kothari and Parajuli, 1993; Deegan, 1993; Parajuli, 1996). Each movement has involved *adivasi* and subaltern communities in a contest over rich hydro, mineral, or forest resources. Chipko and Jharkhand have also represented popular resistance against a history of state intervention in the name of colonial modernization and post-colonial development, as forged and articulated through alliances with urban and international activists and researchers. The form and scope of these movements, while broadly construed as a mobilization against conventional development schemes, is manifold: both Chipko and Jharkhandi movements have simultaneously resisted the implementation of mega-projects such as hydroelectric dams, struggled for greater autonomy and control over local resources and community life, and strived for the creation of new institutionalized relations with the state.

**The Narmada Conflict: Implementing and Opposing Development**

Before applying this conceptual framework towards an analysis of the Narmada conflict, I briefly outline the context and trajectory of state, *adivasi* and activist relations over the past two decades. The Narmada River is located in central and western India, its 800-mile journey to the Arabian Sea passing through three states, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh. It is one of the longest rivers in India, is used for a number of economic, cultural, and religious purposes by those living in the valley, and has significant religious importance for Hindus in India, as well as *adivasis* in the region (Deegan, 1995).

This region is home to several distinct, though interrelated groups; the largest percentage of people living in the riparian plains are caste-stratified Hindu farmers, as

well as smaller populations of Gujaratis and Marathas who range from land-owners or merchants to landless agricultural labourers (Paranjype, 1991: 26-27). Although differing significantly in their primary economic activities, language and religion, these communities are well integrated into conventional government and market activities. The smallest population in this region is comprised of several *adivasi* groups, such as the Bhil, Bhilala, Gond, and Korku, living primarily in the forested land further downstream from the riparian plains. These tribal groups are differentiated from other inhabitants of the region through their marginal economic and political status, subsistence resource use, and distinct cultural and religious practices (Paranjype, 1991; Baviskar, 1995a).

Although technical studies on the feasibility of damming the Narmada were carried out in the 1940s, with construction on some of the infrastructure beginning in 1961, the project was effectively shelved until the 1980s due to conflict between Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra over the percentages of submerged land, displaced oustees, and financial obligations each state was liable for, and eventual irrigation and power benefits accruing to each (Dwevedi, 1998). The project, known in its entirety as the Narmada Valley Damming Project (hereafter, NVDP) has undergone further alterations in scale and detail since the project was legally stabilized in 1979 by the Narmada Water Resources Tribunal (NWRT), although minor clauses regarding construction and resettlement continue to be debated and altered (Caufield, 1996; Dwevedi, 1998).

As currently conceived, the NVDP includes 30 large, 135 medium, and 3000 minor multipurpose dams on the Narmada river and its tributaries. The centrepiece of the project is the Sardar Sarovar Project (hereafter SSP) in Gujarat, which has been

constructed to over 90 feet of its projected full height of 130 feet. Due to its location in

the Narmada River and proximity to adjoining *adivasi* villages, the SSP has had the most

severe environmental and social effects due to periodic submergence. Given this, the fact

that the other major dams in the project have not been completed, and the

disproportionate share of damage caused by the SSP versus other dams to date, the NBA

has historically focused its energies on countering the Sardar Sarovar's construction.

Other elements of the NVDP currently completed or under construction include the Tawa,

Bargi and Maheshwar dams in Madhya Pradesh, and the smaller Narmada Sagar and Man

projects. As the Narmada project has been exhaustively explored elsewhere[3], I quickly

review some salient points of the conflict, and insert relevant historical and contemporary

details as relevant in the chapters that follow.

Gujarat is the prime beneficiary of the Narmada project, although most of the

dams, and their environmental impacts and human displacement occur further upstream in

Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. Not surprisingly, Gujarat also has the most financial

capital and political resources invested in the project. Gujarat's position over the past two

decades has been legitimated primarily on the argument that despite the project's negative

environmental and social impacts, its benefits, especially drinking and irrigation water

will accrue mostly to the Kutch and Saharastra region in northwestern Gujarat, bordering

Pakistan. Comprised mainly of disadvantaged nomadic and farming communities living

in a semi-arid and perennially drought-ridden region, Kutch and Saharastra have become

the anchor for the massive publicity resources invested in promoting the Narmada project

as the "lifeline of Gujarat" (Sangvai, 2000).

Dams such as the Sardar Sarovar have historically occupied a privileged place in Indian development discourse. Unlike few other symbols of development and modernity, dams legitimate science as a harbinger of social benefits and goods such as energy, drinking water and irrigation through the domination and control of nature (McCully, 1996: 1, 237). Buttressed by loans from international finance institutions such as the World Bank, and the involvement of western consulting and engineering firms, India has built over three thousand large dams since independence (Roy, 1998: 4). The Narmada dams are further situated within a development discourse shaped by the teleology of unidirectional progress and the agenda of the nation-state, as exemplified by the comments of the Narmada Valley Development Agency (NVDA)'s former chairman Y.C. Alagh about the project's displaced communities:

> No trauma could be more painful for a family than to get uprooted from a place where it has lived for generations… Yet the uprooting has to be done. Because the land occupied by the family is required for a development project which holds promise of progress and prosperity for the country and people in general. The family getting displaced thus makes a sacrifice… so that others may live in happiness and be economically better off (quoted in Alvares and Billorey 1987: 64).

As with other big dams, in the Narmada case, science has played a conventionally positive role in proponents' claims. A banal statement by the World Bank in 1987 reveals the conjoining of scientific and development discourse: "It is difficult to conceive of a scenario in which India can afford to let the water of a major river such as the Narmada run wasted to the sea" (McCully, 1996: 237). The nation-state is legitimated as the sole agent of development through reference to 'its' actions. The Narmada's flow has little apparent benefit for the state's most important political constituents – urban settlers, industrialists, and export-oriented farmers – and thus can be construed as a 'waste' unless

harnessed in ways that privilege these interests. In this context, a dam provides the most efficient means by which to glean recognizable 'value' from the river. The Narmada river is defined by both a totalizing 'view from above' as a single, unified object, and through a reductionist lens by which it is fragmented into 'data': the amount of hectares it will irrigate, the amount of energy it will generate, the water volume to be collected in the dam's reservoir and passed through its turbines. Kala refers to this state and transnational paradigm as a "space of erasure", "which empties places of differential subjectivity, lived experience, and local meaning in the interests of economic, political, and cultural domination (Kala, 2001: 10).

The NBA began through the effort of social activists and researchers, many of whom were already involved in social activism in *adivasi* communities in and around the Narmada Valley in the early 1980s. Various groups, such as the *Rajpipla Social Service Society, SETU* [bridge in Gujarati], *ARCH* [Action Research for Community Health]-*Vahini, Narmada Asargrasta Samiti, Multiple Action Research Group, Khedut Mazdoor Chetna Sangath* [Association for Awareness Among Peasants and Workers], and the *Narmada Dharangrasta Samiti* were involved in this early phase of mobilization (Baviskar, 1995b; Dwevedi, 1998). It is important to note that these groups' focus at this point was on access to information about specific submergence affects and lobbying for reasonable resettlement benefits, rather than outright opposition to the project. Later, as the involved states began to improve oustees' resettlement and rehabilitation programs, a schism formed between Gujarati NGO's and activists, led by *ARCH-Vahini*, that advocated a critical but engaged position vis-à-vis the project, and those activists in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh who viewed the states' conciliatory moves as

insufficient (Dwevedi, 1998: 146). Seeing the multitude of problems with the planning of the ambitious project, the latter coalition became the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* and decided to oppose the project's existence in its entirety.

Among the NBA's numerous financial, technological, social and environmental critiques of the Narmada project are: an ambitious plan for dozens of large dams, along with a massive water transport and energy distribution infrastructure which cannot be achieved without incurring significant debt from external lenders; massive displacement of *adivasi* and farming communities in the three states, numbering around 400, 000 people in total, including the project's reservoir area and related infrastructure; and serious environmental costs mainly resulting from reservoir flooding, including over 37,590 hectares of submerged land and the loss of large tracts of forests (Dwevedi, 1998). Almost every independent study conducted of the technical feasibility and political interests backing the Gujarat government claims that the water from the project is intended for farming interests and urban centres, while the project's other major benefit, energy, is to accrue to the industrial interests dominating Gujarat's economy (Alvares and Billorey, 1988; Dwevedi, 1998, 1999; Sangvai, 2000).

More recently, in the fall of 2000, the Indian Supreme Court ruled against the NBA's public litigation lawsuit filed in 1994 against Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra. After six years of deliberation, during which time a stay order was issued on the construction of the Sardar Sarovar dam, the court decisively ruled in favour of the project's continuation, allowing construction to proceed immediately. In the period following the adverse legal ruling, the NBA managed to continue placing vigorous pressure on the project and achieving gains in its struggle, mainly by monitoring the

NWDT's rehabilitation and resettlement provisions, without which dam construction cannot proceed. Due to a paucity of land for resettlement as per the binding NWDT regulations, and the NBA's tenacious monitoring of the situation at the grassroots level, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra have had difficulty in meeting the goals through which further dam construction could proceed, thus delaying further submergence in the area.

## Methodology and Implementation

This thesis is based upon fieldwork conducted in India from early June to early September 2000, although I also view participation in Narmada solidarity groups in the United States and Canada (such as Narmada Canada and the Narmada Solidarity Coalition of New York) as part of this research process. During the India component of fieldwork, my overall activities can be divided into two main categories. First, I undertook extensive library research at various research institutes and activist organizations in New Delhi, Pune and Baroda. Particularly rich sources of information were found at the Centre for Science and Environment in New Delhi and the Kalpavrikish Environmental Action Group in Pune. This documentary research was supplemented by interviews with former and current NBA activists in Maharashtra and Gujarat, and archival and literature reviews in NBA offices. Second, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the Narmada Valley. There, I travelled to fifteen tribal villages in Alirajpur *tehsil* (district), in a narrow border belt of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh bisected by the Narmada River. I did interviews with *adivasi* inhabitants and participated in meetings organized by NBA activists. I also participated in numerous rallies, cultural programs and

protest marches as part of the monsoon-long *satyagraha*[4] called by the NBA against the Narmada project.

I began ethnographic research with a short visit to the *satyagraha* site in Domkhedi. Throughout my fieldwork in the Narmada Valley, I used Domkhedi as the geographical base from which to journey to other *adivasi* villages and towns. I also conducted interviews with some of the important stakeholders in the Narmada conflict who passed intermittently through Domkhedi, such as NBA leaders, and allied *adivasi* villagers. In total, the villages in Alirajpur *tehsil* where I conducted interviews included Amba, Chinchkhedi, and Jalisindi, Nimgavhan, Sikka, Dhoopkheda, Bhiligaon, Surung, Bhijri, Selkadha, Ghainda, Rajpadi, Trishul, and Maal. Other village representatives interviewed at Domkhedi were from Turkheda, Dhanil, Mokhdi, Chimalkhedi, and Gaman, as well as intensive agriculturalists from Nimad in Madhya Pradesh. The ethnographic material presented here is mostly gleaned from Sardar Sarovar-affected tribal villagers. I attended larger cultural programs and public rallies at Dhadagaon, Mandeleshwar and Toksar, all in Madhya Pradesh, and the Shoolpaneshwar sanctuary in Gujarat (where *adivasis* from over 160 villages are to be removed for the creation of a nature conservation area to mitigate the submergence effects of the Narmada project). In general, these fieldwork activities were readily undertaken, as I was afforded generous access to NBA activists and *adivasi* villagers in the region.

The largest amount of energy and time during field research was devoted to conducting selective interviews (both structured and open-ended) with *adivasi* leaders and representatives in these villages, mostly men, balanced by continual dialogue and interviews with Andolan activists working in the Narmada Valley or in other urban

locales. Standard ethical protocols were followed, including provisions for informed consent, voluntary participation, and the preservation of confidentiality.

Throughout this paper, I recount several encounters or events that occurred during the course of research, elicited mainly through interviews and participant observation. These methods have been guided by linguistic and time restrictions, specifically an inability to understand *adivasi* languages such as Pawri and Bhilali, a time limit of three months spent conducting fieldwork. These restrictions determined that my time was most usefully employed participating in NBA rallies and public meetings, and conducting interviews in villages where NBA activists were available to translate into Hindi or English.

My aim in conducting these in-depth interviews was to ascertain exactly what the historical and current relationship of *adivasis* was vis-à-vis the state; how the Narmada project had affected them and their environment, through programs such as compensatory afforestation and resettlement; and to what extent these experiences or views were shared within and between *adivasi* communities, in turn affecting the type of relationships each community had with the NBA and state. Several basic questions guided these interviews. How did *adivasis*' experience with the historic implementation (or lack) of state 'development' such as wells, schools, and medical clinics; encroachment, confiscation, or disentitlement to land and resources by revenue and forestry department officials; and policies of Narmada-related displacement and afforestation guide their willingness to engage or oppose the state? How were villages facing problems such as deforestation in the upper forest hills that serve as communal grazing lands and associated soil erosion, and depletion and decline in water quantity and quality; and how did structurally

asymmetrical relations between state bureaucrats and *adivasis* reproduce these environmental problems? How did the Andolan and its activists try to remedy or mitigate such negative state policies and thus contest the very realization of the Narmada project, through various tactics directed towards particular parties? What were the explicit and implicit meanings and symbols attached to the various actions of the state in attempting to implement the damming project (bribery, physical encroachment or destruction of land and property, forcible removal from traditional land and resettlement, harassment and coercion)? More importantly, how did these moral idioms and symbolic mechanisms become reproduced and communicated via various Andolan strategies, including fasts, physical blockades, public rallies and cultural programs and the words and actions of *adivasis* and activists resisting the Narmada project?

**Chapter 2: Localized Hegemony and Resistance in the Narmada Valley**

My analysis of how the Narmada project is contested begins by outlining the complex relationship between involved actors at the 'local' level. I am concerned in this chapter with conceptualizing interactions that occur in tribal villages and small market towns in the Narmada Valley between NVDP proponents such as state forestry, police, and revenue bureaucrats, and tribal inhabitants and NBA activists.

One of the most contentious aspects of the NVDP is the compensatory afforestation program designed to mitigate the submergence of vast tracts of the Narmada Valley's forested land; the SSP alone is projected to submerge nearly 40,000 hectares of land, of which 32 percent is forest cover (Breiger and Sauer, 2000: 2). Designed as part of a larger array of conservation measures that would offset the environmentally negative consequences of submergence, including loss of important animal habitats, the compensatory afforestation program is designed to replant more than double the projected number of trees to be submerged, around 42.5 million trees in total (ibid.). On the part of the state, compensatory afforestation represents the progressive nature of the NVDP, a unique marriage between the goals of development and environmental preservation. As the Gujarat Narmada and Major Irrigation Projects Minister has written,

> The Sardar Sarovar Project was the first major river valley project in India to assimilate the philosophy of development with environmental awareness. It included major environmental impact assessment studies... The positive environmental impacts of the SSP are enormous... For every hectare of forest land submerged or diverted for the Sardar Sarovar Project, compensatory afforestation has been carried out on 1 ha of non-forest land and 2 ha of forest land (Vyas, 2001: 50).

Compensatory afforestation has disproportionately impacted *adivasi* communities in the Narmada Valley because the SSP, the project's centrepiece, has only been

completed to 93 feet of its projected total of 130 feet. The SSP has thus displaced a small proportion of the total number of *adivasi* communities to be submerged, but as environmental and social rehabilitation programs are to be carried out *pari passu* (at the same time as) dam construction proceeds, the vast bureaucracy spawned by the NVDP has been able to intervene in potentially affected tribal communities to satisfy the project's requirements even before permanent displacement occurs. Compensatory afforestation involves lower-level state bureaucrats, usually forestry department officials, such as forest rangers and officers, who travel to designated villages, both within and outside the submergence zone, to plant trees. Legally, such actions fall within the purview of laws giving the state ownership over most forested land, though because of historic *adivasi* 'encroachment' on these lands for grazing and harvesting activities, villagers see them as confiscation or seizures of tribal land. Indeed, such interventions are highly charged affairs, and have turned into one of many points of contention between the NBA and the state.

Here, I recount my conversations with *adivasis* about this topic, and use them to illustrate their complex reactions and responses to government-sponsored interventions. It is a warm July evening in Domkhedi, an *adivasi* village in Maharashtra that serves as the base for the yearly NBA *satyagraha*. Among the participants who are or will be in Domkhedi during this two-month period are international activists and researchers from Britain, the United States, the Netherlands and Canada. A larger number of the external visitors to the *satyagraha* site are Indian students and activists, who are involved in a variety of issues, including gender equality struggles, *dalit* (lower-caste) rights cases, empowerment of urban slum dwellers, and environmentalist causes. The two main groups

to be affected by the NVDP are also represented, intensive agriculturalists from the Nimad plains region in Madhya Pradesh, and villagers from scattered *adivasi* communities in the Narmada Valley.

A small group of men have arrived from Turkheda, an *adivasi* village in Gujarat further downstream from Domkhedi and towards the Sardar Sarovar dam. With Pravin, an Andolan activist translating from Pawri to English, we begin speaking about *adivasis'* relationships with the state (*sarkaar*). The men recount instances of officials demanding bribes in exchange for silence about 'illegal' forest encroachments made for grazing and cultivation. The conversation quickly turns to the compensatory afforestation program. A senior member of the group, *Dedla-Bhai* begins speaking: "The land is our village (*gaun*). The government doesn't know how to properly manage the forests, the trees [planted] will not grow properly". Another man chimes in, invoking the ever present issue of government corruption when he says: "The government contractors wouldn't let the forests even grow, they quickly uprooted the saplings and used the land for farming so that they and their cronies would benefit from the produce... other times we would not let them get even this far; we would pay the forester so that the plantations would not go ahead and we could continue using it [the land]". What seems especially frustrating is that there was no consultation or discussion with local villagers about the implementation of this program. A younger man from the group says: "they didn't even ask us about what are good species to plant, or how to take care of them, they planted foreign species which are alien to the environment and they die".

I ask about responses to these officials, and am told that villagers initially confronted officials when they arrived in Turkheda and refused them entry onto village

land. Later, to prevent opposition to afforestation, officials threatened violence, backed up by the presence of police contingents at times. Interestingly, mention is made of dissension within the village about afforestation. Some members are said to be clearly in favour of afforestation, even with the knowledge that such practices are likely to destroy or eliminate economically productive land, simply because government officials implement afforestation by employing *adivasis* from the village itself. The money to be made from such labour is increasingly valued insofar as *adivasis* in many parts of the Narmada Valley depend on regional markets to buy fertilizer, pesticides, food grains, and other items. Furthermore, other communities are unable or unwilling to risk further bureaucratic harassment or violence if opposition is shown. Lastly, some communities have not resisted such programs but accepted them in return for official promises of future benefits such as improved resettlement conditions or cash payouts.

This conversation illustrates that villagers in Turkheda understand the future implications of state 'development' programs in terms of corruption. Endless bribes would have to be paid to forest officials to either prevent the planting of trees on productive farming and grazing land, or to facilitate such activities after official tree planting had occurred. Such fractious negotiation of state development or conservation policies is not limited to compensatory afforestation. Similar dissension about participation in the NVDP's programs, especially state resettlement and rehabilitation, has resulted in significant conflict within *adivasi* villages, a topic more fully explored in the third chapter.

As such, *adivasis* whose land was intervened upon and confiscated in the name of conservation were not united in a single show of opposition to the compensatory

afforestation program; it would be a mistake to understand the exercising of state power upon the already marginalized as necessarily impelling *adivasis* to react in resistance. Rather, the complexities of this very disempowerment can result in tribal communities – if grudgingly and unenthusiastically – further entrenching state power and policies of development and conservation.

Such conditions illustrate that hegemony and resistance do not constitute opposite polarities of social interaction, and neither do the spaces of dominance exist separately from those of opposition, as implied in Scott's formulation of 'onstage' sites of hegemony and 'offstage' zones of autonomous consciousness (1990: 117-119). Rather, the complex interweaving of dominance and resistance occurs simultaneously precisely because "struggles commonly occur not outside but inside the field of power" (Haynes and Prakash, 1991: 11). As Moore notes,

> Social actors manoeuvre amidst cross-cutting fields of force, and resistance emerges not from an originary site but rather through oppositional practices. Rather than conceiving of a space of subalternity, insurgency, and resistance outside of power, domination, or hegemony, the challenge becomes to understand their mutual imbrication (Moore, 1998: 353).

Resistance, beyond defiance in the face of subjugation or perceived injustice, is a process of continuous negotiation between social actors who operate from particular structural positions along a spectrum of power relations. Ongoing, complex negotiations of both convergence and disengagement rather than static relations of dominance 'from above' and resistance 'from below' characterize the relationship between the state, *adivasis* and activists. Such a conception of power and resistance borrows from Foucault's notion of the "microphysics of power", where power is seen as a continually unfolding set of strategies, positions and conflicts:

Power exercised on the body is conceived not as a property, but as a strategy; that its effects of domination are attributed not to 'appropriation', but to dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functionings; that one should decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity, rather than a privilege that one might possess; that one should take as its model a perpetual battle, rather than a contract regulating a transaction or the conquest of a territory (Foucault, 1980: 174).

## Conserving Oneself and Nature

There is a general consensus within the Andolan and among many of its tribal constituents that land and water resources in many Narmada Valley villages are declining, as populations have increased and demands made on the environment. As a result, in many villages land of poor quality or on steep slopes is being cultivated, leading to soil erosion; forest resources are also under pressure from overgrazing, fruit and vegetable harvesting, and tree felling for firewood and housing material. In part this is because, as almost every *adivasi* I spoke with noted, the quantity of resources available in the forest — building materials such as bamboo, wild fruit and vegetables, grazing fodder for animals — is usurped through state afforestation and conservation programs. Out of an awareness of the increasing pressure on environmental resources, the NBA has attempted to institute conservation measures through voluntary village agreements that, among other things, attempt to restrict one portion of 'jungle' in each *adivasi* village from grazing and cultivation activities.

Yet although the need for conserving forest resources is widely recognized, and some villages such as Gaman have attempted to be faithful to such agreements, their effective implementation is limited by a lack of consensus as to whom such measures benefit. The unequal and unenthusiastic response by some *adivasi* villages to these activist conservation measures is conditioned by factors beyond 'internal' pressures

within villages, such as an increase in population, or stealing and raiding of resources within and between villages. Environmental change and degradation is the product of a relationship between the state, markets, and tribal peoples in which *adivasis* are at a significant disadvantage (Baviskar, 1995a). The various pressures encouraging environmentally destructive behaviour are glimpsed by recounting the factors influencing *adivasi* conservation choices. Among these are: potential or actual deforestation by bureaucrats following state directives to clear land below the submergence line of the SSP; potential or actual afforestation by bureaucrats directed to plant more trees to mitigate the effects of such development; the unpredictability of forced removals or resettlement by the state; submergence or flooding caused by the rising of river water; and the need to sell forest produce and wood in local markets to procure food and fertilizers. Gul Singh, a respected adivasi leader from the Bhil village of Amba, articulates some of these pressures:

*The jungle has been diminished; our village members have increased and need it [wood] to build houses, or for fire. The grass has decreased, the dirt falls down into the river and the ground is becoming dry. The sarkaar [government] is taking the wood [and] people from Gujarat come to get it. We only take dry wood for burning, wood that has fallen, but if we leave all of it, then the government comes and takes all of it... the fate of the forest is not known. It will be used by the government but cannot be saved by the villages...the Gujarat government lets these timber mafias come [and] they can take more than 40 truckloads at once! We could preserve it if its status was better decided, and then we could kick the Gujaratis out.*

Such a narrative illustrates how compensatory afforestation, as a state practice in *adivasi* villages of the Narmada Valley, represents not the separation but the convergence of large-scale discourses and polices within particular locales, where they are shaped by a host of actors. The existence of the compensatory afforestation program in the NVDP, as part of a World Bank condition for its loan, is the outcome of previous transformations in

development and conservation discourses in both national and international arenas. In the 1970s and 1980s, the World Bank, facing pressure from western development and environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) and advocacy groups, shifted its policies away from conventional development schemes and towards a paradigm emphasizing "sustainable development" (Gupta, 1998). Moreover, compensatory afforestation is the product of an environmentalist or conservationist ethic that is rooted in the western separation between nature and culture, and of a desire to preserve 'wilderness'. Such ideas are often inimical to 'Third World' social movements mobilized around issues of development and the environment. These movements emphasize social justice concerns that reproduce a set of conceptions about ideal human-nature relationships in terms of equitable rights and access to environmental resources, running counter to conservation discourses which advocate decreased rights and access to natural resources (Guha, 2000).

As such, despite the state's purportedly beneficial intentions, compensatory afforestation has paradoxically not only failed to achieve its purposes of environmental mitigation, but also served to consolidate state control over *adivasi* lands, leading to further environmental degradation through arbitrary confiscation and encroachment.[5] Despite this, many well-intentioned commentators continue to assume the complementarity of environmentalist and tribal or indigenous struggles, resulting in vague pronouncements that the two are ideally suited to an "alliance for conservation" (Stevens, 1997). From the example of compensatory afforestation, it is clear that discourses of development and conservation are intertwined with material and structural

conditions that often impel *adivasis* and state bureaucrats to act in ways that produce neither the benefits of social development nor those of environmental sustainability.

Such conditions do not mean that conservation notions are peripheral to the discursive strategies of NVDP proponents or the Andolan. Indeed, although the representations of compensatory afforestation presented by the three riparian states and the NBA show how discursive categories are shaped separate from 'on the ground' realities, they also demonstrate how environmentalist rhetoric has come to be inextricably intertwined – through international protocols, policy prescriptions, and academic discourse – with social legitimacy and political viability. Similar to Indian farmers' movements that strategically invert the state's development populism to achieve their own material gains (Gupta, 1997, 1998), the NBA has been able to employ the dissonance between the state's laudatory conservation goals of compensatory afforestation, and the material realities of corruption and environmental destruction, to contest the state's legitimacy. Although the NBA originally focussed and continues to focus its energies on NVDP-caused social problems, its activists have strategically categorized – and allowed themselves to be categorized – as an environmentalist group, also employing conservation discourse when necessary to gain the support of international supporters such as the Environmental Defence Fund and the Sierra Club (Udall, 1998). In a cultural context where *adivasis* are still regarded as inferior and primitive compared to modern Hindu civilization, employing the discourse of environmental conservation against the state is one of the most strategically efficacious ways to resist the Narmada project.

I have thus far outlined the way in which globally circulating discourses such as development and environmental conservation come to be shaped and negotiated by

*adivasis* in communities that are the realization points for these macrologies. Programs such as compensatory afforestation, hailed by national states and international institutions can in fact not only fail to accomplish their aims, but lead to bureaucratic encroachment and harassment, resulting in the confiscation and destruction of farming and grazing lands. Rather than being imposed on passive subjects, macrologies such as conservation come to be shaped and influenced in highly unpredictable ways, rebounding and refracting to state and activist strategies. Often fractious negotiations take place within communities – not unlike those that occur over the issue of displacement-induced resettlement and rehabilitation – leading some to facilitate and others to resist the Narmada project. However, the choices made are prone to continual evaluation and differ from village to village, so the power relations framing these choices can neither be compartmentalized nor understood as static, revealing rather the commingling of state dominance with *adivasi* resistance and accommodation.

Chapter 3: Negotiating Regional Development

In this chapter, I examine how negotiations of dominance and resistance – as framed through the state's determination to construct dams and a social movement's desire to stop their implementation – manifest themselves at the regional level in India. By regional 'levels' or 'sites', I refer to places such as towns and cities as well as the social and organizational modalities, including law courts and newspapers, through which the conflict is represented and reported to wider audiences.

As explained in the first chapter, the NBA has articulated the various political, social, financial and scientific "risks" inherent in the Narmada project (Dwevedi, 1998).[6] These criticisms converge in what for many years was the NBA's overarching critique of the project: that the Narmada dams represented India's economically misguided, environmentally degrading, socially harmful development paradigm. This conventional framework was said to encourage centrally managed, scientifically guided, and bureaucratically imposed interventions that satisfy the needs of urban, elite actors rather than the tribal, rural and lower-caste constituents who have borne the brunt of development-induced effects such as displacement (Fisher, 1995; Baviskar, 1995; Sangvai, 2000). While I speak of both this paradigm and its critique in the past tense, it should be quite clear that both are visible in the contemporary Indian economic and political landscape. Still, as revealed in recent NBA press releases, collective practices, and organizational alliances that respond to state moves to privatize and deregulate part or all of the project, the NBA has shifted its overall context of critique to economic globalization, a topic explored more fully in chapters 4 and 5.

The NBA has been able to leverage this articulation of development-induced risk into public, academic, and policy arenas through several strategies, including non-violent resistance tactics, and effective discursive articulation in public reports, research, and dissent in conjunction with Indian and western advocacy organizations. I focus in this section on public displays of dissent and non-cooperation, hoping to illustrate that non-violent resistance tactics both result from and in turn spur the transformation of existing power relations in local and regional domains, as well as nationally and internationally circulating discourses of development and globalization.

It should be emphasized that such 'resistance' involves the targeting of particular state practices and voicing of specific project-related problems that comprise elements in a larger struggle against the implementation of the Narmada project. Thus, demonstrations are conceived and unfold with particular locales, people, and issues in mind, and activists and villagers focus on common project-related problems. These include inadequate land titling and resettlement, corruption, afforestation, and the government's failure to provide 'development' (such as medical clinics, schools, or drinking water wells) to the *adivasi* population in the Narmada Valley.

I illustrate this point by recounting a NBA demonstration that occurred during my fieldwork. In 2000, the Indian Supreme Court appointed Grievance Redressal Authorities (GRA) in each state to independently investigate problems with NVDP-related resettlement and rehabilitation. Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra each had GRA's who toured *adivasi* villages and resettlement sites to 'independently' evaluate government compliance with NVDP related guidelines. In practice, each GRA has

conducted short, often incomplete studies that in general have supported the government and project authority's position (Aravinda, 2000).

During July and August 2000, the Maharashtra GRA did his rounds in a limited set of villages in Maharashtra. He visited Manibeli, the first village behind the SSP to face submergence, and the *satyagraha* site of Domkhedi. Both of these meetings were cursory, with the GRA acting brusquely, impatiently and condescendingly to both the NBA activists facilitating these meetings, and the *adivasis* who had arrived to voice their complaints about resettlement, surveying, and compensatory afforestation. He attempted to stifle the voice of *adivasis* by various methods: by interrogating *adivasi* household heads about details such as the precise age of each child in the family; by refusing to see more than a small fraction of *adivasis* from Narmada-affected villages in Maharashtra; by refusing to listen to concerns beyond the parameters of the issues he was mandated to hear (i.e. Maharashtra oustees in Gujarat resettlement sites); by demanding quantitative answers in a language (Marathi or Hindi) most *adivasis* do not understand; by interrupting and repeatedly emphasizing that *adivasis* answer only the specific question asked; by claiming that the activists were nonsensical and romantic and determined to keep *adivasis* backward; by being accompanied by a large caravan of over 100 police officers and state officials; and by possessing contempt of court powers which he threatened to use when frustrated.

Such behaviour, for NBA *adivasis* and activists, is symptomatic of long-standing and widely practiced state corruption, arrogance, and abuse of power. Despite this, the *adivasis* who spoke showed remarkable courage in challenging the GRA's authority and, through him, that of the government. One *adivasi, Dedli-Bhai,* like most of the *adivasis*

speaking, expressed his frustration with resettlement and surveying: "What are we going to get in compensation? If the land really was there, everyone should have been resettled by now". *Noorgi Padir*, from Manibeli, echoed this: "Basically, the government has no land. In my village, three people were allotted the same piece of land! Can the government give us all that the jungle gives us?" Later, *Dhamenia*, one of the few *adivasi* women activists to speak, said:

*We went in 1994-95 to Auli for rehabilitation. The same land allotted to us was shown to others from Pipalchop. We kept approaching the government with problems but they were not resolved. They continue to show the same land to others from Chimalkhedi and Mukhri with the use of police force. The government has made lots of promises but we have been tricked. They gave us rocky land and others from Auli have also decided to come back, because they haven't been given good land.*

In response to this meeting, the Andolan felt it necessary to conduct a *dharna* (solidarity protest) in early August in front of the offices where the GRA would further interrogate tribal oustees and hear their grievances. Many *adivasis* from Maharashtra walked several hours through the hilly Satpura Range to Dhadagaon, a regional town. The purpose of this gathering, numbering over a thousand people, was to be in solidarity with several tribal representatives who were being questioned by the GRA inside a police compound. The day began with the careful organizing of the day's activities and delegation of responsibility to activists and participants in the centre of Dhadagaon. Soon after, NBA activists led a long, slow parade of people through the middle of town, passing through the market and becoming a spectacle for the town's citizens. Large, enthusiastic, and colourful, the parade shouted slogans and songs heard at most NBA public gatherings:

"*Hamara gaon ma amra raj*" (Our rule in our villages!)
"*Adivasi ekta Zinadabad*" (*Adivasis* united in victory!)
"*Hindi, Marati, oh Gujarati, Larne Hum ek hi jati*" (Hindus, Marati's, and Gujarati's, we

fight as one!)
*"Vikas chahiya, vinash nahin"* (Development is needed, not destruction!)
*"Dubenge par hatenge nahin"* (Even if flooded we will not move!).

Such public parades are regarded by Andolan activists as being important for the maintenance of support from regional townspeople such as those living in Dhadagaon, because state and market representatives have critical influence over tribal livelihoods in the Narmada Valley. After settling down at the gates of the police station serving as the site for the GRA's interviews, NBA activists began calling up various representatives of affected *adivasi* communities, some of whom have become key figures in the organization and mobilization of tribal support regionally. One of these *adivasi* leaders, *Vesta-Bhai* from the village of Sikka began speaking about the various ills of the Narmada project: the attempts by government representatives to divide village solidarity by offering better resettlement land to some and not others, and how some families in other villages who have accepted resettlement have found that their new land is water-logged or unsuitable for grazing or agricultural activities, and chosen to return to their villages. During his monologue, he says:

*We are here to be with those inside that are being interrogated by Kurdukur. We all have had the same experiences of suffering because of Sardar Sarovar. The government will not do proper surveying to give us the pataa [ownership papers] so then we are not able to even be resettled because we are encroachers. If we complain about resettlement or stop afforestation, the officials come with their thugs and get bribes.*

I will not recount every testimonial that follows, but instead emphasize that almost every Andolan public rally I attended consisted of a similar set of tribal speeches. Yet the *adivasi* testimonials at Dhadagaon, while seemingly representative of the experiences of all *adivasis*, cannot speak for the experience of *adivasis* throughout the valley. Many of the complaints voiced in Dhadagaon imply unbroken and uniform solidarity within and

between affected *adivasi* communities on the Narmada issue, but in fact support for the Andolan is fractured, discontinuous and regularly negotiated. For example, there is much intra-village and inter-village dispute about whether and how to accept government-sponsored resettlement and rehabilitation. Each *adivasi's* relationship to state 'development' is shaped by their structural position within the village hierarchy, and consequent relationship with state functionaries such as lower level *punerwasen* (resettlement) bureaucrats. Also, such relationships are heavily determined by the particular emphasis placed by the state on those *adivasi* villages that are to be relocated. The Andolan has accused the government of using divide and conquer tactics in this process by turning villagers against one another and exploiting existing political fissures in villages. According to the NBA, the state's aim is to simultaneously gain legal consent from villagers, while withholding legally mandated resettlement and compensation provisions to dam-affected persons. As a result, it is not uncommon to see disputes within villages leading to some families accepting resettlement, while others stay behind. Higher-ranking village leaders with existing relationships to bureaucrats will manage to obtain above-average resettlement terms while others in the same villages do not. Throughout the valley, it is not uncommon to find villages with some families living in resettlement sites, others who have been almost entirely resettled, and still others who had initially relocated but who have returned due to poor land conditions at government sites.

In *adivasi* villages, leaders such as the *karberi* (village headmen) are employees of the state and function as key liaisons between village councils and regional bureaucrats. In my conversations with NBA activists while touring *adivasi* villages, such leaders were described as critical actors in determining village politics and alliances, and in some

cases, due to divisive state practices, were regarded as corrupt and self-interested. At

Dhoopkheda, *Lala Gi*, activist and affected landowner from the Bargi Dam displacement

further upstream, recounted bureaucratic practices in his own situation that are common

throughout the Narmada Valley:

*The government used middlemen and gave them money to break [our] villages. He [gave]*
*a couple of villages [a lot of] land, and then it appeared that there is complete village*
*agreement [to resettlement] in the region. But of course many other families are given*
*degraded or simply no land at all. They do this so that people cannot all be behind the*
*Andolan.*

Such complicated and variegated experiences within villages evince differential

relationships to state development, including the ability of some to access benefits while

others cannot.[7] As such, resettlement has produced pockets of compliance and resistance

within the *adivasi* communities in the Narmada Valley, instead of automatic, uniform

resistance to the project, as activist and academic literature often imply (c.f. Sangvai,

2000). *Adivasi* testimonials conducted at NBA private meetings and larger public rallies,

then, are emotionally powerful narratives that depend for their efficacy on their seeming

universality, rather than glimpses into the fractured relations of alliance and

disengagement governing state-*adivasi* relations

Moreover, rallies such as the one in Dhadagaon, as public expressions of dissent,

are not only regional practices. Rather, they are events situated between international

discourse, national policies, and local actions. Development and other discourses become

articulated and contested in such sites, drawing from local experiences that reveal

disjuncture between state claims of environmental beneficence and local realities of

corruption and neglect. It should be equally clear that such displays of 'resistance' show

neither the clear denial of authority nor acceptance of its legitimacy. Such occasions

suggest social friction in a constant if unequal dialogue over past, present, and future practices determining the social and environmental terrain of the Narmada Valley. As such, neither the actors assumed to constitute unified 'resistance' (*adivasis*), nor the actors portrayed as 'dominant' (state revenue collectors, forest rangers, and police authorities) are located at opposite poles. Instead, to completely understand how development is implemented and contested, we must acknowledge that there are incomplete, fractured relations of agreement and conflict between involved actors.

In turn, these experiences become fodder for the various positions taken by the state and activists; the government takes partial resettlement as proof of *adivasi* acceptance of the Narmada project and validation of its overall strategy, while the Andolan takes such fragmented responses as signs of incomplete support for its own aims. Ultimately, the ability of state development to create or exacerbate existing fissures between and within villages can lead to the disruption of existing cultural mechanisms for competition, cooperation, and livelihood.[8]

## Narrating State (Under)development and Producing Tribal Resistance

As outlined in the first chapter, many contemporary analyzes of development highlight that such state interventions produce transformations of material power relations in favour of government functionaries (Escobar, 1995; Ferguson, 1990). This transformation of power relations is visible both in the hegemony of particular discourses, structures, and mechanisms in national domains, and in rural villages where development interventions mediate relations between local populations and state bureaucrats.

Development instead of being a neutral, technical problematic, is a complex platform for

the consolidation of institutional state power over (often marginalized) citizens:

> By uncompromisingly reducing poverty to a technical problem, and by
> promising technical solutions to the sufferings of powerless and oppressed people,
> the hegemonic problematic of 'development' is the principal means through which
> the question of poverty is de-politicized in the world today. At the same time, by
> making the intentional blueprints for 'development' so highly visible, a
> 'development' project can end up performing extremely sensitive political
> operations involving the entrenchment and expansion of institutional state power
> almost invisibly, under cover of a neutral, technical mission to which no one can
> object. The 'instrument-effect', then, is two-fold: alongside the institutional effect
> of expanding bureaucratic state power is the conceptual and ideological effect of
> depoliticizing both poverty and the state (Ferguson, 1990: 256).

Ferguson's analysis is primarily centred on transformations in material power

relations, as reflected in the state's ability to control flows of goods and people within and

between borders, and the ability of state bureaucrats to access the fruits of development

interventions. Yet I believe that by focusing on the depoliticizing effects of development

discourse, researchers may fail to recognize how actors brought into conflict through

development-related interventions activate complex symbolic and moral mechanisms.

The negotiation of 'cultural politics' provides not only the tangible backdrop for such

conflicts, but also a template for collective action (Alvarez et al., 1998; Moore, 2000).

Drawing from her examination of development interventions in Indonesia, Li notes that:

> In rural contexts, the partial overlapping of local history, landscape, kinship and
> biography provides a richness of shared and separate experience which can be
> invoked by individuals to achieve specific outcomes, or, more generally, to
> suggest particular interpretations of cultural ideas. Negotiation in this context is a
> negotiation of meaning and value, not solely the manoeuvring of individuals
> within agreed rules. It is a social process which draws upon cultural traditions
> while in the process transforming them (Li, 1996: 510).

In this section, I argue that moral idioms are imbedded within both state and NBA

articulations and practices, and culturally and symbolically resonant imagery is

continuously activated in the contestation of the Narmada project. Normative moral idioms are evoked both through discursive conflict in media and legal arenas, and in state, activist and tribal practices in the Narmada Valley. In particular, activist moral discourse, propelled by the memorialization of state injustice, provides a crucial means for demanding government accountability.

I begin by noting that development discourse is propelled by a moral imperative, albeit one capable of challenge and delegitimation through the assertion of a different set of moral qualities. To be developed is to be prosperous, civilized, orderly, rational, confident, happy, content, and loyal. To be underdeveloped is to possess backward or ignorant ideas, to be unruly, savage, disorderly, of a degraded religious or cultural order, and to be materially impoverished. This is the dominant moral framework propounded by the Indian state in its promotion of the Narmada project. By coding development in a moral idiom, the state is able to symbolically assert legitimacy and denote social normative behaviour.

For example, Gujarat, in its promotional material of the NVDP, employs dramatic images of the perpetually drought-stricken Kutch-Saharashtra area where Narmada water is intended to flow. This continues to be the primary argument made in favour of the project, as a quote from a World Bank study of the project in its initial stage indicates: "If the waters of the Narmada river continue to flow to the sea unused there appears to be no alternative to escalating human deprivation, particularly in the dry areas of Gujarat" (Supreme Court of India, 2000: 25). Such alarmist language suggests the need to act immediately to alleviate individual and social 'underdevelopment'. Thirst, hunger and poverty are among the tangible physical problems and effects of such underdevelopment

emphasized in the discourse of the dam proponents. However, the social and political

effects of underdevelopment are also suggested by invoking images of individuals in

Kutch-Saharastra: disempowerment and political marginalization from 'society' resulting

from a lack of material resources.

The second group of people whose 'underdevelopment' is employed to legitimate

the Narmada project and its proponents are, perhaps ironically, the very same tribal

communities to be displaced by the dams. The current condition of tribal peoples residing

in the Narmada Valley in official discourse is characterized as backward, primitive, and

poor (in contrast to urban India's apparent progress, modernity and wealth). The Narmada

Valley's inhabitants are seen to be living a marginalized existence based on dwindling

environmental resources, which while true in part, is nowhere as extreme as portrayed by

the project's proponents. Most of the tribal population in the Narmada Valley to be

displaced reside in Madhya Pradesh; in the Government of Madhya Pradesh Action Plan

submitted to the Supreme Court in 1993, the following is stated about the social and

natural environment of the tribal inhabitants:

> The oft quoted symbiotic living with forests is a misnomer in this area because the
> depleted forests have nothing to offer except fuel wood. Soil is very poor mostly
> dis-integrated, granite and irrigation is almost nil due to undulating and hilly land.
> Anybody visiting this area finds people desperately sowing even in hills with
> steep gradient. Only one rain fed crop of mostly maize is sown and so these is no
> surplus economy. PAPs [Project Affected Peoples] inhabiting these interior areas
> find generous rehabilitation and resettlement packages as a means to assimilate in
> the mainstream in the valley (Supreme Court of India, 2000: 23).

These images create a sense of moral urgency such that the Narmada project is

validated and seen to be a *fait accompli*. Yet the state does not have a monopoly on

morality or its articulation in wider political strategies; the NBA returns the moral gaze.

In its formulation, the state, although proclaiming to pursue benevolent development, is

actually corrupt, unpredictable, violent, unjust, and capricious. The NBA facilitates the

expression of this morality through two avenues. First, *adivasi* testimonials such as those

at the Dhadagaon rally discussed above address the injustice of such state development

interventions through eyewitness accounts at village meetings and public demonstrations,

recounting instances of state encroachment, violence, dispossession, harassment, and

corruption. Here, I use Warren's concept of *testimonios* as employed by indigenous

Mayan communities in response to state violence and terror perpetuated by Cold-War era

military dictatorships in Guatemala:

> Testimonios, which have been widely used in Latin America to personalize the
> denunciation of state violence and to demonstrate subaltern resistance, gain their
> narrative power from the metaphor of witnessing. On the one hand, they represent
> eye-witness experiences, however mediated, of injustice and violence; on the
> other hand, they involve the act of witnesses presenting evidence for judgement in
> the court of public opinion (Warren, 1997:22).[9]

In both private and public settings, such tribal testimonies are descriptive as well

as prescriptive. That is, a key element in such eyewitness accounts involves the detailing

of one or more instances where, in the context of the Narmada project, state bureaucrats

have caused some harm to occur to those speaking and hence provoked resistance. Such

testimonials represent a series of actual cases where the state has wronged *adivasis*, and

are portrayed as indicative of the universal condition of powerlessness of *adivasis* versus

the state. By historicizing state subjugation and presenting it as the prevailing condition

vis-à-vis *adivasis*, the narratives construct a worldview that will impel other *adivasis* to

reconsider state offers of resettlement, and revaluate the risks and benefits of working

with the Andolan. Thus, such testimonials are normative in that they construct the

political climate in which action – in this case, resistance – occurs.

*Adivasi* testimonials do in fact aid in the mobilization of tribal villagers against the Narmada project. This is in large part because *adivasis* speak in the language of other potential oustees and recount experiences germane to their existence, whether experienced directly or indirectly. As numerous NBA activists recounted to me, when the movement's mobilization first began in the Narmada Valley fifteen years ago, many *adivasis* were hostile to warnings about submergence; yet the words of other *adivasis* give such warnings a more plausible grounding in reality. As one NBA activist noted,

*It has always been very difficult to mobilize new villages, whether against the Bargi Dam [construction and displacement in the early 1990s] or the SSP. The villagers are so unconvinced that water could rise and destroy their land. They say 'there has never been a flood like that since my great-grandfather's time, so how can it happen now?' They are very sure of their land and their relationship with it, which is why we have always promoted displaced villagers from other dams [such as Bargi and Tawa] to come visit the [newly mobilized] villages. Or we take some of the village heads from here [Maharashtra] to Bargi to see the effects of what the dam did there and then they realize what damage the SSP can do.*

There is a further link with Warren's notion of *testimonios*, involving the circulation of testimonies in a wider social 'court of opinion'. She is concerned here with the ability to register a marginalized person's claim of personal harm in the sphere of socially approved and officially sanctioned history, the attempt to reinsert the subaltern into a scientific, economic, and social system that obfuscates their presence.[10] I believe there is a similar urge on the part of activists and *adivasis* in the Narmada Valley to articulate to the state and to the wider public the personal and systematic process of state-sponsored displacement, violence and encroachment.

Such an articulation of 'voice' is intimately connected to tribal communities' ability to manipulate the dominant knowledge and institutions of the state to their own advantage. James Scott argues that the state's ability to control the natural and social

environment depends on its ability to penetrate and gain intimate knowledge of that environment, which is then codified in specialized languages of science and law, to be managed by technical experts and bureaucratic elites (Scott, 1998). Both the state's inability to achieve this, and opposition from those who are the targets of these state interventions create spaces in which overt challenges to state power occur. Moreover, when those who oppose the state's ability to intervene challenge its authority, they paradoxically use the state's mechanisms of "legibility" (Scott, 1998) such as science and law, against it. For example, there has been a large amount of legal research and scientific data produced by sympathetic scholars and activists which has been crucial in the NBA's ability to articulate the risks of proceeding with the Narmada project (c.f. Pananjype, 1991; Kothari, 1995; Sangvai, 2000)

The lack of 'voice' (that is, elimination or marginalization from prevailing apparatuses, policies, or discourses) implies non-possession of the tools to speak in the dominant language or discourse. In other words, lack of specialized forms of knowledge and languages (such as engineering or legal discourse) by which one could impress oneself on the books of history leads to further marginalization, while an ability to access these tools is commensurate with inscription into dominant concerns. Narmada Valley *adivasis* have been able to access voice through the NBA and its battery of allied activists, lawyers, scientists and social scientists, and thus contest the legitimacy of the project.

Turning back to the *adivasi* testimonials at Dhadagaon, I believe that they offer an immediately visceral and passionate denunciation of state practices and development that underlines the moral legitimacy of the NBA's struggle. These testimonials offer a chance

for *adivasis* to enter their grievances into the public record, and combined with other testimonials form an overarching meta-narrative of *adivasi* experience in the Narmada Valley. In this way, there are common threads of Narmada-induced oppression publicly deployed to enact resistance.

**Bodily Resistance and Memorialization**

Besides *adivasi* testimonials, the NBA also articulates moral claims through public displays of defiance that collectively utilize the power of the body to highlight injustice. The NBA's history of confrontation with state authorities is interspersed with instances of NBA activists and *adivasis* refusing officials entry into villages (*gaon bandhi*) and blocking roads into the valley (*rasta rako*) (Dwevedi, 1998:151).[11] In August 1991 during the first *satyagraha* at Manibeli, when activists tried to stop construction of a bridge to be used during dam construction, the police beat and arrested over 100 people participating in the non-violent action (Sangvai, 2000: 54). Again, in January 2000, the NBA did succeed in occupying the Maheshwar dam site with over 4500 people, of which 1500 were forcibly arrested and some badly beaten. Another Andolan tactic is the *gherao* (surrounding a public official with a circle of bodies, that is physically non-violent but still coercive). The NBA has often used this tactic against officials, and I now turn to recounting such an instance from my fieldwork.

It is a sunny July afternoon in Domkhedi, Maharashtra. After morning prayers and meetings, a diverse group of *satyagrahis* set out towards the site of the Madhya Pradesh police camp in adjoining Jalisindhi. If NBA leader Medha Patkar and others decide to commit *jal samarpan* (self-drowning) when the Gujarat government closes the sluice

gates of the Sardar Sarovar dam, and monsoon waters rise and submerge *adivasi* villages in the region, police from this camp will swoop down from the hills and 'rescue' *satyagrahis* by forcibly removing and jailing them. After crossing the river, the group of around 150 people, emboldened by the infectious energy of NBA slogans and songs, arrive at the police camp. Quickly, the first protestors entering the camp realize that many of the officers have been drinking, including the police sergeant, whereupon several women from the Nimad region of Madhya Pradesh *gherao* (encircle) him, pinning him to the spot. An afternoon of protestor ranting, denunciation, and singing ensues, with the police sergeant – violently shaking and looking rather ill – as the unwilling centre of attention and abuse. Without physically harming the police, the *satyagrahis* are able to physically confine and threaten his power; despite expectations that other police officers might respond violently, they mill about watching the goings-on placidly and rather bemusedly. More interesting is how the *gherao* functions as impromptu trial of not only the policeman who is the centre of attention, but of the profession and government he represents. The comments flung in the sergeant's face vary from the personal to the political: for example, one woman from Nimad indicts his behaviour as morally, and thus politically, corrupt: "You police only know how to drink in the sun and take advantage of these backward tribals! You say you are here to rescue us but you are only selfish and corrupt".

In such situations, I believe that state officials function simultaneously as individuals with whom the NBA can negotiate, but also as symbolic embodiments of larger political processes – in this case of domination framed through development.[12] The sergeant's drunkenness becomes symptomatic of moral perversion writ large, and the

NBA *satyagrahis* are able to contest this larger oppression by *gheraoing* and putting the police and state on trial. Of course, the NBA *satyagrahis* do not treat every state official in this way, and as the protest ends, NBA activists quietly negotiate with a revenue department official about filing a report to his supervisors about the police camp. The official patiently listens to their grievances while complaining about being obligated to undertake his duties because of pressure "at higher levels". He emphasizes that he does not have any control over land records, proper surveying for resettlement, police corruption, or court records. Eventually, the *satyagrahis*, satisfied that their voices have been heard, make the trek and boat ride back towards Domkhedi.

A related tactic favoured by the NBA in the context of a larger public rally or demonstration is fasting or hunger striking. Members of the NBA, including key activists such as Medha Patkar, and affected *adivasis* and farmers in the *Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra* (Struggle March for People's Development) undertook one of the most famous fasts in the Andolan's history in 1990. It was preceded by a six-day march by 8000 people across the Narmada Valley, the intention being to blockade construction access and work on the Sardar Sarovar dam. Upon arriving at the Madyha Pradesh-Gujarat border, the NBA *yatra* (march) was confronted by a *Shanti Yatra* (peace march), composed of pro-dam actors and organizations, among them farmers' groups, and pro-dam protesters and NGO's mobilized by the Gujarat government, buttressed by state police (Sheth, 1991: 40). A month-long standoff ensued, with rallies, speeches and prominent speakers representing each side (former Gujarat politicians and Chief Ministers on one side and prominent Gandhians and activists on the other).

Soon, Medha Patkar and seven other marchers went on a hunger strike that lasted for 22 days (Sangvai, 2000). This strike, closely observed by the international and national press, built upon existing pressure that the World Bank was facing as a result of direct lobbying by NBA-allied advocacy groups in Japan, the US and some European countries. When the World Bank, facing both internal pressure from its directors and bureaucrats and the moral pressure of this prolonged fast and standoff at the Gujarat border, agreed to initiate an unprecedented independent review of the project, the NBA called off the hunger strike (Morse and Berger, 1992).

While the *gherao* and fasting are among the most common of the NBA's non-violent tactics, *jal samarpan* (self sacrifice in water) is the movement's most extreme expression of resistance. *Jal samarpan* was declared by the leaders of the NBA in 1991, during the first monsoon *satyagraha*. The NBA claimed it was literally honouring its oft-repeated pledge of *Koi Nahin Hatega Bandh Nahin Banega* (No one will move, the dam will not be built). In 1993, the threat of self-sacrifice reached a new height when the *Samarpit Dal* (Drowning Squad) went underground to avoid police teams, and threatened self-sacrifice in the rising waters unless the government initiated a full independent review of the project. The government finally relented, and a frantic search for the drowning squad ensued, all of whom were notified before submergence occurred. In 1999, on two occasions in July and August the water rose up to the *Samarpit Dal's* necks but each time the squad was 'rescued' by police who forcibly took Medha Patkar and others away to government jails.

In each case, there has been enormous pressure on the state to prevent self-drowning or death by fasting, and the NBA has gained significant publicity for the cause.

I believe the force of such a tactic resides in its ability to articulate the moral and political justifiability of the NBA's cause, and conversely the unjustifiability or moral violence of the Narmada project. In India, fasting resonates with Hindu notions of sacrifice and of personal, spiritual and moral self-deprivation for collective benefit. It also directly mimics Mahatma Gandhi's highly respected strategies during his campaign against British colonialism. Also, these NBA tactics challenge the legitimacy of the state insofar as the state exists primarily in a relationship of trustee to its citizens; citizens enter into a contract with the state in which certain rights are traded for certain responsibilities, and one of the state's obligations is to protect its citizens from harm, even if that harm is intentional on the part of that citizen. Thus, if Medha Patkar and other NBA activists were to succeed in self-sacrifice, this would symbolize the state's failure to protect its citizens. In India's case, because the state's legitimacy is bound up in its ability to impart development, such actions challenge its moral legitimacy in the most tactile, literal form through the wilful destruction or death of the body.

It is important to note that these protest methods are not only resonant in India. As with other cultural processes, resistance tactics are prone to mutation in form and character and can traverse to other locales (Fox, 1997). Fox attempts to account for the diffusion of Gandhian protest methods through a textured account of the particular human agency that results in methods and movements becoming linked, shared, disrupted, or perverted; he refers to flows not as inevitable or smooth, but as riled with bumps, fissures and contradictions (Fox, 1997: 66-67). This conception reveals that the apparent "Indian-ness" of Gandhian protest methods is itself a cross-cultural construction, as are claims that their effects are only resonant on the subcontinent. For example, Gandhi's use of

non-violence, though assumed to be a product of a particular Indian spiritual and cultural location, was itself hybrid, borrowing from western philosophies and protest history, while their powerful effect in western settings, as described in the case of the World Bank's response during the 1990 Gujarat standoff, should not be underestimated (ibid.).

As such, protest methods, and the moral discourse upon which they depend, do not exist separately from wider processes or discourses, but in important ways are interconnected with them. To illustrate this I recount events in November 1993, when a group of NBA activists and *adivasis* had attempted to stop government officials from carrying out surveying activities in the Dhule *tehsil* of Maharashtra (Narmada International Human Rights Panel, 1994). 500 state officials were attempting to facilitate land and population surveying for resettlement of *adivasis* in this district because of expected submergence in this area, which the Andolan responded to by confronting these officials and an accompanying contingent of police. One of the NBA groups near the village of Chinchkedi challenged arriving officials, at which point the government maintains that the activists ambushed the officials and started throwing stones at them, while the NBA maintains that police aggressively brandished weapons and threatened to shoot the protestors. Protestors threw stones, whereupon the police opened fire, striking two protestors, including one, Rehmal Punya Vasave, who was killed.[13] Three days later, several hundred villagers went to Dhule, the district government headquarters to protest the police shooting, and a large contingent of police and officials of around 500 responded with a *lathi* charge[14] and severely beat the protestors, resulting in 125 protestors being hospitalized, some for serious injuries. These two linked incidents of state violence against NBA activists and *adivasis* in the Narmada Valley were

investigated as human rights violations by the People's Union for Civil Liberties and the

Narmada International Human Rights Panel (Narmada International Human Rights Panel,

1994). The story of Vasave (and other *adivasis* and activists who have been beaten,

killed, arrested and coerced by state authorities) has been disseminated throughout the

Valley through rituals, rallies, commemorations, and narratives of martyrdom and

sacrifice. For example, during my fieldwork, the NBA held a *Kranti Din* (Tribal Martyrs'

Day) at the *adivasi* village of Jalisindhi, where the sacrifice of those assaulted or killed

was praised and the righteousness of the cause affirmed.[15]

The multiple cases of violence against NBA activists and NVDP-affected persons,

some of which have gained widespread publicity through media, activist, and academic

channels, has resulted in the NBA being able to insert such experiences into a human and

indigenous rights critique forged by international groups. For example, the Narmada

International Human Rights Coalition was formed in the mid-1990s by over twenty

international NGO's allied with the NBA. These groups, along with other human rights

groups such as Asia Watch, conducted investigations into cases of state violence,

detailing arrests, beatings, and coercion designed to suspend support for the NBA

campaign among *adivasis* and activists (Gossman, 1992). The NBA also produced a

formal submission to the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1989 through

Survival International, a British-based indigenous rights organization, as well as the

International Federation of Plantation, Agricultural and Allied Workers. Another

submission was prepared in August 2000, mainly through the work of two British

activists with Narmada UK. Both the 1989 and 2000 submissions employed ILO

Convention 107, concerning state obligations to indigenous and tribal peoples residing

within their boundaries, which was ratified by India in 1958. In particular, the NBA has

focused on three articles in Convention 107: Article 6, mandating the provision of

economic development in the form of special projects; Article 11, concerning indigenous

ownership rights over traditionally occupied lands; and most importantly Article 12 on

state-initiated involuntary displacement of these populations, to occur only in special

cases of national security or for the benefit of these groups themselves (*Narmada Bachao*

*Andolan*, 2000). Each submission details how the three Narmada states, particularly

Gujarat, have repeatedly violated Convention 107, and often their own state and national

laws on tribal rights and displacement (ibid.). Thus, through advocacy intermediaries, the

NBA and *adivasis* have been able to transform fine-grained experiences of domination,

and the particular moral mechanisms through which they are articulated, into challenges

to state authority by employing international discourses of human and indigenous rights.

In the next chapter, I explore this interface of local-national power more fully, drawing

out the links between accommodation and resistance at the level of the 'nation'.

**Chapter 4: The State of Development**

In this chapter, I examine how the state becomes a site of conflict in interactions between bureaucrats and *adivasis*. I am concerned with the interplay of dominance, accommodation, and cultural politics that resonate with and are inflected by global processes and local practices. I begin with the notion that government interaction with social movement and advocacy organizations can both enable spaces of democratic opposition and severely constrict challenges to state authority. Cunningham (2001) refers to "multiple repertoires of state control", which shifts attention from the obvious spectacle of state repression against marginalized actors, to more subtle but important methods of co-opting civil dissent. Among these are funding non-governmental and citizen-led coalitions, mobilizing public relations efforts, and conducting customer service and community outreach activities. The end result is that potentially antagonistic civil constituencies are neutralized and brought into normalized relations with the government.[16] Such an argument echoes Trouillot's claim that the state exerts its power not necessarily through particular institutional or geographical sites:

> "The state is not an apparatus but a set of processes. It is not necessarily bound by any institution, nor can any institution fully encapsulate it. At that level, its materiality resides much less in institutions than in the reworking of processes and relations of power so as to create new spaces for the deployment of power" (Trouillot, 2001: 127).

As social movements and advocacy organizations become more prominent in international trade and environmental negotiations, much has been written about the potential for enacting progressive change (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Klein, 2000). Yet there is much evidence to suggest that NGO's and social movements are being actively reconfigured into conventional power matrices:

> The new political and economic institutions that govern the global political economy today are often even less democratic and more exploitative that those that preceded them. Not only organizations such as the IMF, World Bank, and World Trade Organization, but also NGOs, social movements, and 'civil society,' today participate in new, transnational forms of governmentality (Ferguson, 1999: 249).

Further, NGOs frequently operate within webs of political power whose contours and borders are determined by state authority. Thus, they can be conceptualized as "neo-" and "para-" rather than "non-" governmental organizations (Alvarez et al., 1998: 17; c.f. Parajuli and Kothari, 1998: 24-25).

In the Narmada Valley, it is tempting to view instances of overt state repression as representative of the entire state-*adivasi* relationship. Yet such an approach ignores the more prosaic methods by which the three riparian states have marginalized opposition to the Narmada project. For example, beyond its direct bureaucratic involvement in resettlement and compensatory afforestation issues, the Gujarat government has also set up dozens of 'NGOs', which receive government funding and carry out projects under the guise of independent agents. To influence *adivasis* reluctant to participate in state resettlement and compensatory afforestation schemes, Gujarat has funded NGOs that pay *adivasis* to install hand-pumps and build wells and roads (Sangvai, 2000:109).

There are also NGOs financially and organizationally independent of the state that have nevertheless aligned themselves with the government's position. Indeed, Medha Patkar's initial work in the Narmada Valley was under the auspices of *ARCH-Vahini*, which has consistently supported the construction of the Narmada dams but sought to improve state resettlement conditions (Dwivedi, 1999). Further, groups such as *Narmada Abhiyan, Shramik Vikas Santhan,* and *Anand Niketan* have maintained a nominally supportive stance in regards to the Narmada project, aiding in its implementation insofar

as they have monitored the effectiveness of state resettlement and afforestation programs (Sheth, 1991: 33). Such groups are viewed by the state as "constructively critical", unlike the NBA's "negative and closed mindset" (Sheth, 1991: 47).

Yet while it is simple to conceptualize the state in a unitary manner (as I have done at times in this thesis), governments are wrought with organizational, financial, and political fissures that paradoxically can negate the effect of particular development interventions. As such, while the interplay of civil society actors with state bureaucracies and discourse can neutralize the potentially antagonistic tendencies of social movements, the operation of states are ridden with so many 'internal' conflicts as to simultaneously open arenas for greater leverage and manoeuvrability.

As many recent anthropological analyzes of the state note, the state is constituted as a political force through the active reification of, among others, bureaucrats and citizens, whereby the state comes to be seen as a 'natural' and powerful entity, despite its contingent, constructed essence (Herzfeld, 1997; Taussig, 1997; Trouillot, 2001).[17] Yet such reification, in continually asserting the power and legitimacy of the state, operates concurrently with (and sometimes as a necessary precursor to) the ability of non-state actors to subvert, diverge, and undermine the official rules of citizen relations, the play of which is referred to as "social poetics" (Herzfeld, 1997: 25). Importantly, binary conceptions of the state counterpoised to civil society, the community, or the citizen are undermined by the blurring of such relations in countries such as India (Gupta, 1995; Mosse, 2001: 6). Thus, as Thomas notes: "government is not a unitary work but heterogeneous and partial, and moreover... the meanings engendered by hegemonic codes and narratives do not exist in hermetic domains but are placed at risk, revalued and

distorted, through being enacted and experienced" (Thomas, 1994: 4 in Moore, 2000: 675). The state cannot be characterized as a "monolithic, autonomous entity" (Herzfeld, 1997: 10) because people do not experience the state, either individually or collectively, as an "ontologically coherent entity" (Gupta, 1995: 384).

The particular contradictions and nuances of negotiating with the state are revealed in how *adivasi* communities relate to its most marginal functionaries. Districts (*tehsils*) are the basic unit of state and social organization in India, and district collectors, mostly drawn from the ranks of the elite Indian Administrative Service (IAS), are the most powerful members of these administrations. They are able to utilize patronage and the resources of prestige and coercion to maintain control. From this level down, the revenue, forestry and police officials within each district possess decreasing amounts of power. *Adivasis* have personal and shifting relationships with state bureaucrats yet often speak about the state in a reified, permanent manner. Although relations with state bureaucrats are differentiated between villages depending on particular transactions with traditional political authorities, they are also influenced – especially when coercion, corruption and bribery is a possibility or reality – by the knowledge of a larger state apparatus existing behind these functionaries. As such, *adivasis* can speak simultaneously of a particular relationship with the *sarkaar* (state), but also of its general character, influenced by similar experiences and common narratives among other *adivasis*.

State-NBA conflict in public domains also reveals a differentiated, negotiated relationship determined largely by shifting alliances and transformations in resource allocation and distribution. For example, NBA protest and discursive strategies shift depending on which of the riparian states is being targeted or affected. NBA activists,

when mobilizing villages, speaking to state officials and planning demonstrations are keenly aware of the enabling and restricting possibilities of advocacy in each state. Gujarat is regarded as most hostile to NBA activists, and its police authorities are also seen as the most repressive, an observation for which there is much historical evidence (Sangvai, 2000), while Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh are regarded as more flexible in terms of the NBA's ability to publicly contest state legitimacy.

Moreover, the disagreements between the each state over the implementation of the Narmada project can encourage unpredictable alignments and actions favouring the NBA's position. Gujarat has the most political, economic, and social resources invested in the project, and has been the most vigorous proponent of the project since the 1940s, while Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh are slated to receive far fewer irrigation or power generation benefits, while having to absorb a significant displaced population within their borders and a greater percentage of submerged land mass.[18] As a result, Madhya Pradesh, especially during the mid-1990s in Supreme Court deliberations, aligned itself with the NBA position when faced with mounting costs over resettlement and rehabilitation. During this period, it began to advocate a more modest project with fewer dams and less submergence. This proposal provided valuable 'official' support (in terms of acknowledging the NVDP's technological and financial risks) to many of the NBA's own articulations (Fisher, 1995; Dwevedi, 1998). This is only one instance where either central or state government bureaucrats have shown disagreement with the Gujarat-led project:

> State institutions played a significant role – directly and indirectly – in providing an opportune environment for the fostering of NBA politics. The Central Ministry of Environment and Forests... took a tough stand on the SSP. At various stages the NBA to bolster their critique of the project used its reports. More significant is

the M.P. government's tacit support of the NBA. In two national reviews [a Five Member Group panel formed and to conduct a comprehensive review in 1993, and its submission to the Supreme Court], the NBA and the M.P. government have articulated similar positions on the SSP (Dwevedi, 1998: 156).[19]

## The Post-Development State: Repression and Contradiction

This discussion of the possible factors shaping the state's ability to usurp or further the NBA's resistance leads to an extended inquiry of how state-NBA interactions are manipulated through violence and physical conflict. The Indian state's response of violence, coercion, and restriction of movement and speech against the NBA has also been used against tribal, religious, ethnic, and lower-caste insurgency movements (Das, 1997). In each case, the state deploys its security apparatus when groups threaten the integrity of the social order – and the political and economic interests – protected by the government.

For example, while there are obvious differences, the Indian state's response to the Sikh insurgency movement for a separate homeland in north India in the 1980s, and the NBA's own resistance campaign can be compared. In each case, the resisting groups contest state power by attacking its primary function, the regulation of the flow of goods, capital, and people. As Gupta notes,

> Sovereignty does not only depend on the protection of spatial borders: it is above all the ability of state elites to regulate flow across those borders of such items as commodities and surpluses; the passage of people in the form of labor, tourists, and so forth; and the movement of cultural products and ideas (Gupta, 1997: 190).

In the case of the Sikh separatist movement, flows of arms and cash between diasporic communities abroad and terrorists in India were critical in prolonging the campaign of insurgency and state terror (Das, 1997). The Indian state was able to use the security facilities of western countries along with its own internal police force to monitor and

stifle aid to these Sikh militants in India. But the NBA's challenge to the state is refracted through non-violent methods, legal tactics and social discourse in public domains such as the International Labour Organization (Udall, 1998). The NBA's international allies employ tactics of protest and lobbying that do not contravene inter-state laws, complicating an effective restrictive response by the Indian state.

On the one hand, recognizing the potential challenges to entrenched political and economic interests, the three riparian states behind the NVDP have engaged in standard measures of internal coercion and violence, deploying their significant security resources to hinder the movement of NBA rallies and activists, forming teams of police personnel to prevent NBA tactics of *jal samarpan* and fasting, and forcibly removing, beating, and jailing activists. *Adivasis* have, in many villages not under continual Andolan surveillance, been subject to misinformation campaigns maligning the NBA as well as coercive inducements to resettlement and rehabilitation (Sangvai, 2000). Yet these state tactics, while certainly demoralizing and effective in quelling NBA or *adivasi* opposition in the short term, have not managed to spur the majority of *adivasis* or activists to cease resistance to the project.

What I suggest here is that movements such as the NBA, through their diffuse strategies of resistance, have not been coherently dealt with by the postcolonial nation-state. Governments such as India's are riven by shifts in established development policy doctrines and by contradictions following economic liberalization, yet they continue to deal with social movements such as the NBA through nationalist discourse and standard security tactics. For example, the state's response to the NBA, as revealed in politicians' statements, NVDA promotional material, and Supreme Court documents has consistently

attacked the NBA for its perceived 'foreignness' (Sangvai, 2000). At one level, such

claims are easily dismissed, and can be seen as irrational or desperate outbursts. At

another level, they reveal, albeit in an indirect form, the challenges to the Indian state

through such international coalitions. Politicians involved in the Narmada project,

especially those from Gujarat, have insisted that the NBA is a foreign conspiracy, at times

held variously to be the result of the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)[20], the

American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), or environmentalists trying to keep India

'backward'. As Sangvai quotes, from a passage of one of the more radical pro-dam

Gujarati NGO's:

> Those opposing the dam are anti-national, anti-Gujarat, agents of CIA, Naxalites,
> KGB, Pakistan etc. They are misleading the tribals, peasants, and people of
> Gujarat. They and their supporters in Gujarat should be banished from the state,
> be taught a lesson by the people, be boycotted... In countries like China, USSR,
> these people would have been shot and killed by the government, but we Gujarati
> people are tolerant. Not an inch of SSP height will be reduced... This is the issue
> of Gujarat's *asmita* (self-esteem) and survival... Gujarat will be destroyed in the
> next century if SSP is not built... [The anti-dam protestors] receive foreign
> money. Stooges of foreign powers... Tribals lead a wretched life in their original
> villages. Their displacement itself is their development (*visthapan hi vikas hain*)
> (Sangvai, 2000: 141-142).

Tellingly, this hostility is articulated through reference to the state's security

interests and not as a specific response to the NBA's own projection of Narmada project's

problems.[21] As an NBA activist explained, the state's perspective on the NBA during its

transition in the late 1980s from a movement concerned with better resettlement

conditions for oustees but fundamentally unopposed to the project itself to one that is

against the completion of the dams, has shifted considerably:

*[During] the initial period we were tolerated by the government, because we were not
questioning the project itself, only asking for minor changes to it. When we took the anti-
dam position, we got a much more vehement and violent rhetoric from the project's
supporters. The NBA was accused of being anti-nation because we were anti-*

*development. This is what they will always say: we are romantics, Luddites, backward-looking, and want to keep tribals underdeveloped.*

Further proof of this position is evinced in the state's repression and control of activists and others opposing the project. For example, the government of Gujarat has often invoked the Official Secrets Act (OSA) in the vicinity of the SSP dam site and Kevadia Colony, the site of Narmada-related administrative offices (Sheth, 1991: 13; Dwevedi, 1998). The OSA is usually only invoked in cases of terrorism and militant insurgency against the state, and is designed to prevent large groups of people from publicly meeting or organizing. Following the invoking of the OSA, oustees, activists and the media were prevented from accessing records, examining SSP construction, and speaking with construction workers and affected oustees from Kevadia (Sheth, 1991: 13). More recently, the Indian government attempted to stifle the international outreach of the NBA by refusing visas or denying entry to three foreign activists from Narmada UK and Narmada Canada who had attempted to reach the 2001 *satyagraha* (Ali Sauer, personal communication). Lastly, and perhaps most ominously, also in the summer of 2001, several prominent former and current politicians in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh submitted a demand for the banning of the NBA through the National Council for Civil Liberties (Kothari, 2001). These demands were made under the aegis of the Unlawful Activities (Protection) Act of 1957, detailing the NBA's accused crimes of foreign funding, information sharing, and general subversion against government bodies and Indian citizens (ibid.).

## Development Fantasies and State Legitimacy

I have examined how the NVDP-implementing states have maintained their basic

support for the Narmada project. Political and technical authority is backed up by the

state's ultimate tool, force. Yet the question that needs to be asked is why the state, after

nearly five decades of planning and inter-state conflict, and nearly two decades of conflict

with the NBA, still invests enormous financial and political resources in the project. Here,

I turn towards an explanation for the state's determination to proceed with the project,

and how this can illuminate the power relations under which social movements and

advocacy organizations in India increasingly operate.

In India, as elsewhere in the 'Third World', state development has long been

viewed ambivalently. The origins, purposes, and goals of conventional development are

cast into doubt insofar as certain actors, knowledge, and resources are privileged over

other, pre-existing ones. As Ludden notes, "on the one hand, Nehru's kind of modernity

machine became the new Indian nation producing development; on the other, it also

became another modern state's assault on ecologies of local tradition" (Ludden, 2000:

258). In other words,

> On the one hand, [development] is synonymous with Western materialism and
> hence accused of endangering indigenous culture and corrupting traditional
> morals. On the other hand, 'development' also improves physical living
> conditions, and thus it is fundamental for the economic progress of 'third world'
> societies. It is both derided and desired at the same time (Tennekoon, 1988: 301).

To relieve this ambivalence, state authorities tend to subsume 'development'

within existing cultural frameworks, as with other 'national' projects seen to be of foreign

origin and imparting dubious benefits. For example, in Tennekoon's (1988) analysis of a

large Sri Lankan irrigation and hydropower project funded by foreign donors, the

government eased concern about massive social displacement and environmental costs by recasting the interventions in terms of historical Sinhala consciousness. Ancient values, spiritual well being, and cultural pride became consolidated through Buddhist religious rituals conducted during the project's construction. Thus, the state legitimated itself as 'modern' through a development intervention, while conceptualizing a western-funded project as "a reincarnation of an ancient, indigenous, national culture whose features are indisputably ethnic (Sinhala) and religious (Buddhist)" (Tennekoon, 1988:297).

Such manipulations find resonance in the wider problematic of *Bharat* versus India.[22] A number of scholars of Indian social movements, in particular farmers' movements, have analyzed the emergence in the late 1970s of a political cleavage between rural, agrarian interests and urban, industrial interests, based largely on rural opposition to the post-independence trajectory of state development (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987; Brass, 1994; Gupta, 1997, 1998). Agitating for increased representation in national development policies, farmer's movements began to negotiate benefits from the Indian state by recasting rural interests, including those of agrarian producers and labourers, within the ambit of national and cultural purity; farmers come to be represented as religiously observant and pious, respectful of tradition and culture, and the repository of Indian authenticity. 'India' is conceptualized as the urban mass, denoting all that is foreign, corrupted, excessive, and disrespectful (Brass, 1994; Gupta, 1997, 1998).[23] By creating a morally and culturally powerful division between urban and rural interests, Indian farmers' groups have mobilized often conflicting rural interests (producers and labourers, upper and lower castes) towards common goals of accessing increased state development benefits (Rudolph and Rudolph, 357-364).[24]

Of course, farmers' movements operate in a different political and social context than the NBA in its agitation against the NVDP; however there are similarities in the discursive mechanisms employed by the NBA to achieve change in state development policies. For example, one of the NBA's most frequent assertions is that the government is beholden to western interests, such as the World Bank and transnational corporations providing financial and technological capital for the Narmada dams (Sangvai, 2000). In numerous press releases and rallies, the NBA has thus inverted the state's claim that it operates for rural constituents' benefit by asserting that the state's primary interest in the Narmada project is to help elite bureaucrats and industrialists, through foreign lenders and corporations (Dwevedi, 1999).

In a sense, the NBA's claim that the state is beholden to foreign interests, and the implicit assumption that this foreignness is indicative of a lack of independence for Indians, both undermines and consolidates the authority of the state. On the one hand, by asserting that neo-liberal economic policies that are directly impacting the construction of the NVDP are responsible for social harm, the NBA contests the state's legitimacy based on bringing about 'development' for its citizens. On the other hand, the state is appealed to because it still has the power to resist material effects traced back to international lenders and corporations (although it rarely employs it). Thus the NBA's own discourse contains ambiguity, both condemning the state as 'un-Indian' and thus responsible for the misery of certain citizens, but also upholding it as the proper arbiter of development, as western interests cannot be.

This is not surprising because encounters with the state in an age of globalization simultaneously reveal the "depth of governmental presence" and "images of

governmental power challenged, diverted, or simply giving way to infra- or supranational institutions" (Trouillot, 2001: 125). Indeed, globalization has altered existing spaces of the Indian state's control, but not eliminated it:

> New social movements and Hindu majoritarianism have splintered national identity, and structural adjustment and liberalization prevent the state from making firm development commitments. Regional, popular, and global forces bounce development in various directions. Development projects are now most often outside state control. Yet national states also authorize most development projects; national boundaries inscribe the public sphere; and national systems of law, politics, and culture implicate every locality. There is no escaping the state (Ludden, 2000:225).

Such ambivalence is amplified in a world characterized both by rapid flows of capital, goods and people through borders and by the need for maintenance of national controls (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000):

> States find themselves pressed to stay 'open' by the forces of media, technology, and travel that have fuelled consumerism throughout the world... On the other hand, these very cravings can become caught up in new ethnoscapes, mediascapes, and eventually, ideoscapes... that the state cannot tolerate as threats to its own control over ideas of nationhood and peoplehood (Appadurai, 1990:14).

Thus, for states that face competing forces because of globalization, there is increasing dependence on mass-mediated ritual drama employing notions of desired 'indigenousness' and unwanted 'foreignness' to legitimate coherence and the appearance of stability. Undertaking refugee control programs, banning particular television programs, and even building a dam can be seen as symbolic and ritual activities that affirm the unity and power of the state:

> Postcolonial regimes evince a strong predilection to appeal to new or intensified magicalities, especially... under the sign of autochthony. [They] resort to mass-mediated ritual excess – to produce state power, to conjure up national unity, and to persuade citizens of the reality of both... [the state's] authority has become dependent on the performance of quotidian ceremonial [acts], extravagant in its theatricality, to win the collusion of citizen-subjects (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000: 15).

While it seems difficult to think of 'development' as an appropriate locus for such 'theatricality', I believe that symbolically, the state's determination to pursue the Narmada dams, despite pressure from an array of actors and a lack of financial resources, does consolidate its authority. By altering an environment dramatically, by displacing a large number of people, by constructing an elaborate technological-bureaucratic apparatus and claiming to bring about increased prosperity to many, the state's authority becomes consolidated in the most concrete and tangible form. In the face of recent political mobilization that contests its authority, the state affirms its legitimacy to determine the social and political features of the country. Ironically, this authority depends increasingly upon foreign investors working within the framework of international trade agreements, on compelling western corporations and donors to take responsibility for the implementation of 'development'.

In chapter 5, I explore the international dimension of the Narmada conflict at length. But before this, I want to highlight that the porous space opened up through economic globalization results in projects, policies, and effects that can be challenged, not only through direct campaigns against the Indian state, but also through lobbying and pressure exerted by NBA-affiliated international activists. For example, the Maheshwar dam became one of the first large energy or hydro projects to be developed by the private sector in India when taken over by Indian industrialists S. Kumars in 1994. In turn, S. Kumars has attempted to secure western funding, technology, and expertise in the ownership and management of the Maheshwar project, yet each foreign company involved has subsequently withdrawn from the project (Kala, 2001). Two German utilities, Bayernwerk and VEW Energie initially agreed to buy 49 percent equity in the

project, and then withdrew after protests, as did Odgen, an American industrial concern. An export loan from the private German bank HypoVereinsbank, tied to the purchase of turbines and generators from Siemens, was withdrawn in July 2000, after lobbying of the German government by European activists. Although the Narmada project is directly tied into state 'development' goals, its implementation or lack thereof is increasingly being determined through international channels. Thus, the state's affirmation of authority is increasingly contested via political and financial conduits beyond its immediate location or control.[25]

## Chapter 5: Globalizing Local Resistance

The NBA is resisting a damming project being implemented by three regional governments and affecting remote tribal villages in western India. Yet it would be a mistake to enclose our analytic frame solely around these actors and sites. The emphasis on 'national development' and a 'people's struggle' can obscure how international actors and organizations influence a development project's implementation and opposition. In this chapter, I examine how the dominance of the three riparian states, and resistance of *adivasis* and activists is inextricably bound up with a diverse set of organizations and actors in places such as New York, London, and Frankfurt. I begin by recounting a particular example of western advocacy, and then move on to different global forms of resistance to the Narmada project.

It is a windy November evening on the Upper East Side in Manhattan. A ragtag collection of ten students, teachers, and activists of Indian origin have converged on the Indian consulate beside Central Park. Most of the people present are in the Narmada Solidarity Coalition of New York, formed after a senior NBA activist visited the area in 1999 to mobilize support. The purpose of this demonstration, as with others held in the United States and England in the fall of 2000, is to protest the Indian Supreme Court ruling favouring the full implementation of the damming project. Soon after, NBA allies abroad initiated letter-writing campaigns, and organized NBA solidarity demonstrations at Indian consulates in London, New York, and San Francisco.

As late afternoon turns into evening, several activists park at the side entrance of the consulate, a fortunate spot as a continuous flow of people enter and leave the travel

visa office located there. After some initial negotiation with two New York policemen who have been instructed by the consulate and annoyed neighbours to move our noisy demonstration to the main street, the policemen, bemused by our chants and songs and assured that we will be non-violent, let us stay. We begin a series of NBA chants and songs, while waving placards and distributing flyers with information to passers-by. Some of the Indian activists at the New York demonstration have been to a previous NBA *satyagraha*, and begin to chant some of the most common Andolan slogans. After ninety minutes, during which time a consular official asks us to write down our demands and chants on paper for his superiors, and a couple of elderly Indian men accuse us of causing mischief and urge us to return home, we stop our 'demo' and retreat to an activist's apartment to discuss our efforts and sip Indian tea.

The impact of public rallies and demonstrations is difficult to measure by any calculus, especially when conducted at a small scale and seemingly at a remove from the events that constitute their focus. This does not make them inconsequential, as they are part of a complex and interwoven series of practices that do in fact have important effects at the 'grassroots' level. The Narmada Solidarity Coalition of New York and other NBA affinity groups have been formed, developed, and linked with other activist organizations through flows of common experience, writings, and materials. Members from activist groups such as the Association for India's Development (AID) and Narmada UK have visited NBA offices and work sites in India, and aided in its research, legal, and public relations' operation. Various advocacy organizations in North America have sponsored Medha Patkar, and Booker-prize winning Indian author Arundathi Roy (who has written for the NBA and supported it financially) as they have come abroad for rounds of lectures

and educational outreach activities. Lastly, activists whose work has easily flowed across

advocacy and academic boundaries have facilitated research, writing and information

dissemination on the movement.

Among the other tactics employed by NBA advocacy partners are direct lobbying

and intervention in legal, policy and governmental arenas. For example, the NVDP was

initially heavily dependent on World Bank and Japanese aid for its construction. In the

period from the mid 1980s to early 1990s, the NBA formed alliances with legislators and

aid bureaucrats in the United States and Japanese governments, who in turn influenced

World Bank funding. A network of actors in the west worked closely with activists in

India, and key NBA activists in turn toured internationally. This network lobbied and

courted sympathetic legislators, ministers, and World Bank bureaucrats through letter-

writing campaigns and symposia, which in turn pressured the World Bank and the

Japanese government to initiate reviews leading to the withdrawal or cancellation of their

financial involvement (Udall, 1998).[26] The New York demonstration at which I was a

participant thus reveals the multiple interconnections between Indian and western

activism, as facilitated through the circulation of particular ideas and experiences. These,

along with financial and institutional support, form the fine threads connecting allied

actors and organizations against governments and multinational lenders.

## Civil-izing Society: Movements, Alliances, Networks

Among the western advocacy organizations through which the NBA has

articulated its case are environmental groups such as the International Rivers Network

(IRN), Environmental Defence Fund, and Friends of the Earth; human and indigenous

rights organizations such as Survival International and Amnesty International; and

development organizations, such as the Association for India's Development (Udall,

1998). Several groups have been formed explicitly around the Narmada issue, such as

The Narmada Solidarity Coalition of New York. Both the specific NBA-allied collectives

and larger multi-issue organizations are part of the Narmada Action Committee and

Friends of the River Narmada, a mainly North American and European collection of

environmental, South Asian, development, and environmentalist activists. These

constitute "transnational advocacy networks" (TANs) (Keck and Sikkink, 1998) or

"transnational social movement organizations" (TSMOs) (Kriesberg, 1997), globally

linked collectives of social movements.[27] Such networks are comprised of relays or nodes

that exert pressure on state and corporate actors, and produce a "boomerang pattern"

whereby "international contacts can amplify the demands of domestic groups, pry open

space for new issues, and then echo back these demands into the domestic arena." (Keck

and Sikkink, 1998: 12-13).[28] International protests against the Narmada project change

the character of negotiation between the state and domestic actors in ways that potentially

offer greater flexibility and increased options for activists. TAN's consolidate

international support, and emerge as highly visible signs of political unrest which

magnify and rebound towards policy makers and bureaucrats in international financial

and development institutions, and foreign investors whose interests often overlap with

capital-intensive industrial projects such as dams. In this sense, protest movements such

as the NBA not only succeed in articulating the financial, environmental and social risks

produced by complex projects such as the Narmada dams (Dwivedi, 1999), but also by

creating political and economic risks for hegemonic actors. When social movements and

activists disturb the stable investment climate that governments such as India are expected to create, foreign investors are disinclined to participate in such projects (Beck, 1999: 55).

Transnational advocacy networks are fluid entities, with changing individual participants, sources of funding and expression, and projects. Thus, social movements such as the NBA, and TAN's such as the Narmada Action Committee and Friends of the River Narmada are not static entities, but rather expand and contract spatially and temporally, and utilize hybrid discourses and practices to achieve their ends. As Dwivedi notes,

> (a) as temporal processes, social movements are movements in time changing shape and orientation; (b) articulatory practices of contemporary movements spread across different arenas and multiple levels; and (c) environmental mobilizations acquire syncretic language of protest through each of the several axes of networks (Dwevedi, 1998: 137).

The contingency and malleability of social movements and transnational advocacy networks defies static conceptions of 'civil society'. Within the Friends of the River Narmada and other TAN's, there are organizations with differing financial resources, political visibility, and organizational strengths. This fact is unsurprising, given that transnational alliances involve diverse organizations and struggles, as well as actors who have the power to define and articulate a movement's public ethos. Yet as many recent commentators have pointed out, notions of civil society often imply greater organizational equality and political leverage vis-à-vis political institutions, such as multilateral financial institutions, than actually exist (Fox and Brown, 1998). Rather, the movement against the Narmada dams must be understood as another "politically contingent, tactical coalition, not long-term strategic alliance" between different activist actors and organizations (Fox and Brown, 1998: 30).

That these resistance networks are contingent, mutating entities prone to disagreement and new articulations and approaches should not be surprising given that they depend most critically on human agency to actualize resistance. Many analyzes of cross-border mobilizations against development and globalization have placed primary emphasis for their emergence and success on the increased access to and speed of information technology (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Kala, 2001). Of course, it would be a mistake to ignore that a crucial component of transnational advocacy is rapid information circulation that aids in spreading and articulating messages of dissent, and also in mobilizing other organizations and actors. For example, the New York demonstration at which I participated was the immediate result of the Supreme Court decision that was endlessly debated and discussed on e-mail lists and Internet discussion forums directed at western activists. Among the most important of these electronic forums in the past several years has been the *Narmada Samachar*, a weekly compilation of Narmada related news, press releases, advocacy, and opinion sent out by the Friends of the River Narmada. Other important vectors for electronic mobilization and education have been electronic mailing lists operated by AID and the IRN.[29] Yet collectives such as the Friends of the River Narmada are not automatically 'international' networks because of the availability of cheap, accessible communication, nor do these technologies signify a dramatic shift in power relations.[30]

Instead, I suggest that social movements are constituted, defined and transformed through small acts of agency, creativity, and imagination (Taussig, 1997; Trouillot, 2001; Cunningham, 2000). As Appadurai (2000:6) notes, "terms such as 'international civil society' do not entirely capture the mobility and malleability of those creative forms of

social life that are localized transit points for mobile global forms of civic and civil life".

Cunningham's (2000:584) useful description of another cross-border activist movement

also echoes my own perspective on transnational advocacy linkages:

> Rather than begin with globalization as a given, I explore the global as itself a
> constructed context of political identity and practice. Rather than approach
> globalization simply as a structural reality that occurs to people, I explore it as a
> process of identity construction in which individuals, using the rhetorical and
> symbolic resources available to them, come to constitute their actions and social
> worlds as global. In this sense, I attempt to explore globalization as the confluence
> of structure and agency, of political economy and cultural imagination.

Such a perspective, emphasizing both the constitutive nature of global networks and their

dependence on human agency at critical moments, was articulated during my

conversations with NBA activists:

*The NBA has not always been so large or well known. We were simply a few scattered
'social workers' working on adivasi and dalit [lower-caste] oppression. Then gradually
we saw something fundamentally wrong in what the government was doing and had to do
something about it. We were lucky that people like Patrick [McCully of the International
Rivers Network] came along when they did. And also that the Review Team [of the World
Bank] had sympathetic people like Hugh Brody. It seems now that we have always [been]
in papers and getting attention but it is only because people like Medha have sacrificed
for it – otherwise we would be nothing.*

Such an acknowledgement of the transnational nature of the NBA's articulatory

practices and alliances is also reflected in particular sites or events where the NBA's

formation and evolution as an international movement is inscribed. The most prominent

of these was a rally in one of the Narmada Sagar Project affected townships in Harsud,

Madhya Pradesh in 1989, numbering between 20,000 and 45,000 potentially affected

oustees. Its importance lies in the fact that it provided an important convergence point for

the several disparate groups who had been doing work on various aspects of the NVDP

resettlement and rehabilitation program, and marked the wider recognition of the

movement by the public in India and by between 100 and 200 NGO's and activist groups

both nationally and internationally (Sheth, 1991: 25; Dwevedi, 1998: 152). As recounted

to me by an NBA activist,

*We had only started with getting a just settlement for the oustees, mainly of the SSP reservoir. Then we gathered more information on the pitiable plan for R & R [resettlement and rehabilitation]. We gathered more information and realized that large landowners and industrialists would benefit more than the people of Kutch. So we shifted our position from 'OK dam, just adequate resettlement' to 'Anti-Dam totally'. We realized that there were other dams like Tehri and Bargi where this had happened and that this was not just one case of bad development, so we also had a plea for being anti-development as well as anti-dam. We had fights with ARCH-Vahini and others who we were in solidarity with before because they didn't want to be as radical as us and were happy to help with state resettlement – this only helps the government do what it wants! Everything really came together at Harsud, the planning really bringing people together and helped us to think of a unified critique of the project and what our stance was. It was really only then that we realized who our allies and partners were, who we could trust, and who decided to be 'on board'.*

## Constructing Sympathy, Representing Injustice

Transnational projects of activism depend on particular representations of reality

that are deployed towards strategic ends. In this section, I wish to highlight how the

transnational advocacy network spawned by the NBA has combined its environmental,

anti-development, anti-globalization, and human rights critique with a global politics of

indigenous or tribal self-determination and resistance.

"Indigenism" is a term for indigenous communities, national organizations, and

international affiliates that, through established networking forums and information

technology, employ lobbying mechanisms and existing national laws and international

treaties to achieve political benefits (Niezen, 2000). This phenomenon can be witnessed

in the existence of national indigenous groups such as the Assembly of First Nations in

Canada and the National Indigenous Congress in Mexico, in transnational networks

combining research, activism, and lobbying, such as the World Council of Indigenous

Peoples and the International Indian Treaty Council, and in specific articulations of self-determination or resistance such as the Cree opposition to the James Bay hydroelectric project in northern Quebec in the early 1990s. The NBA movement is different from the political advocacy of indigenous communities in the west, such as various First Nations groups in Canada and Aboriginal communities in Australia, insofar as those communities' advocacy tends to more directly involve indigenous members, while in the Narmada case there have been numerous intermediaries by which *adivasis* have become visible at forums such as the ILO.

The NBA's strategy has slotted *adivasis* into an internationally recognized, and sympathetically viewed "tribal" or "indigenous" category. Although indigenous people have long been regarded as impediments to 'development', in the last decade indigenous environmental knowledge has gained prominence among researchers, activists, policy makers and development agencies, accompanied by increased attention to indigenous political self-determination and cultural identity (Agarwal, 1995; Gupta, 1995; Niezen, 2000). The valorization of indigenous knowledge has subverted conventional development assumptions by asserting its technical efficacy and value in promoting sustainable development. It has also provided a critique of centralized and hierarchical scientific regimes insofar as they have subjugated indigenous people and eliminated their knowledge from development interventions:

> at the very moment when the basis of their livelihood is being undermined and their way of life destroyed, 'indigenous' people are being celebrated for their knowledge of the forest, their concern for the environment, and their 'philosophy' of life. Such recognition clearly enables certain kinds of resistance to be mounted, and this recognition has been used very effectively by some groups who have employed their 'exotic' status to forge a measure of self- determination (Gupta, 1998: 168).

Moreover, the political value of indigenous identity and knowledge is predicated upon its construction as a spiritually based, technically balanced, and socially harmonious system, as typified by the writings of Vandana Shiva (1988). In the multifaceted, heterogeneous discourse of Indian environmentalism, the "new traditionalist" variant claims that:

> traditional or pre-colonial Indian society was marked by harmonious social relationships, ecologically sensitive resource use practices, and was generally far less burdened by the gender, economic, and environmental exploitation which concern contemporary observers (Sinha et al., 1997: 67).[31]

This construction of indigenous knowledge has through such notions become a central element of contemporary anti-development activism: "Indian new environmentalism is important not simply as an appealing interpretation of environmental history, but because it mobilizes a version of the past as a template for alternative development policy." (Sinha et al., 1997: 69).[32]

The NBA has deployed a similar 'new traditionalist' discourse in which *adivasi* identity and knowledge serve as a template for resistance by highlighting the negative impact of the Narmada dams on 'tribal' peoples and their knowledge: "*adivasi* assertion" is a central means by which the NBA is able to "articulate a challenge to the modernization-industrialization-urbanization paradigm of development" (Baviskar, 1997b: 212).[33] Similar to 'new traditionalist' discourse, "*adivasi* assertion [is] the notion that tribal people, despite their exploitation, maintain and use complex systems of knowledge for managing natural resources sustainably, [and] are ideal stewards of the land" (Baviskar, 1997b: 213). The NBA has at various times in its history depended on such an essentialized portrayal of *adivasi* identity and culture:

> Activists of the movement, when speaking about tribal peoples, project them as communities living in harmony in their forest environment, with little or no contact with market processes. They are also often described as those with a

unique culture that will be torn asunder by the dam and other attendant developments (Kothari, 1991: 7).

Thus this construction of *adivasi* culture and identity has emerged as a factor in determining the fate of the Narmada project, although the strength of this discourse is weakened in several ways. While the cosmology of *adivasis* contains elements of reverence and respect for nature, this does not translate into uniformly sustainable practices. *Adivasi* relationships with the environment are guided by beliefs in infinite natural resources, and shaped by an oppressive state bureaucracy that limits their permanent access to, and control over local resources; these cultural beliefs and political structures compel *adivasis'* overexploitation of resources and degradation of the local environment (Baviskar, 1995a: 232-233). As such, at the heart of an apparently unified resistance movement, there are different worldviews that reveal a heterogeneous network of actors and organizations:

> there is a difference between people's perceptions of what they are fighting for-basic subsistence denied by the state, and the claims made by intellectuals who postulate that 'indigenous' resistance is a comprehensive critique of development based on the 'traditional' *adivasi* way of life, distinguished by its reverence for nature and simplicity – values that challenge the dominant worldview's desire for mastery over nature and material wealth. Although the ideology that perceives environmental conflict in terms of sustainability is external to *adivasi* consciousness, it is employed strategically by the movement in the valley to gain sympathy of urban supporters (Baviskar, 1995a: 237).

Such a critique finds support in assertions that 'new traditionalist' discourse is the outcome of an essentializing process that disregards how 'traditional' resource use is imbedded within existing forms of domination and subordination that usually benefit economically advantaged classes and castes (Sinha et al., 1997: 82; Mosse, 1999: 322; Agarwal and Sivaramakrishnan, 2000: 9). Moreover, the dislocation of the 'local

traditional community' from wider relationships vis-à-vis the state and markets, presumes

an artificial autonomy of the environmental practices within them:

> The NBA's critique of globalism, homogenization and capital intensive
> technology, the flip side of which becomes a proactively ordained discourse on
> localism and diversity, micro-projects and ecologically and humanly benign
> technology... As with globalisms, discourses on localism are susceptible to
> adopting populist explanatory categories which (paradoxically) privilege
> homogeneity in local political economy and culture, interests and values.
> Categories such as 'self-sufficient peasantry', 'local community' and 'rural
> people' suppress contradictions within the local while sharpening contradictions
> with the *other* - industry, urban community or national/global elite (Dwevedi,
> 1998: 161).[34]

Further, recent activist constructions of indigenous culture and identity are seen to be

located within conventional western discourses of scientific supremacy that depend on a

mirror image of non-western indigenous knowledge as politically insignificant and

temporally antiquated, thus perpetuating the subjugation of indigenous and subaltern

peoples in the name of development:

> 'indigenous' knowledge is not a static or closed system but is itself heterogeneous,
> hierarchical, and infused by relations of power and inequality; 'indigenousness' is
> a conjunctural location rather than an essential identity; and the effectiveness of
> 'indigenous' identity depends on its recognition by hegemonic discourses of
> imperialist nostalgia, where poor and marginal people are romanticized at the
> same time their way of life is destroyed (Gupta, 1998: 18).[35]

These criticisms, however useful, must be tempered with the acknowledgment that

such representations are "strategic essentialisms" (Spivak, 1998), usefully employed to

broaden the support base of advocacy movements. I believe that it is important to

acknowledge the tenuousness of essentialized representations while seeking to avoid

undermining their efficacy when inserted into broader political critiques:

> ['Tribe' and 'Indigenous People'] are mobile terms which have been reworked
> and inflected as they have traveled, and as they have been used to engage with,
> and envision alternatives to... models of development... they have taken on new
> meanings in relation to quite specific fields of power... a group's self-

identification as tribal or indigenous is not natural or inevitable, but neither is it simply invented, adopted, or imposed. It is, rather, a *positioning* which draws upon historically sedimented practices, landscapes, and repertories of meaning, and emerges through particular patterns of engagement and struggle. The conjunctures at which (some) people come to identify themselves as indigenous, realigning the ways they connect to the nation, the government, and their own, unique tribal place, are the contingent products of agency and the cultural and political work of *articulation*. Other conjunctures have a different resonance, but are no less political in character (Li, 2000: 151, emphasis in original).

Employing this perspective, I believe that the NBA's '*adivasi* assertion' discourse is both a product of its position within international advocacy networks where categories such as 'indigenous' are politically salient, and of the more obvious urgency and usefulness of positioning *adivasis* in the same category as indigenous peoples in forums such as the International Labour Organization. International activism, as contingent, agential practice, depends on the act of such 'positioning' and 'articulation'. This does not mean that activists who deploy such representations are unaware of their tenuousness or ambiguity. Indeed there is ongoing debate within the NBA and with its allies about the necessity and value of '*adivasi* assertion' strategies, as well as an acknowledgement that such representations are as much a product of other parties' interpretation and articulation (including that of the media and western advocacy organizations) as insisted on and patrolled by the NBA. Yet devoid of the comfort of endless self-reflection, and facing the immediacy of sudden harm and dislocation, it is not surprising that the value of such 'positioning' and 'articulation' supersedes these concerns. In the next section, I draw out this argument to its logical conclusion, examining how the situatedness of the NBA within transnational networks refracts back toward Andolan projects of 'local development' among *adivasi* communities in the Narmada Valley, blurring the

boundaries of geographic sites and political action and suggesting the enabling

possibilities of hybrid coalitions of local-global development.

## 'Alternative' Development, 'Local' Governance

The NBA has repeatedly criticized the state's historic disinterest in imparting

'development' to *adivasis*, as made evident in the absence of government schools, water

wells and irrigation projects, food and agricultural subsidies, and health care providers in

the Narmada Valley (Baviskar, 1995b; Aravinda, 2000; Sangvai, 2000). In response to

this, the NBA has formed its own policies and projects of 'development'. As crystallized

in its slogan of "*Hamara Gaon Mein Hamara Raj*" (Our Rule in Our Villages), the NBA

has translated its policy of noncooperation and withdrawal from harmful state practices

into action by developing projects that attempt to demonstrate alternative systems of

governance and development:

> Translated into policies and actions, the slogan implied non-cooperation with an
> unresponsive government and the development of self-reliant institutions and
> actions in the villages. The resolve was that villages would henceforth boycott
> government activities like census operations and oppose all survey work related to
> resettlement. They would also take up reconstruction activities such as soil
> conservation, irrigation works, health training and adult education. The NBA
> newsletter described this as a "gigantic social experiment... [that] can offer
> crucial insights into exploring alternative systems of governance and
> development" (Dwevedi, 1998: 153).

Various NBA projects and policies have been initiated under the aegis of what is

referred to as *Nav Nirman* (reconstruction). The NBA has attempted to form voluntary

agreements between *adivasi* villages on measures towards environmental sustainability,

such as calls for one acre per village to be left ungrazed for regeneration. Since 1992, it

has constructed eleven schools called *Jeevanshalas*, with over 800 hundred *adivasi*

students in the valley (eight in Maharashtra, one each in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat). These are operated by activists who teach in tribal languages such as Pawri and Bhilali, and who consciously attempt to instil progressive political values (Kala, 2001). Further, the NBA has recently undertaken decentralized, small-scale water harvesting projects, such as the building of micro-hydel[36] generators through which electricity and irrigation can be realized. Such projects are not only successful in terms of material benefits that accrue to local villagers; they also symbolically delegitimize the state's insistence on initiating large-scale conventional development projects such as the Narmada dams. This is because the NBA's success in contesting the Narmada project depends on its ability to successfully articulate the fallibility of a state development paradigm that causes environmental and social problems. By arguing for a more sustainable paradigm of development, the NBA must back up its assertion with evidence of benefits, among them the schools and water harvesting projects it is currently implementing in the Narmada Valley. By aligning itself with discourses of 'alternative development' and 'alternative politics', the NBA seeks the democratization of social life, whereby existing values and purposes are challenged and replaced with visions of equity, sustainability, efficiency and participation (Aravinda, 2000; Sangvai, 2000).

A recent body of literature on 'local', 'grassroots' or 'alternative' development emphasizes decentralized participation and autonomous control, implying withdrawal from wider networks of actors, discourses and practices. To give but one example, "global governance" is counterposed to "grassroots governance", the former predicated upon "cultures of growth and progress" and the latter on "cultures of justice and survival"

(Parajuli and Kothari, 1998: 19). The NBA's *Nav Nirman* schemes might be easily

encapsulated in the following claim:

> In contemporary grassroots politics, the idea is to occasionally challenge the state,
> but, more crucially, to create countervailing power where local communities can
> achieve the dignity, confidence, and self-reliance to govern themselves in the
> process of weakening centralized power (Parajuli and Kothari, 1998: 25).

While not denying the enormous energy, courage and agency of local communities in the

formulation and implementation of such "grassroots governance", I argue here that the

NBA's projects should not be characterized as representative of autonomous or self-

enclosed operations hostile to national and international forces (Sangvai, 2000).[37] Indeed,

the NBA's environmental programs of conservation and water management give evidence

of incorporating hybrid forms of knowledge, management, and control, including those of

*adivasis*, western scientists, and international organizations.

Tracing out the trajectory of a micro-hydel project initiated during the period of

my fieldwork displays the confluences of international and national actors, as well as

NBA activists in the constitution of 'local' development. A micro-hydel project was

initially conceived for implementation in the Narmada Valley when two activist-

engineers based in the South Indian state of Kerala, members of the "People's School of

Energy", came to a previous *satyagraha* in the Narmada Valley. These engineers had

learned techniques of micro-hydel management from the Intermediate Technology

Development Group (ITDG), a network of international organizations that work on

participatory, decentralized development projects emphasizing appropriate technology.

The two engineers had experience implementing such projects in Kerala and Nepal during

the previous five years. In 2000, with enough money gathered to finance the buying of

pipes, tools, and a small generator, they made their way to the *satyagraha* in the Narmada

Valley. The project itself was implemented through the design and labour of the engineers, international activists, NBA workers, and villagers in Domkhedi. Moreover, as should be clear from my earlier accounts of the interaction between dominance and resistance as unfolds in village contests over compensatory afforestation and resettlement, the NBA's programs in various *adivasi* villages denote spaces that are saturated with power, as revealed in continued bureaucratic interventions on *adivasi* land. Thus exists an uneasy tension between conventional (state) and alternative (activist) development.

I believe that such programs of alternative development actually recast transnational relations into a new imaginary, rather than retreating from the outside to the imagined grassroots.[38] In discussing the changing forms of governance that such social movements can initiate and the images and discourses that animate them, I believe that the role of imagination is paramount. I use here Gupta's exploration of nationalism through communities that both supersede and are smaller than the nation-state:

> Any attempt to understand nationalism must set it in the context of other forms of imagining community, other mechanisms for positioning subjects, other bases of identity. Some of these loyalties refer to units of space larger than the nation, some smaller, and yet others to spaces that intersect nations or are dispersed (Gupta, 1997: 194).[39]

In the Narmada case, transnational activism centred on development and globalization is framed through an imagined community, based not on a particular locale or identity, but on the knitting together of various programs and projects that reproduce motivating images for action. Among these are decentralized decision-making and control over resources, provisions for long term environmental sustainability, and the enabling of community health through programs of education and economic self-sufficiency. Further,

the convergence of diverse actors in a shared global arena provides a set of images and

visions that are available for appropriating activist projects and animating new identities:

> Globalization… reflects not only a structural reality – a set of diverse cultural,
> political, and economic processes and relationships – but also a symbolic process,
> a set of diverse and contested images and concepts for re-imagining ourselves as
> contemporary beings. Owing to the pervasive and shared nature of the global
> symbolic field, globalization throws the human subject into unexpected
> relationships as that subject participates in the construction of transnational
> identities and realities (Cunningham, 2000: 584).

The discourses employed by the NBA and their allies are numerous and it should

be mentioned that they are not always complementary. There is a disjuncture between

western environmentalist rhetoric that promise conservation, and alternative development

strategies that delineate different ways of articulating this resource production and

consumption (Guha, 2000). Relations of dominance, evidenced by state practices and

discourse promoting the Narmada dams, and those of resistance produced by the NBA,

*adivasis* and allies, need not be uniformly patterned. Indeed, given the long historical

trajectory of the conflict, shifting relations between the state, international institutions and

others, it is not surprising that rather than being even or uniform, such relations are

uneven, ambiguous, and sometimes contradictory. The complicated role of the

imagination in forging resistance is recognized by a social imagination that can encourage

emacipatory responses in "localized transit points" through "grassroots globalization"

(Appadurai, 2000:6). Moreover, such forms of imagination can simultaneously

collaborate with forms of dominance and subsume the local into the global and vice

versa:

> It allows people to consider migration, resist state violence, seek social redress,
> and design new forms of civic association and collaboration, often across national
> boundaries [and] is also the faculty through which collective patterns of dissent
> and new designs for collective life emerge… the imagination as a social force

itself works across national lines to produce locality as a spatial fact and as a sensibility (Appadurai, 2000: 6).

The NBA's "efforts at imaging collectivity are thus caught between multiple levels of spatial commitment and organization" (Gupta, 1997: 185). On the one hand, it utilizes a specific national frame for its struggle (British colonialism, historic *adivasi* subjugation, Gandhian resistance strategies), yet on the other hand both inserts itself and is itself incorporated into a general metanarrative of struggle against 'development', and more recently economic globalization. As such, the alignments and loyalties bridging the NBA's involvement with national and international advocacy groups are not predicated upon its historical location in India, but rather a larger imaginary of alternative development that necessarily crosses geographical borders.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

This project began out of a general interest with how "macrologies" (Gupta, 1995) and "globalisms" (Tsing, 2000) interface with different modalities of culture, history and power. I was interested in examining the diffuse links between 'local' peoples and places and globally dispersed discourses, processes, and forces. Specifically, I was interested in examining how large-scale processes such as development and globalization have come to be understood, negotiated, and resisted at different sites and through multifaceted methods.

By examining the Narmada project's constitution and contestation at the local, regional, national, and finally international level, I have attempted to explore these interests and made three substantive points. First, I have highlighted the constant, and frequently fractious interconnection of actors, histories, and locales in the conflict over the Narmada dams. Development can neither be said to be a western process imposed by elites (from 'above') nor a project resisted by grassroots communities (located 'below') in the Third World. The multitude of Narmada actors locked in unstable contests over power have been situated at points ranging from adivasi villages in the Narmada Valley to New York street corners. I have found that western discourses of development, economic globalization and environmental conservation find their realization in particular state projects and practices that more often than not have left *adivasi* communities victims of land confiscation, bureaucratic harassment and corruption, and violent displacement. Among these are compensatory afforestation and resettlement and rehabilitation programs. Conversely, *adivasi* and activist practices, such as non-violent civil disobedience tactics, and their insertion into human rights initiatives, environmental

lobbying, and alternative development schemes come to be important catalysts in World Bank deliberations, national government proceedings, and state compensation frameworks.

The second substantive point unfolds out of my first. The conflicted negotiation of actors who wish either to implement the Narmada project or oppose it has highlighted the contingent nature of power, and collapsed simple analytic binaries of dominance and resistance. Suggesting that there are only two possible modalities through which to slot involved actors – most conveniently, tribal peoples and activists on one 'side', state development and international capital on the other – ignores the spectrum of choices that such actors undertake and manipulate, in some cases enhancing state hegemony and subjugation, in other cases opening spaces for increased subaltern voice, legitimacy and material power. Importantly, dominance and resistance are not separate from each other but interrelated in complex ways that can articulate or diverge. For example, in a number of ways, the discourses, policies, and actions of the state can be complementary with those of the NBA or its tribal constituents. *Adivasis* can readily participate in state afforestation and resettlement programs that expropriate their use of village land, while others may vigorously oppose such policies. Regional states involved in the construction of the Narmada project can simultaneously employ conventional bureaucratic language to promote the dam, and co-opt the discourse of sustainable development employed by the NBA to resist the project. In sum, the state-NBA-*adivasi* nexus is characterized not by a simple relation of 'western' or state dominance and tribal or 'grassroots' resistance, but by complicated discursive interactions of both complicity and disarticulation, of political complementarity as well as conflict.

The third main argument presented here employs recent anthropological analyzes on the "cultural politics" of development (Moore, 2000) to argue that the contesting of the Narmada project occurs through the deployment of complex cultural, symbolic and moral elements. I have attempted to illustrate the texture of state and NBA practices, and highlight the moral and symbolic elements unfolding from their actions and discourses. I outlined this assertion by focusing on NBA strategies of resistance that invoke the power of *adivasi* testimonials and utilize collective displays of physical sacrifice such as fasts, blockades and threats of suicide through self-drowning. Concurrently, the state's justification for the project is coded in its own moral discourse saturated with nationalism and elite norms of sacrifice and righteousness, and backed up with state practices of repression and physical violence. It is insufficient to trace out how activists, *adivasis* and bureaucrats are involved in the contest of power without examining how their morality is expressed through familiar symbolic imagery and cultural history. Ultimately, these conflicts over culture inform how actors make sense of political situations and find motivation in moments of disempowerment and strife.

# Endnotes

[1] As is discussed later in this thesis, there are a number of actors involved in the Narmada conflict beyond the three main constituencies identified here. Although the quarter million *adivasis* to be affected or displaced by this project form the bulk of the "grassroots" support for the NBA (particularly concerning the opposition to the Sardar Sarovar dam) the other main group to be affected or displaced by this conflict are intensive agriculturalists, mostly from the Nimad plains region in Madhya Pradesh. However, the particular thematic issues tackled here, insomuch as they concern affected communities and their particular relationship vis-à-vis the state, focus on *adivasis*.

[2] Throughout this piece, as in Indian society, the term 'tribal' is used interchangeably with '*adivasis*' (literally 'original dwellers'). This term is used by these groups themselves, and in public and government arenas in India (Baviskar, 1997b). I am aware that the tribal denotation is regarded as denigrating and has long been superseded by the term 'indigenous' in the anthropological literature. I employ it instead of indigenous throughout this thesis because the standard means of referring to *adivasis* in India by academic media, and government parties is through the tribal category. Among other things, this term denotes a historical and contemporary relationship with *adivasis* that differs from the experience of relatively recent Euro-American contact with aboriginal nations in the Americas and other regions colonized after 1600. That said, there is by no means consensus on how this term is employed, whether it is appropriate to the Indian context, and how those designated as tribal or *adivasis* are linked to or differentiated from both mainstream Indian society as well as indigenous societies in other parts of the world.

[3] For in-depth treatments of the Narmada issue, including the historical trajectory as well as the legal, political, and economic, and scientific details of the state-NBA conflict see Morse and Berger, 1992; Baviskar, 1995b; Fisher, 1995; Dwevedi, 1998, 1999; Drèze et al., 1997.

[4] *Satyagraha* literally means soul-force, as coined by Gandhi to denote non-violent protest that is a quest for truth (Fox, 1997:70). It is not a passive form of protest, insofar as Gandhi envisioned *satyagraha* as a strategic tool to coercively extract concessions:

> For Gandhi, passive resistance was a weapon of the weak, used expediently (not morally) when violence was impossible or too costly. When Gandhi observed British suffragettes and Irish hunger strikers offer passive resistance in jail, he located an essential coercive element in these protests, which made them akin to violent resistance. Such passive resistors perpetrated non-violence to extract concessions from their enemies. Gandhian non-violent protestors, so at least Gandhi said, suffered non-violently to engender trust and respect in their opponents (ibid.).

The NBA's *satyagraha* has for the past decade been the centrepiece of their public articulation of resistance to the Narmada project. While it refers in this paper to a collective process of resistance, following Gandhi's use of the term, *satyagraha* is also a site for action, that is, it is based – though not exclusively carried out – in designated base villages. In 2000, these were Domkhedi, Maharashtra and Jalisindi, Madyha Pradesh, both *adivasi* villages to be submerged by the SSP.

[5] Another way to conceptualize compensatory afforestation, within the larger problematic of dominance and resistance, is by utilizing Foucault's notion of "instrument-effects". Foucault argues that the desired plans, objectives and goals of experts are not always realized, in that their statements or intentions do not always imply corresponding material practices. However, they do often produce systematic social realities or constellations of control that nevertheless serve to maintain conventional discourses and power regimes (Foucault, 1979). In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argues that these "instrument-effects" emerge from discursive reproduction and maintain the intelligibility of hegemonic power relations. For example, he argues that the intended purpose of prisons historically (rehabilitation, correction, individual "normalization") does not correspond with their actual effects (producing delinquency, encouraging criminality) but nevertheless serves to maintain conventional power relations and discourses (control of deviants, taming of illegal acts) (Foucault, 1979, in Ferguson 1990: 18-20). In a similar way, we could see compensatory afforestation programs (and indeed larger projects of 'development') as an effective

instrument for control over subaltern populations precisely because of their seeming appearance as subjectless and 'natural'.

[6] The NBA is not alone in vocalizing the risks inherent in large development damming projects such as social dislocation and impoverishment, environmental degradation, financial mismanagement and corruption, and inefficiency in terms of energy generation and water transport. Similar articulatory practices are found in other transnationally linked networks opposing the Yacyreta hydroelectric project constructed by Argentina and Paraguay (Rapp, 2000), and the second phase of the James Bay hydroelectric project in northern Quebec (McCutcheon, 1991: 162-163).

[7] See Dwivedi (1999) for an account of Narmada-related resettlement that employs risk analysis to formulate why certain oustees have chosen state-sponsored resettlement while others have not.

[8] That state development operates not as a totalizing, deterministic machine but rather exploits and exacerbates existing tensions when interventions occur is seen in other cases of large-scale, displacing projects worldwide. For example, Paul Farmer discusses a similar situation in Haiti with the disruptive effects of a hydroelectric dam project on a village named Do Kay. There, differences in resettlement conditions, and effects of submergence on existing lands, as well as post-development conflict, resulted in bitter inter-personal conflicts and weakened cultural institutions and economic competition mechanisms (Farmer, 1992: 30-31). Jing (1999) records similar fissures in communities occurring after a state damming project in China.

[9] Addressing the related issue of testimonial writing in Latin America, George Yudice writes:

> The rejection of the master narratives... thus implies a different subject of discourse, one that does not conceive of itself as universal and as searching for universal truth but, rather, as seeking emancipation and survival within specific and local circumstances... Truth is summoned in the cause of denouncing a present situation of exploitation and oppression or in exorcising and setting aright official history (Yudice, 1996: 16-17 in Warren 1998: 114).

[10] Naomi Klein theorizes the now famous armed uprising of indigenous Mayan communities in southern Mexico in 1994, under the auspices of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) in a similar vein:

> the paradox of... the Zapatistas is that, despite the masks, the non-selves, the mystery, their struggle is about the opposite of anonymity – it is about the right to be seen. When the Zapatistas took up arms... in 1994, it was a revolt against their invisibility. Like so many others left behind by globalization, the Mayans of Chiapas have fallen off the economic map: 'Below in the cities', the EZLN command stated, 'we did not exist. Our lives were worth less than those of machines or animals. We were like stones, like weeds in the road. We were silenced. We were faceless.' By arming and masking themselves, the Zapatistas... were forcing the world to stop ignoring their plight, see their long neglected faces (Klein, 2001).

See also the Jing's account of how Chinese oustees from a state dam project yearn to articulate their resultant misery and poverty to state officials in public arenas (1999).

[11] Such actions were especially prominent in the early 1990s when the Narmada Control Authority and World Bank were conducting various scientific, social and economic studies towards the implementation of the Sardar Sarovar dams. At this point, officials and consultants were surveying possible submergence heights using stone markers (that would then be thrown into the river by *adivasis*), conducting village surveys to determine family size and applicability for resettlement, and carrying out compensatory afforestation more vigorously.

[12] Capturing government attention by physically confining bureaucrats and government workers is not only a product of Indian social movements. McDonald's analysis of a resistance movement comprised mostly of farmers who opposed the Uruguai River Basin project in Brazil emphasizes the role of tactics such as

capturing, expelling, and refusing entry to government workers in the communication tactics of potential oustees towards an indifferent or hostile government (McDonald, 1993).

[13] Another prominent and much remembered instance of police violence against the Andolan took place earlier in January 1993 when police fired on villagers and destroyed property in response to another instance of opposition to surveying activities (Khedut Majdoor Chetna Sanghat Fact Finding Team, 1993).

[14] A lathi charge is a standard crowd control measure among police forces in India. A lathi stick, made of bamboo or another hard wood is brandished during attempts to intimidate or disperse large or threatening crowds or demonstrations deemed unlawful. There is an established progression from warning to charging that occurs, with warnings given by striking the ground to warn the crowd and then swarming into demonstrations to strike and disperse people (Narmada International Tribunal, 1994: 8-9).

[15] I believe that the power of these *adivasi* and NBA testimonials and memoralizations lies not only in the fulfillment of a desire to articulate claims against the state, but through the work of the NBA and other sympathizers, the ability to memorialize such incidents and transform them into touchstones for action. For example, in peasant communities displaced and resettled because of hydroelectric development in China, collective trauma remained from decades-old forced displacement, destruction of religious temples and family tombs, and bitter memories of meagre subsistence and surroundings when resettled (Jing, 1999). In response to this, political, cultural, and religious mobilizations took place; "memories of trauma were transformed into a political discourse that holds a powerful state bureaucracy accountable for a multiplicity of injuries inflicted in the name of economic development" (Jing, 1999: 324). "Repossession" describes "the staging of public, and often ritualized protests to evoke previously suppressed grievances" (Jing, 1999: 326), most visibly evinced in charged encounters between villagers and state water and power bureaucrats. "Ritualized harassment", involves narratives of suffering, public encounters and physical confinement, and the acting out of traumatic collective histories (Jing, 1999:331). See McDonald (1993) for another account of how a dam-affected movement in South America articulates its suffering, grief and anger at state-sponsored displacement through symbolic imagery and public displays of defiance.

[16] Of course, governments are not unique in attempting to silence potentially unruly communities; a common tactic on the part of corporations, especially in "developed countries" is to initiate community consultation processes, often with indigenous and other communities affected by their industrial activity. These are often seen as an engaged, progressive process involving environmental and social impact studies carried out in partnership with affected constituents, some degree of representation on regulatory bodies, and an attempt to translate the concerns of the community into company action by mitigating negative impacts and providing benefits. Yet despite the rhetoric of participation, partnership, and engagement, such initiatives clearly favour corporations benefiting from existing legal and environmental laws, and moreover can neutralize protest and channel potential community agitation away from company projects. See Whiteman and Mamen (2001) for two examples of this process at work in Canada and Panama with indigenous communities faced with mining on their lands.

[17] Taussig asserts that the state is an entity that legitimates itself on the power of ritual, reification and fetishizing; through this, the state is paradoxically taken for granted and understood as an ultimate authority at the same time as this power is mysterious, unseen, opaque:

> How naturally we entify and give life to such. Take the case of God, the economy, and the state, abstract entities we credit with Being, species of things awesome with life-force of their own, transcendent over mere mortals. Clearly they are fetishes, invented wholes of materialized artifice into whose woeful insufficiency of being we have placed soulstuff. Hence the big S of the State (Taussig, 1997: 3).

[18] Such conflicts between riparian states in India over water resources and management have erupted over other rivers on the subcontinent. For example, the Ravi-Sutlej-Beas river basin in north-western India has intermittently been at the center of conflict between Haryana and Punjab since the 1960s, and the Cauvery in south India has seen violent encounters between inhabitants of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu (and its

colonial predecessors) for over a century (Corell and Swain, 1995). In both cases, interest groups such as farmers' unions have been linked to party politics pivoting on center-regional benefits to exacerbate the conflicts. More interestingly, in each case, ethnic-religious differences between states (Sikhs in Punjab versus Hindus in Haryana; Tamils in Tamil Nadu versus Kannadiga in Karnataka) have been exploited in political-bureaucratic domains to assert claims over water scarcity, waste, and allocation (ibid.). This differs markedly from the inter-state disputes over the Narmada, where the main ethnic cleavage is not between states (as Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra each have majority Hindu populations) but between mainly Hindu beneficiaries throughout the region and dam-affected *adivasis*.

[19] At still another level, the complicated politics of convergence and disagreement are revealed in the inter-divisional conflict within the World Bank leading up to its decision to withdraw from the Narmada project (Udall, 1998). As several commentators have noted, conflicting assessments concerning the viability of its loan for the project, mainly between its financial and environmental wings, and India and head offices was exacerbated by pressure by Indian and western advocacy groups (Caufield, 1996; Udall, 1998; Dwevedi, 1999).

[20] The Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) is the foreign intelligence agency of the Pakistani government. The Pakistani ISI is often invoked in Indian political discourse to explain everything from ethnic armed insurgency against the Indian state to various social problems. More radical pro-Narmada forces, especially within Gujarat, have repeatedly indicted the Pakistani ISI. In part, this can be explained through the Kutch-Saharashtra region's shared border with Pakistan. An impoverished and lowly populated region, Kutch-Saharashtra is also the site for cross-border smuggling and thought to be a key site of infiltration for intelligence agents. According to the Gujarat government, by bringing 'development' to Kutch through the Narmada project, the region could then harbour agricultural or industrial activity, and thus would become more populated, building a strong presence of Indians, and deterring any potentially destabilizing activity from Pakistan. The NBA's opposition to the Narmada dams is thus explained as a necessary result of Pakistani ISI influence.

[21] These claims rest upon notions of autochthony, and are used by postcolonial states facing threats to their authority from external actors, among them transnational advocacy networks:

> One solution that has presented itself in the face of ever more assertive claims on society and the state, of claims formulated in the name of intransitive sorts of identity, has come to lie in autochthony: in elevating to a first-principle the ineffable interests and connections, at once material and moral, that flow from 'native' rootedness, and special rights, in *a place of birth*...
> Autochthony is implicit in many forms of identity, of course; it also attaches to places within places, parts within wholes. But, as a claim against aliens, its mobilisation appears to be growing in direct proportion to the sundered hyphenation of the sovereign polity, to its popularly perceived porousness and impotence in the face of exogenous forces (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000: 16, emphasis in original).

[22] *Bharat* is the Hindi term for India. In the context of farmer's resistance to urban-centred state development policies, it evokes cultural notions of authenticity, purity, and tradition versus the urban corrupt, foreign-polluted, modern world.

[23] Gupta notes that the upsurge in agrarian populism and the rise of new farmers' movements as powerful political constituencies in India in the 1970s depended on the repeated articulation of a resonant Bharat versus India divide:

> The intent was to contrast the vernacular name denoting the ordinary, the rural, the little tradition, the 'real' country of small peasants and agricultural labourers to the western, urban, industrial, internationally oriented modern nation-state. This division was intended to highlight the 'urban bias' of development policies that resulted in a widening gap between urban dwellers that work for the state and industrial sectors, and rural folk who work in the agricultural sector. This duality between Bharat and 'India'... managed to coalesce a variety of dissatisfactions experienced by

different classes and segments of the rural population into a unitary framework. In its ability to map different grievances into a singular antithesis, it functioned as a powerful oppositional populism (Gupta, 1997: 327).

[24] The construction of a cleavage between the countryside and city by rural interests to access government goods such as 'development' is of course not unique to the Indian context. A similar concept is expressed in James Ferguson's analysis of how rural miners articulate differences between the countryside and city in Zambia (Ferguson, 1997).

[25] Conversely, Johnston argues that as international development is increasingly transacted through multinational public-private partnerships, social and human rights mandates encoded in national laws and international agreements can increasingly be usurped, ignored or eliminated in the formulation and implementation of large-scale projects. Lenders and corporations, unlike states, are not party or signatories to these enforcement mechanisms, public enforcement is bypassed, and accountability mechanisms are made irrelevant. Thus, the potential is for social movements and marginalized communities to be rendered impotent instead of strengthened (Johnston, 2001: 115).

[26] Such a diversity of tactics in internationally networked movements against harmful development projects can also be seen in other sites. For example, in the Cree campaign against the second phase of the James Bay damming project in northern Quebec, lobbying by Crees and their allies in urban centers in Canada and the United States played a critical role in articulating to wider public and other bodies the justifiability of Cree opposition. The Cree argued "before regulatory bodies, before environmental impact review panels, before courts, before legislative body hearings, before voters, on the streets, in the news media..." (McCuthcheon, 1991: 178-179). See Rapp (2000) for another example of multifaceted resistance to a damming project in South America.

[27] Other heterogeneous and internationally dispersed coalitions have been formed in response to specific indigenous struggles against large state development projects, especially dams. These include the involvement of human rights, church, environmentalist, and labour actors in opposition against the Yacyreta dam in South America (Rapp, 2000). As in the Narmada case, the Cree struggle attracted, to varying degrees of involvement, the financial and political energy of various progressive groups in North America. Again, as in the Narmada case, these groups were separated into case specific anti-James Bay collectives (the James Bay Defence Coalition, comprising twenty groups) as well as already existing environmental and indigenous rights groups. Indirect support in financial and organizational terms came to the Crees from environmental groups such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth, and indigenous rights groups such as Cultural Survival and the Canadian Arctic Resources Committee (McCutheon, 1991: 160-162; Niezen, 2000).

[28] See Johnston (2001: 114) for another example of how transnationally-linked advocacy groups have leveraged their attacks on multilateral donors and developers to pressure states into mitigating social impacts of development, involving the Biobio hydroelectric damming project in Chile and involuntary displacement of Pehuenche indigenous communities.

[29] The AID web site is www.aidindia.org, and IRN's is www.irn.org. The NBA's official web site (www.narmada.org), run by Andolan supporters abroad, maintains an extensive database of press releases, relevant documents, images and photos, and links.

[30] An intriguing consequence of increased dependence on electronic communication for advocacy is how it transforms geographic and cultural sites of resistance, by constituting a deterritorialized non-space whose defining contours are ideological rather than geographical:

electronic connections are experienced as immediate and rapid, and have little specific connection to a geographic sensibility (such as that associated with letters), or even a sense of the availability of the recipient on the other end (such as that associated with a telephone call or a fax). The groups listed on [such a] network tend not to list a geographic address (e.g., a street number, city, state, or

telephone number with an area code), underscoring the idea that cyberspace, as a new kind of socio-political space, is independent of many of the traditional markers of everyday social life, including, by extension, markers of state authority (Cunningham, 2000: 598).

[31] Other streams of Indian environmentalism, primarily those informed by Gandhian principles, also utilize conceptions of 'indigenous knowledge' that bear similarity to 'new traditionalist' discourse. This aspect is most evident in Gandhi's vision of 'village republics', decentered, locally controlled cooperatives employing 'traditional' Indian knowledge for simple, subsistence purposes. This is perceived to counter the corruption, commodification, and elitism afflicting urban, western-influenced, scientifically minded people (Ludden, 1992; Brass, 1994). Such a discourse, although not dominant in the post-independence development period in India, has continued to resonate with activists and communities involved in anti-development resistance movements.

[32] Such a discourse has been at work in many official and nongovernmental development narratives as well as in the articulations of social movements. Images of autonomous, local, traditional resource use that have been undermined by state bureaucrats, transnational capital, and industrial development provide a template for anti-development critiques that aim to recover "latent community capacities" (Mosse, 1999: 320-321).

[33] The other internationally prominent environmentalist or anti-development movement in India, the Chipko mobilization for increased forest access in the Indian Himalayas, similarly depended on a 'new traditionalist' discourse that reified indigenous and traditional knowledge in opposition to the 'violence' engendered by the colonial and postcolonial state, science, and development:

> One indication that new traditionalism is an 'authoritative' discourse is that, with few exceptions, Chipko is imagined globally as a paradigmatic, popular, 'civilizational' response to India's contemporary ecological crisis, a latter-day example of the great value that 'traditional' Indian culture placed on the active defence of the forests (Sinha et al., 1997: 83).

Yet in effecting constructive change, such a discourse does not satisfactorily characterize what is a heterogeneous and complex political project infused by power relations:

> Chipko's ascent to fame... hinged on the central role played by rural elites... They were particularly successful when they articulated their demands in the state's vocabulary of national integrity, development, and democracy, and combined this language with symbolic acts of popular protest. Their protests gained wider audiences through simple, populist narratives that pitted peasants against the state and markets, but glossed over the heterogeneity of classes, interests, and constituencies within the movements (Rangan, 1996: 216).

[34] Such a reification of indigenous knowledge, traditional communities, and local actors as part of the 'new traditionalist' discourse articulated by Indian social movements paradoxically provides Hindu nationalists with a rich body of historical and cultural material by which to advance their politics:

> not only is the radical new agenda claimed by/ for new social movements neither radical nor new, but the complicity of the new farmers' movements, ecofeminism, and sections of the left with what is an historically long- standing neo-populist/ nationalist/ (communal) discourse about the interrelationship between people/ peasants/ gender/ nature/ nation has contributed towards the reproduction of an ideological space which permits right-wing political organizations to reappropriate the Indian past... with the object of creating an ethnically specific India state (Brass, 1994: 48).

[35] Such valorization of indigenous knowledge is thus linked to the historical project of "Orientalism", a discourse evolving out of, and perpetuating western colonial domination over the myriad non- western peoples signified as the 'Other' (Said, 1978):

The assimilation of *adivasis* into different ideological projects parallels the way in which the East came to be defined in different Orientalist constructions. A romantic and essentially positive view of the East is a mirror image of the scientific and essentially pejorative view normally upheld by western scholars of the Orient. In both cases, the East constitutes the Other, it is defined by a uniquely spiritual, nonrational 'essence', even though this essence is valorized quite differently by the two schools. Eastern people exhibit a spiritual dependence on nature – which, on the one hand, is symptomatic of their prescientific and backward self, and on the other, of their ecological consciousness and wisdom. Both views are monolithic, simplistic, and have the same effect – intended in one case, perhaps unintended in the other – of denying agency and reason to the East (Baviskar, 1995a: 240).

[36] Hydel is the term used by the NBA and others to describe a mixed hydro-energy project.

[37] Rangan argues that in recent discourses of environmental sustainability the use of what she terms the 'local' narrative unhelpfully reproduces a similar divide between the local and global, where global processes such as inter-state economic competition and political dominance threaten the ability of local communities to sustainably manage ecosystems. In response, restraints on global commerce and state intervention, and the enhancement of ecologically responsible communities is urged. Besides the already mentioned tendency within such a discourse to purge internal hierarchy and romanticize actors such as indigenous peoples, Rangan finds such a narrative lacking precisely in its failure to draw out the mechanisms of locality:

> There is absolutely no conception of region or regionality in these narratives. Descriptions of 'the global' and 'the local' are essentially about spatial scales that have been stripped of geographical history. The link between global and local is tenuous at best, particularly when there is no attempt to describe how these links have been made and remade over time... 'the local', despite bearing a warm fuzzy feeling, remains a poorly articulated spatial entity (Rangan, 2000: 128).

[38] The spatial ambivalence of the NBA's articulation of local resistance or alternative and grassroots development is consonant with the political ideology and practical strategies of the Zapatista struggle in Mexico: "their goal is not to win control (of dominant political institutions), but to seize and build autonomous spaces where 'democracy, liberty, and justice' can thrive", through reclaimed control over land, direct political representation, and rights over language and culture. Paradoxically, such local autonomy is gained by forging links with international and national supporters, a resistance that is simultaneously territorially and culturally bound with a history of injustice in Mexico, and the beneficiary of wider political movements and influences (Klein, 2001).

[39] Moore pushes Gupta's creative insistence on finding non-national bases for identity construction in politicized contexts one step further by noting how they are intimately conjoined with notions of 'place':

> Rather than conceiving of localities as inert, fixed backdrops for identity struggles, we need to see them as products of those contestations. Instead of viewing geographically specific sites as the stage – already fully formed constructions that serve as settings for action – for the performance of identities that are malleable (if also constrained and shaped by multiple fields of power), this vision insists on joining the cultural politics of place to those of identity (Moore, 1998: 347).

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