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Towards Eco-Dharma: The Contribution of Gandhian Thought to Ecological Ethics in India

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Dissertation

TOWARDS ECO-*DHARMA*: THE CONTRIBUTION OF GANDHIAN
THOUGHT TO ECOLOGICAL ETHICS IN INDIA

By

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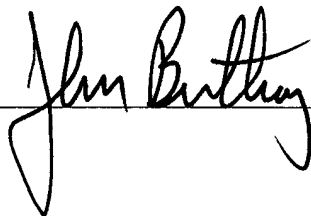
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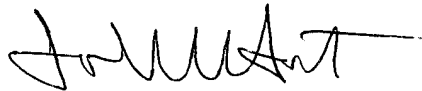
By

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ABSTRACT

Ecological concern prompts poor and indigenous people of India to consider how a society can ensure both protection of nature and their rightful claim for a just and sustainable future. Previous discussions defended the environment while ignoring the struggles of the poor for sustenance and their religious traditions and ethical values. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi addressed similar socio-ecological concerns by adopting and adapting traditional religious and ethical notions to develop strategies for constructive, engaged resistance. The dissertation research and analysis verifies the continued relevance of the Gandhian understanding of *dharma* (ethics) in contemporary India as a basis for developing *eco-dharma* (eco-ethics) to link closely development, ecology, and religious values. The method of this study is interpretive, analytical, and critical. Françoise Houtart's social analytical method is used to make visible and to suggest how to overcome social tensions from the perspective of marginalized and exploited peoples in India.

The Indian government's development initiatives create a nexus between the eco-crisis and economic injustice, and communities' responses. The Chipko movement seeks to protect the Himalayan forests from commercial logging. The Narmada Bachao Andolan strives to preserve the Narmada River and its forests and communities, where dam construction causes displacement. The use of Gandhian approaches by these movements provides a framework for integrating ecological concerns with people's struggles for survival. For Gandhi, *dharma* is a harmony of *satya* (truth), *ahimsa* (nonviolence), and *sarvodaya* (welfare of all). *Eco-dharma* is an integral, communitarian, and ecologically sensitive ethical paradigm.

The study demonstrates that the Gandhian notion of *dharma*, implemented through nonviolent *satyagraha* (firmness in promoting truth), can direct community action that promotes responsible economic structures and the well-being of the biotic community and the environment. *Eco-dharma* calls for solidarity, constructive resistance, and ecologically and economically viable communities. The dissertation recommends that for a sustainable future, India must combine indigenous, appropriate, and small- or medium-scale industries as an alternative model of development in order to help reduce systemic poverty while enhancing ecological well-being.

ABBREVIATIONS

CM	Chief Minister
<i>CWG</i>	<i>The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (98 Volumes) in CD-ROM</i>
DGSM	Dashauli Gram <i>Swaraja</i> Mandal
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
GATT	General Agreement on Tariff and Trade
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GoG	Government of Gujarat
GoI	Government of India
GoMP	Government of Madhya Pradesh
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JFM	Joint Forest Management
MAF	Million-Acre-Feet
MARG	Multiple Action Research Group
MoEF	Ministry of Environment and Forest
MoTA	Ministry of Tribal Affairs
MoWR	Ministry of Water Resources
MW	Mega Watt
NAEB	National Afforestation and Eco- Development Board
NAPM	National Alliance of People's Movement

NBA	Narmada Bachao Andolan
NCA	Narmada Control Authority
NWDT	Narmada Water Dispute Tribunal
PAF	Project-affected Family
PM	Prime Minister
R&R	Resettlement and Rehabilitation
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programs
SC	Supreme Court of India
SSNNL	Sardar Sarovar Narmada Nigam Limited
SSP	Sardar Sarovar Project
THDC	Tehri Hydro Development Corporation
USV	Uttarkhand Sangharsh Vahini
WB	World Bank
WCC	World Council of Churches
WCD	World Commission on Dams
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WTO	World Trade Organization
WWAP	World Water Assessment Program

GLOSSARY

ahimsa. Nonviolence.

anasakti. Non-attachment.

andolan. Movement.

anubhava. Experience of Reality.

artha. Wealth.

ashram. Community of disciples centered on the person of a *guru* or teacher.

brahmacharyashram. First of the four stages of life devoted to learning.

dalit. Scheduled caste, scheduled tribe.

darsana. Nature of Reality.

dharma. Ethics, religion, duty, righteousness, moral law.

dharmayuddha. Righteous war.

harijan. 'People of the Lord', formerly untouchables.

himsa. Injury, violence, wish to harm.

jeevanshala. School of Life.

karma. Law of ethical causation and moral retribution, action.

kshatriya. Caste of warriors.

lokasangraha. Preservation of the community.

lokavidya. Local traditional knowledge base.

moksha. Liberation, salvation.

nai talim. New education.

padayatra. Foot march.

panchayat. Small popularly elected body in charge of running the affairs of a Village.

parikrama. Circumambulation.

prakriti. Nature.

purusharthas. Basic goals of life.

rta. Natural or cosmic law or order.

samanvaya. Harmony.

sanatana dharma. Eternal Religion.

sarvodaya. Welfare of all.

sastras. Sacred texts.

satya. Truth, reality.

satyagraha. Nonviolent resistance.

smriti. Sacred code of laws.

swadeshi. Self-sufficiency.

swaraj. Self-rule, political independence.

tapas. Penance.

tyaga. Renunciation.

varnashramadharma. Duties relevant to the four stages of life and the four castes.

yoga. Spiritual discipline; union with the divine.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

A majority of the poor and marginalized people in India view concerns about ecology and environment with skepticism. For them, a new-found enthusiasm for these concerns also means a denial of their right to a just and sustainable future by the rich and the powerful. Indigenous communities in India have upheld the cause of protecting the environment in 'traditional' ways, often finding themselves major victims of environmental degradation. The most pressing question for the poor and indigenous peoples is how a society can ensure protection of nature while it denies the rightful claim of the poor and marginalized for a better life. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi addressed similar social questions by adopting traditional religious and ethical notions and developing new methods to tackle such situations as systemic poverty and environmental degradation. Thus, it is in this context that the search for a new discourse on ecological ethics (eco-ethics) assumes importance and revisiting the contributions of Gandhi becomes pertinent. Gandhi could be considered an environmentalist who was ahead of his time.

This study attempts to explore the ideal of an *Eco-Dharma* (Environmental Ethics) in India through a close reading of Gandhian principles, especially the notion of

dharma, in the light of the prevailing eco-crisis. This project assumes that the Gandhian notion of *dharma* (ethics) has the potential to develop an eco-*dharma* to provide a directive for sustainable development including sustainable communities, a sustained Earth, and respect for biotic evolutionary integrity in contemporary India. This dissertation tries to construct a new discourse of ethics by interpreting the Gandhian notion of *dharma* as an ecologically meaningful paradigm. An analysis of some of the environmental movements in India that drew inspiration from the Gandhian concept of *dharma* will lend empirical confirmation to the study.

Contributions of the Gandhian notion of *Dharma* towards an Eco-ethics

The Hindu concept of *dharma* (literally meaning to ‘uphold’ or ‘hold together’) denotes both religion and morality. *Dharma* is the ordering principle of the Indian society, which sustains the individual as well as society. Somen Das asserts that the Gandhian notion of *dharma* has both continuity and discontinuity with traditional Hindu religious understandings of this concept. Gandhi acknowledged the traditional notion of *dharma* with its deontological (duty-oriented) framework that legitimized *Varnashramadharma* (caste system) as the ordering principle of society.¹ But his dynamic interpretation of the notion of *dharma* took a new turn when he coined the terms *swaraj* (self-rule) and *sarvodaya* (welfare of all), both with a definite teleological (goal-oriented) thrust and content. Gandhi could then delink the term *dharma* from the

¹ Somen Das, *Dharma of the twenty-First Century: Theological - Ethical Paradigm Shift* (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1996), 77.

clutches of its traditional usage tainted with the legitimation of the caste system. This study affirms Gandhi's use of the word *dharma* without its linkage to caste.

The *sarvodaya* approach to life envisions the common good of a community as its goal. The Gandhian concept of *ahimsa* (non-violence or non-injury) affirms the sacredness of life while upholding a sense of responsibility for the future. The creative tension between the deontological and the teleological dimensions in the Gandhian notion of *dharma* holds the key to Gandhian Ethics.² Gandhi attempted a synthesis of these two thrusts into a dynamic practice, the search for truth and divinity in the vibrant model of *satyagraha* (truth-force; literally meaning 'holding on to truth'). A number of environmental movements in India today use the *satyagraha* model as an effective method in their struggles.

Sustainable Development: A Primary Category of Eco-ethics

India remains a predominantly agrarian economy. Since independence, the Indian government has followed a mixed path where certain principles of a planned economy were integrated selectively into a largely capitalist economy. In 1991, the emphasis on economic planning was abandoned and economic liberalization was adopted as the new mantra for development. It is a wide spread assumption that the current models of development proposed by liberalization are heavily dependent on the exploitation of natural goods, though this hypothesis needs further inquiry. Gandhi predicted the nexus

² Ibid., 96.

between industrialization and economic exploitation as one that would ‘strip the world like locusts.’³ Gandhi’s economic model of *swaraj* visualized a rural India with decentralization of power and self-reliance in economic production. The question being raised in the present socio-economic context of India is whether the Gandhian economic theory comports well with the new economic liberalization policy. Will it be possible to evolve a working synthesis of both models in an age of technological development? These questions need to be probed in the context of the persistent nature of the environmental crisis today. This study assumes that sustainable development, which envisages a close connection between the environment, biotic wellbeing, and development promoting economic growth within the limits of the planet, becomes a viable model to alleviate the problem of mass poverty in India. An ecological discourse in India cannot but address the need for sustainable development as a primary category. It is my hypothesis, albeit only verifiable in the long term, that the Gandhian approach provides a framework to integrate ecological concerns with people’s struggles for survival.

Environmental Movements: Praxis of Gandhian Notions

Various environmental movements in India address the eco-crisis without losing focus on the primacy of people’s struggles for life and a sustainable future. Gandhian notions and methods have influenced some of these movements, including the prominent

³ M.K. Gandhi, *Young India*, 20 December 1928, in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (hereafter cited as *CWG*), *The Life and Works of Mahatma Gandhi* [CD-ROM] (New Delhi: Publications Division, Information and Broadcasting Ministry, 1999), Vol. 43, 412-413.

Chipko movement⁴ and the Narmada Bachao Andolan⁵ (NBA), both of which offer a platform upon which to test the relevance of Gandhian thought in contemporary India. These two groups are chosen in this project because they are the best known and documented cases to date in India. Chandi Prasad Bhatt and Sunderlal Bahuguna,⁶ the pioneering leaders of the Chipko Movement, are known to follow Gandhian ideals in their struggles. The movement adopted the Gandhian concepts of non-violence and *sarvodaya*. The rationale behind selecting NBA for verification of the Gandhian ideals is that the movement employs Gandhian tools of *satyagraha* for the struggles. The village-based economic organization of NBA, as self-supportive and self-sufficient, is mainly based on Gandhian models. The NBA derives its ideological basis from a synthesis of both Gandhian and socialist ideals⁷. For Gandhi, the market is a place where people exchange goods when surplus is generated and it could be argued that the tribal market system that the NBA depends on follows this pattern. Moreover, both the Chipko and NBA leaderships follow a Gandhian lifestyle. The environmental movements in India are engaged in the search for alternative, ecologically viable economic models. Social, political, and economic questions are raised in addition to those concerning the

⁴ The Chipko (meaning ‘hug’ or ‘stick to’) movement began in 1973 as a peasant resistance to protect the forest trees in the Himalayan hills. Women voiced their protest by hugging the trees that were slated for felling. The movement succeeded in defending the forest against destruction.

⁵ The Narmada Bachao Andolan (‘Save the Narmada Movement’) is a protest movement in the Narmada river valley to oppose construction of a mammoth dam project (Sardar Sarovar) which would displace thousands of poor people in the project area.

⁶ Sunderlal Bahuguna, *Chipko Yatra* (Hindi) (Chipko Journey) (Uttar Pradesh, India: Chipko Sunchina Kendra, 1981); Bhatt, Chandi Prasad, *Eco-System of the Central Himalayas and Chipko Movement* (Uttar Pradesh, India: Dashauli Gram Swarajya Sangh, 1980).

⁷ *Ham Ladenge Sadhi: Narmada Khadi ka Jansangharsh* (Hindi) (Comrades, We will Fight: People’s Struggle of the Narmada Valley) (Pune: Narmada Bachao Andolan, 1994).

environment, such as the rights of the displaced indigenous people and their right to information and decision making. Accordingly, a critical study of selected movements will be helpful in understanding the relevance of Gandhian concepts at a practical level.

Significance of the Study

Environmental debates in the West have sometimes upheld the environment while ignoring the struggles of the poor for food and other basic needs; moreover they have also employed in their scenarios scientific or rational categories while ignoring the cultural and religious values inherent in the issue. Notwithstanding this kind of analysis, Lynn White⁸ found the cause of ecological crises in the theological treatises and practices of the Judeo-Christian traditions, assuming that it was Judeo-Christian traditions that rationalized the exploitation of nature. In contrast, the Latin American theologian Leonardo Boff⁹ integrates a closer understanding of the concerns of the poor and a deeper sensitivity to religious traditions in his ecological proposals. For the most part, environmental debates in India have appropriated Western constructs,¹⁰ failing to draw on Indian traditions and manifesting a lack of engagement with Indian philosophy and society. This project will attempt to formulate an eco-ethics with a strong emphasis on the Indian ethos and traditions.

⁸ Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of the Ecologic Crisis," *Science*, 155 (1967):120-7.

⁹ Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, trans. Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995).

¹⁰ Bas Wielenga, *Towards an Eco-just Society* (Bangalore: Centre for Social Action, 1999); K.C. Abraham, "A Theological Response to the Ecological Crisis" in *Ecotheology: Voices From South and North*, ed. David G. Hallman (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 65-78.

This thesis is significant because it is the first attempt to clarify and strengthen the foundations of an integral eco-*dharma* in India based on a new understanding of the Gandhian notion of *dharma*. It tries to verify the relevance of the Gandhian concept of *dharma* in the development of an eco-ethics in India in the context of its ability to provide a close link between development, ecology, and religious values. The conclusion of this study in terms of the relevance of the Gandhian notions such as *satyagraha*, *swaraj*, and *sarvodaya* in exploring an alternative model of development will have constructive implications for environmental challenges and movements in contemporary India.

Previous Research in the Field

A brief review of previous studies will be helpful to bring out the essential significance of the present project. Earlier studies on the concept of *dharma* in the Indian traditions include the work of Somen Das,¹¹ which traces the continuity of traditional and contemporary readings of the notion of *dharma* from a theological and ethical perspective. Badrinath¹² identifies *dharma* as a secular concept that offers a key to understanding the Indian ethos. Dwivedi also advocates the need for a “new paradigm of

¹¹ Somen Das, *Dharma of the twenty-First Century: Theological - Ethical Paradigm Shift* (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1996).

¹² Chaturvedi Badrinath, *Dharma, India and the World Order* (Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, 1993).

thought, a dharmic ecology.”¹³ These studies, however, have made little reference to the Gandhian notion of *dharmā*.

In the Parisar Annual Lecture (1993) Ramachandra Guha,¹⁴ for the first time, traces the Gandhian roots of the environmental movements in India. Guha notes the contributions of Gandhi’s followers in linking Gandhian notions to environmental concerns. In his work (with a foreword by Gandhi) published in 1945, J.C. Kumarappa,¹⁵ a disciple of Gandhi, closely follows the relevance of Gandhian precepts for ‘an economy of permanence,’ taking nature as a permanent entity and documenting well the connection between the process of modernization and Gandhian ideas of development. Most of the Gandhian studies, however, have been done in the area of economics and sociology with very little reference to the ethical aspect of environmental problems. Hence it becomes necessary to focus attention on the relevance of Gandhian thought in considering eco-ethics in India. It is here that the present study assumes significance.

Sources of Study

Many of the ecological movements in India use Gandhian notions and methods in their search for ecologically sensitive models of growth and development. The examination of these movements is an integral part of this study, which attempts to understand the thought of Gandhi by looking into Gandhi’s pronouncements on the

¹³ O.P. Dwivedi, “Dharmic Ecology,” In *Hinduism and Ecology: The Intersection of Earth, Sky, and Water*, ed. Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 20.

¹⁴ Ramachandra Guha, *Mahatma Gandhi and the Environmental Movement* (Pune: Parisar, 1993).

¹⁵ J. C. Kumarappa, *Economy of Permanence*, 6th ed. (Varanasi: Sarva-Seva-Sangh-Prakashan, 1997).

notion of *dharma* and associated concepts, as recorded in primary as well as secondary sources. The primary source used in this study to trace Gandhian thought is *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*¹⁶ (cited in this work as *CWG*), which runs into one hundred volumes in print, published by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, on CD-ROM. The *Collected Works* contains the whole corpus of Gandhi's writings, speeches, and letters covering the period 1884-1948. Apart from books, Gandhi's writings include articles in journals, newspapers, and government documents. Original texts in the Hindi language will also be used. Secondary sources are the writings by Gandhi's close associates, disciples, critics, and Western scholars that are referred to in the bibliography section in detail. Articles published in the *Gandhi Marg*, a quarterly journal published by the Gandhi Peace Foundation in Delhi, are also of immense value in the present study.

In an attempt to make a systematic exposition of his ideas on state and society, Gandhi offers a critical evaluation of modern civilization in his treatise the '*Hind Swaraj*'¹⁷ (Indian Home Rule), making an ardent plea for a return to the simple self-sufficiency of the 'traditional' village life. Gandhian scholar Raghavan N. Iyer has placed the treatise on the *Hind Swaraj* as the "*point d'appui* of Gandhi's moral and

¹⁶ M. K. Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWG)*, Vol. 1-98, in *The Life and Works of Mahatma Gandhi* [CD-ROM] (New Delhi: Publications Division, Information and Broadcasting Ministry, 1999). *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* is available in print (1958) as well.

¹⁷ Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, *CWG*, Vol. 10, 245-315.

political thought.”¹⁸ Vivek Pinto¹⁹ selects the *Hind Swaraj* as the text and context for an analysis of Gandhi’s views on agricultural development. This study also treats Gandhi’s systematic treatise on the *Hind Swaraj*²⁰ as of prime importance, since Gandhi endorsed its precepts all throughout his career. E. F. Schumacher, the famous author of *Small is Beautiful*, makes an attempt to endorse Gandhian economic principles in his treatise on technology and economics.²¹ Kumarappa and Vinoba Bhave,²² associates and disciples of Gandhi, offer a vital link between Gandhi and the present day Gandhian environmental activists.

The social reformer Baba Amte and civil rights activist Medha Patkar led a people’s struggle that is known today as the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA). Patkar describes the movement as “the struggle for participation and justice,”²³ while her close associate Arundhati Roy depicts the millions of displaced people as “refugees of an

¹⁸ Raghavan N. Iyer, *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1973; Oxford India Paperbacks, 2000), 24.

¹⁹ Vivek Pinto, *Gandhi’s Vision and Values: The Moral Quest for Change in Indian Agriculture* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998).

²⁰ The Hindu Fundamentalists take the term *Hind* to mean Hindu religion. But Gandhi used the term meaning India.

²¹ E.F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (New York: Perennial Library, 1975), 187-190.

²² Kumarappa, *Economy of Permanence*; Bhave, Vinoba, *Moved by Love: The Memoirs of Vinoba Bhave*, comp. Kalindi, trans. Marjorie Sykes (Devon: Green Books, 1994).

²³ Medha Patkar (in conversation with Smitu Kothari), “The Struggle for Participation and Justice: A Historical Narrative,” in *Toward Sustainable Development: Struggling Over India’s Narmada River*, ed. William F. Fisher (Jaipur and New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 1997), 157-178.

unacknowledged war.’’²⁴ Internet resources like www.narmada.org and online editions of news magazines like the *Economic and Political Weekly* (www.epw.org.in) and *Frontline* (www.frontlineonnet.com) allow retrieval of articles on environmental movements in the Indian context. Vandana Shiva is an eco-feminist who has written extensively about Gandhian concepts guiding the ecological movement under the leadership of women. People’s movements in India are leading the search for alternative ecologically viable economic models. Here I will cite mainly from Vandana Shiva,²⁵ Madhav Gadgil, and Ramachandra Guha.²⁶

Method of Investigation

The method of this study, which is an effort to understand the thought of Gandhi that reveals the ecological motif in his writings and actions, will be interpretive, analytical, and critical. Gandhi’s writings are by and large contextual and they acquire clarity and coherence if explained together with the context. Therefore, texts are selected for the study according to the themes presented and placed in their respective contexts, wherever necessary. Gandhi himself opened up the question of interpretation in his discussion with Dharmadev: “My language is aphoristic, it lacks precision. It is therefore

²⁴ Arundhati Roy, *The Greater Common Good* (Bombay: India Book Distributors, 1999).

²⁵ Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development* (London: Zed Books, 1988); *The Violence of the Green Revolution: Third World Agriculture, Ecology, and Politics* (New Jersey: Zed Books, c.1991); *Monocultures of the Mind: Perspectives on Biodiversity and Biotechnology* (New Jersey: Zed Books, c.1993); and *Captive Minds, Captive Lives* (Dehra Dun: Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Natural Resource Policy, 1995).

²⁶ Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha, *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); and *Ecology and Equity: The Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

open to several interpretations.’²⁷ This study intends to recapture the Gandhian understanding of ecology and environment by engaging primarily his writing and understanding his ideas in the context of the later interpretations by Gandhian social thinkers, environmental activists and economic planners. Since the study depends primarily on the Gandhian concept of *dharma* (ethics), a careful analysis of how this concept is placed in relation to his concern for the environment and its preservation, will be a major objective of this study. While delving into the exposition of Gandhian notions, every effort will be made to evaluate critically and clarify the concepts and to arrive at some comprehensive view on Gandhian Eco-*Dharma*. The discussion explains the creative and dynamic tension between the deontological and teleological dimensions of the *dharma* notion in Gandhi’s thought and his attempt to resolve this rather contradictory understanding. The ecological movements offer the context in which the Gandhian concepts are interpreted and verified for their relevance in the contemporary Indian reality.

For an analysis of ecological problems and environmental movements in India, this study intends to make use of the method of social analysis adopted by the Belgian Social Scientist Françoise Houtart, who has identified himself with the Indian ethos and culture and written from an Indian perspective.²⁸ Houtart uses a framework of analysis to

²⁷ Gandhi, ‘Discussion with Dharmadev,’ *CWG*, Vol.59, 495.

²⁸ Françoise Houtart, *Sociology and Pastoral Care*, trans. Malachy Carroll (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1965); Françoise Houtart and Andre Rousseau, *The Church and Revolution*, trans. Violet Nevile (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1971); Françoise Houtart and Genevieve Lemercinier, *Church and Development in Kerala*. (Bangalore: Theological Publications of India, 1979); Françoise

‘make visible’ any given society as a whole by looking at the tensions and divisions that characterize the society, from the perspective of the underprivileged groups.²⁹ Houtart’s method of social analysis and ethical reflection requires an inter-disciplinary approach that integrates economic, political, cultural, and religious aspects of the society.

Serampore University (India) uses a modified version of the Houtart model³⁰ for social analysis after careful verification and integration of class, caste, ethnicity, and patriarchal analytical models. Therefore, this model appears to be more appealing to the Indian situation. This study will adapt Houtart’s method to analyze ecological movements in India by bringing up the struggles of people for survival and approaching the problem from an economic, political, and religious perspective. The framework of analysis used is rather flexible, which includes interviews with a variety of people affected and the leaders of the movements. This method enables us to verify the efficacy and contemporary application of Gandhian notions as the ecological movements are employing them.

Thus far, ecological questions were seen from the perspective of government officials, growth-oriented economic thinkers, and industrialists, thereby complicating matters and furthering an abounding optimism that science and technology could fix the problems of the environment. This study, however, holds a different view, focusing upon

Houtart and Françoise Polet. ed. *The Other Davos: Globalization of Resistances and Struggles*. trans. Ruth Harland, (Thiruvalla: Christava Sahitya Samithi, 2000).

²⁹ *Church and Social Justice* (Bangalore: Synod of CSI with ITS and CISRS, 1975).

³⁰ Gabriele Dietrich and Bas Wielenga, *Towards Understanding Indian Society* (Madurai: Centre for Social Analysis, 1997; reprint, 1998), 14.

the stories and struggles of the people. The method of investigation includes evaluation and analysis of the pronouncements, documents, and publications by the leaders and participants of the Chipko Movement as well as the NBA. It will be mainly a historical investigation involving both empirical and literature study. The project incorporates visits to the NBA villages in order to collect as much relevant material as possible about the origins and present plans of the people involved in the ecological debates. A working knowledge in Hindi language has enabled the present researcher to observe and analyze the movements closely. Most of the documents pertaining to both the movements are still in Hindi. The struggles of tribal and indigenous people, especially women, the victims most affected by displacement from their homeland due to deforestation and creation of new sites for development projects, give us a perspective ‘from below’ towards an ecologically sensitive *Eco-dharma* (ethics) in India.

Plan of Study

This dissertation includes first, a critical review of the nexus between eco-crisis and current patterns of development, and the search for an alternative paradigm for sustainable development by the ecological movements in India. Second, it underlines the importance of the Gandhian notion of *dharma* for an integral understanding of ethics. Third, it aims to verify the efficacy of Gandhian notions and methods by focusing on how they are being used by environmental and people’s movements in their struggles. Finally, the thesis proposes the construction of an *eco-dharma* by highlighting the contributions of Gandhian thought to a counter-discourse on the ecological crisis.

Chapter Outline

The introduction includes the statement and significance of the problem, definitions, limitations, and a plan of study. The second chapter gives an overview of the problem of environmental crisis and economic injustice in India. The notion of sustainable development gets a detailed review and the apparent nexus between development and eco-crisis in India is discussed. Chapter three discusses the struggle of the Chipko Movement for a forest as the source of soil, water, and air. Chapter four depicts the Narmada Bachao Andolan as a movement for a river that is the lifeline of a people. A comprehensive discourse on the response of environmental movements in India sets the stage for raising the problem in its proper context. The fifth chapter will focus mainly on the evolution of the Gandhian notion of *dharma*. This chapter deals with the efficacy of the principle of *ahimsa* as an ecologically sensitive paradigm. A discussion on the ecological movements in India that use Gandhian principles, especially the method of *satyagraha* for their struggles of resistance against destructive forms of development, elucidates the efficacy of the Gandhian method. The sixth chapter highlights the Gandhian principles of *swaraj*, *swadeshi* and trusteeship, and attempts a critical evaluation of the Gandhian model of economic and social development. It discusses the significance of the Gandhian notion of *sarvodaya* as a vibrant ethical principle towards a ‘comprehensive communitarian ethic.’³¹ The ideology and methods of Chipko and NBA are then critically verified as Gandhian praxis models using social analytical tools. The seventh chapter attempts to evolve an Indian eco-*dharma*, integrating the Hindu concept

³¹ Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth Community Earth Ethics* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 346.

of *dharma* as enunciated by Gandhi with eco-justice and concerns of sustainable development for the construction of an ethical paradigm. This chapter will also trace the development of an integral, relational, and ecologically sensitive ethical system. Eco-*dharma* is integral since it denotes the central perspective used in this research, namely, *dharma*. It also refers to an ethics, which integrates the concerns of the poor and the marginalized sections of the society in relation to the question of eco-justice and welfare of all. The concluding chapter will present the findings of the investigation and the significance of the study for further research and application.

Definitions

Dharma

The term *dharma* is derived from the Sanskrit root *dhr*, which means ‘to hold’ or ‘uphold.’³² *Dharma* sustains and holds together all human beings. It carries a wide range of meanings that include duty, truth, religion, custom, ethics, and law. In the present study *dharma* means ethics.

Eco-dharma

Eco-dharma is a term that I have used to mean eco-ethics in general as it would be more appropriate in the Indian setting. The prefix ‘Eco’ is used variably to mean ecology or environment. Ernst Haeckel proposed the word ‘ecology’ in 1869. The word is derived from the Greek *oikos*, meaning ‘house.’ Ecology is defined as “the study of the structure and function of nature” or the “science of the interrelations between living

³² Bal Gangadhar Tilak, *Gita Rahashya* (Bombay: Popular Books Publications Press, 1944), 91.

organisms and their environment.”³³ Ecology is also defined as "the economy of nature" and as "the biology of ecosystems."³⁴

Limitations

I intend to limit the scope of this research to Gandhian thought pertaining to modern development and environmental challenges. The period of study is also limited to the post-independent era in India; i.e., from 1947 to the present with special focus on the last decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century. The period is marked as post-Gandhian as well, during which the successive governments tried to implement Gandhian ideals to some extent but eventually pushed them to the periphery.

³³ Eugene P. Odum, *Fundamentals of Ecology*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia and London: W.B. Saunders Company, 1971), 3.

³⁴ *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2008, s.v. "Ecology."

CHAPTER TWO

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICTS IN INDIA

Introduction

Humanity is confronted by two critically disruptive realities in the contemporary world: an ecological crisis and a social crisis. The ecological crisis is the depletion and destruction of natural goods; the concomitant social crisis is that a majority of Earth's people lack sufficient subsistence goods. Confronted by these crises, most people are unable to maintain a dignified existence; in the case of some, their lives are in jeopardy. The ecological crisis is the result of relentless human intervention in a fragile global ecosystem, raising questions about the very survival of life on planet Earth. Catastrophic changes will affect people in both rich and poor nations alike, and all biota in some way.

Earth has a limited base of natural goods, global and regionally, endowed with a critical role to sustain a life-support system. The disciplines of ecology and economics derive their expression from the Greek term *oikos* which denotes the meaning 'house.' '*Oikomene*' implies that the world as a household is the habitat of all forms of life.³⁴ The Eco-crisis raises challenges to this very concept of global partnership and cooperation and urges us to search for alternative ways of understanding the relation of humans to nature eliciting ethical reflections. The categories of ethical and moral reflection must today incorporate nature as part of the discourse in ecological ethics (as Aldo Leopold

³⁴ See A.P. Nirmal, "Ecology, Ecumenics and Economics in Relation: A New Theological Paradigm," in *Ecology and Development: Theological Perspectives*, Daniel D. Chetti, ed. (Madras: UELCI, Gurukul and BTE/SSC, 1991), 17-18.

proposed in 1949); any relevant contemporary ethic must include a "land ethic."³⁶ Eco-ethics deals with global concerns such as understanding the relationship of humanity to the environment, human responsibility to nature, and the preservation of natural goods for posterity. It is concerned with a range of problems such as the control of pollution, the restriction of population growth, the conservation of natural goods, the preservation of species diversity, and the question of "sustainable development," which must include the preceding and, for its part, promote a sustainable community of all life on a sustainable Earth.

The Environmental Crisis and the Debate on Sustainable Development

The ecological crisis looms over planet Earth, endangering all living beings and depleting both organic and inorganic matter. It has become a universal crisis crossing all human made boundaries such as nations, races, languages, religions, and cultures. Since the crisis has not emerged from natural processes, human beings are primarily responsible for generating the problem. Felix Wilfred observes the human predicament as that of one behaving like the proverbial fool "cutting the very branch on which he sits."³⁷ Consequently, as 'a thorn is removed by a thorn,' it becomes imperative that human beings take the initiative and responsibility to curtail the human inflicted problem with a sense of immediacy.

³⁶ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949, 1987), 204. See the discussion on Eco-ethics in Alan S. Miller, *Gaia Connections: An Introduction to Ecology, Ecoethics, and Economics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991), 9-10.

³⁷ Felix Wilfred, "Nature and Human Survival" *Jeevadhara* 18 (1989): 55.

The Sources of the Eco Crisis

Discovering the plausible roots of the current ecological crisis is rather a difficult and complex endeavor involving varied factors. One cannot ignore the fact that human beings have been altering the environment from the very beginning of human existence.

Religious and Cultural Roots

Lynn White tracks the aggressive nature of western science and technology to the Judeo-Christian view of the relationship between humans and nature. Raising one of the initial voices in the early days of ecological awareness, White affirms that the Judeo-Christian tradition bears "a huge burden of guilt" for the ecological crisis. The biblical mandate to "subdue the earth," he claims, has become an endorsement for an abusive and damaging exploitation of the environment.³⁸ Commenting on Lynn White's criticism on the role of Judeo-Christian tradition in the environmental crisis, Peter C. Phan traces the roots of the problem in a variety of Western cultural movements such as the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the Scientific Revolution. He further affirms that even nature-affirming religious traditions share the burden of guilt.³⁹ In a later essay, "Continuing the Conversation," White maintained that there are supportive texts in the Hebrew biblical tradition that affirm the idea of "a spiritual democracy of all creatures" vis-à-vis anthropocentric overtones.⁴⁰

Lewis W. Moncrief is critical about Lynn White's position that Judeo-Christian

³⁸ Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155 (1967): 120-7.

³⁹ Peter C. Phan, "Eschatology and Ecology: The Environment in the End-Times," *Dialogue & Alliance* 9, no. 2 (1995): 99-100.

⁴⁰ Lynn White, "Continuing the Conversation," in *Western Man and Environmental Ethics: Attitudes Towards Nature and Technology*, ed. Ian G. Barbour (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1973), 61.

tradition is solely responsible for the development of modern science and technology leading to environmental degradation. White may be right with regards to the situation in the West, but elsewhere science and technology developed taking other routes. Moncrief suggests another model in which the Judeo-Christian teaching has only an indirect impact on the ecological crisis. In this model, the Judeo-Christian tradition is traced as the possible precursor for the processes of capitalism (with attendant development of science and technology) and democratization, both leading to the conditions of urbanization, increased wealth, increased population, and individual resource ownership, all of these factors together paving the way to environmental degradation.⁴¹ The second and third stages of this model could be true for non-western nations while the Judeo-Christian tradition may not be a necessary precondition, especially with the liberal notions of human progress and the increasing secularization of technology.

Science and Technology

Today's ecological crisis has brought us to the realization that the new scientific and technological breakthroughs that have opened up superior standards of living also unearthed ecological disasters. With each blessing of modern technology a corresponding risk is likely to emerge into the fore.

The medieval era was environment-friendly with its agricultural system directed towards local self-sufficiency. The period between the years 1500 and 1700, however, witnessed the rise of materialistic science and industry that replaced the subsistence

⁴¹ Lewis W. Moncrief, "The Cultural Basis of our Environmental Crisis" in *Environmental Ethics: Readings in Theory and Application*, Louis P. Pojman ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1998, Second Edition), 25.

economy with industrial methods of production in agriculture geared to enhance the emerging market economy. The eras of Renaissance and Enlightenment in Europe marked the growth of science with reductionism at the heart of its philosophy. Reductionism attempted to reduce the whole world of nature to matter and material forces which are measurable and predictable. Francis Bacon (1561-1626), one of the founders of modern scientific method, held that "knowledge is power" and felt that nature should be made a slave so that the scientist could "torture nature's secrets from her."⁴² The concurrent influence of market-induced agriculture and the increasing scope of industrialization set in motion the depletion of natural goods. Carolyn Merchant indicates that with this transition of subsistence agriculture to the capitalist economy through rapid industrialization began the dwindling of Europe's forests in the sixteenth century. While the former economy was based on organic and renewable energy sources such as wood, water, and wind, the new economy relied not only on non-renewable resources but on an inorganic economic core of metals, further depleting the forests.⁴³ In a consumerist society, greed to possess and consume blinds one's vision to see the reality in a coherent manner. Inasmuch as the ecosystem is viewed as discrete parts, the process of development which may be beneficial to a particular segment could also be detrimental in other areas.

Economics and Eco-crisis

Our economic pursuits have opened ways towards the marginalization of nature,

⁴² Quoted in Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature* (San Francisco: Harper&Row, 1980, Reprint 1989), 169.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 63.

leading to ecological disasters and environmental destruction. The race for development has turned out to be a race for destruction. The Western industrial growth model which gained wide currency across the globe has contributed to the eco-crisis with its large scale exploitation of natural goods and human labor. A consumerist economy reserves its decisions regarding goods for production and the type of technology to be used, where "the controlling logic of growth is greed and not need."⁴⁴ Gabriele Dietrich calls this type of development unscientific since the 'want-based economy' associated with Western industrialism is based on a concept of unlimited growth. This neglects the "first and second laws of thermodynamics which teach us that energy cannot be created but only converted and that with every conversion of energy a part of it is converted and that with every conversion of energy a part of it is transformed from a usable state into an unusable one."⁴⁵ Dietrich designates this development pattern as the major root cause of environmental destruction. An environmental audit could well reveal the nexus between economic motives and the present eco-crisis. The issue of sustainable development as placed against the backdrop of destruction and pollution of nature involves economic questions.

Political Economy Approach

Political economy, originally a branch of the social sciences, later developed into economics, and focuses on the study of interrelationships between political and economic

⁴⁴ K.C. Abraham, "A Theological Response to Ecological Crisis," *Masihi Sevak, UTC, Gurukul Alumni Journal* XVIII, nos. 2 & 3 (1994): 4.

⁴⁵ Gabriele Dietrich, "Women and Development," *Religion and Society*, Quoted in K.C. Abraham, "A Theological Response to Ecological Crisis," *Masihi Sevak, UTC, Gurukul Alumni Journal* XVIII, nos. 2 & 3 (1994): 4.

institutions and processes. Economics is the social science that studies how economies operate. As economies have developed over time, economic theories⁴⁶ have evolved trying to explain changing circumstances.

As an analytical concept, ‘political economy’ can be comprehended in contrast to the more limited perspective of ‘neo-classical economics’ which views economics as a self-contained discipline with its own internal laws. The political economy approach, on the other hand, recognizes that decisions about patterns of production, trade, or development involve both political and economic considerations. Political economists view particular economic issues as linked with other parts of a larger system and try to analyze these linkages, paying particular attention to a wide range of factors such as caste, class, gender, ethnic identities, and geo-political realities.⁴⁷ From that angle, political economy could be used as a perspective for examining the relationship between

⁴⁶ As a comprehensive economic theory, classical economics began with Adam Smith whose celebrated treatise; *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776) argued that a nation’s wealth was greatest when its citizens followed their own self-interest. *The Wealth of Nations* presents a central thesis that capital is best employed for the production and distribution of wealth through the efficient operations of private industrial and commercial entrepreneurs under conditions of governmental noninterference, or laissez-faire, and free trade. David Ricardo’s *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817) and John Stuart Mill’s *Principles of Political Economy* (1848) gave increased attention to problems of value and distribution, elaborating on Smith’s ideas by relating them to contemporary social conditions. Classical economics proceeded from the assumption of scarcity, such as the law of diminishing returns and Malthusian principle of population. Dating from the 1870s neoclassical economists such as William Stanley Jevons and Alfred Marshall shifted their attention from limitations on supply to interpretations of consumer choice. Later, Karl Marx and John Maynard Keynes made significant contributions by modifying classical economic theories to reach very different conclusions. Writing during the mid-19th century, Karl Marx saw capitalism as an evolutionary phase in economic development. He believed that capitalism will eventually be overthrown and succeeded by a world without private property. The international economic crisis of the 1920s and 1930s urged Keynes to stress the importance of activist government policies to promote high employment, and Keynesian theories dominated economic policymaking in the early post-war period. Beginning in the late 1960s, inflation and low productivity prompted economists to review economic theories and look for new solutions.

⁴⁷ See editorial comment on ‘political economy’ In Hunter P. Mabry, ed., *Doing Christian Ethics: Context and Perspective* (Bangalore: Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College [BTESSC], 1996), 62.

specific areas of interests and concerns such as those of the poor, indigenous peoples, and women populations in relation to environment and development. By establishing interconnections between economic, social, cultural, and political dimensions of current global situations, the political economic approach provides interdisciplinary tools to analyze strategies for social change, and explore alternatives to the current global systems.

The Political Economy of the Global Environmental crisis

The relationship between the economic and political interests of blocs of countries or interest groups that contributed to the eco-crisis at the global and local levels should be examined. After the decline of colonialism, the switch from capitalism and socialism to a new paradigm of globalization and free trade in the context of a divided North and South, has deepened the global environmental crisis.

The Failure of Capitalism and Socialism

Capitalism and socialism have been controlling the world as the two major economic systems until recently, and are represented by 'first world' and 'second world' countries respectively. Both systems took raw materials, capital, and labor as basic components of production. While capitalism considered capital as the most important factor, socialism considered labor to be primary; both failed to recognize the intrinsic worth of natural goods.⁴⁸ The last decade of the twentieth century witnessed the failure of most planned economies and the reversal of most socialist economies to capitalism and the “free” market. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, however, socialist

⁴⁸ Xavier Jayaraj, Sr. Christine Mynsong and Jayraj Velusamy, “Ethical Perspectives on Technology and Ecology,” *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 57, no. 4 (1993): 226.

governments were elected in several Latin American Countries. Past experiences caution us about increased ecological deprivation when the market forces get a free hand, causing severe repercussions in the national and international economy. The developed nations of the north are more concerned about the ecological crisis for fear of losing the benefits they have hitherto received from nature. For the 'third world' developing countries in the south (South America, Africa, and parts of Asia), however, ecology is a question of life and survival. The question to be raised is which economic system would present a viable future, with goals of socially and ecologically sustainable growth, and efforts to bring about a just and participatory society.

Global Environmental Concerns and North-South Conflicts

Global environmental concerns can be summarized under two aspects of the crisis: the pollution of Earth (air, water, and land) and the indiscriminate destruction of nature and its natural goods. While pollution, largely a byproduct of industrial development, has become a matter of grave concern for the developed nations, the developing nations face an altogether different set of problems. The global North and South appear to hold different perspectives and priorities on how to address the crisis and attain a sustainable paradigm of development. The processes of development in the South, even as they are at the launching stage, have become anti-development, anti-people, and anti-nature. The primary concern for the South is therefore the protection of nature and the preservation of natural resources in the wake of mal-development and environmental destruction. Most of the developed nations are keen to sign global treaties on pollution and climate change while the developing nations demand setting a global

priority to meet basic human needs. There is a widespread awareness that the ecological crisis involves equity issues that have churned out over-consumption in the North and grinding poverty in the South.⁴⁹

The existing patterns of association between the wealthy Northern nations and the poor Southern states are characterized by unequal relations and hierarchical power structures. The logical outcome of such inequality is the subjugation and exploitation of natural goods to meet the ends of the rich and the powerful at the expense of the poor. Indian Economist C. T. Kurien terms the 1980s as a “lost decade” for the Third World in terms of development opportunities, when the gap between the rich and the poor countries widened due to resource transfers from the South to the North.⁵⁰ The South has become the provider of rich resources to the North while receiving the deleterious effects of environmental degradation.

Colonialism towards Globalization

Globalization is considered by many as the present form of colonialism - or rather, neo-colonialism – though, characteristically distinct from that of the previous centuries. Globalization facilitates the free movement of capital and trade towards an unequal and unidirectional accumulation of wealth by the rich from the poor, it threatens the local and national economies in which people are regarded as cheap labor and, as

⁴⁹ Steve Lerner, *Beyond the Earth Summit: Conversations with Advocates of Sustainable Development*, Bolinas (California: Common Knowledge Press, Commonweal, 1992), xiii, xvii.

⁵⁰ See C.T. Kurien, *Global Capitalism and the Indian Economy, Tracts for the Times/6* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1994), 57-78.

such, have no say in the process.⁵¹ Globalization, though it has a unitive role in making the world one global village, has increased the polarization between rich and poor countries and between rich and poor people and peoples within each nation.

The economic policies of most of the South are regulated by a few nations of the North, named the G-7, and by international agencies such as the IMF (International Monetary Fund), the World Bank, and the WTO (World Trade Organization) that they control. The GATT agreement of 1994 (General Agreement on Tariff and Trade) which was endorsed by nearly 120 countries after the Uruguay Round and the organization of WTO in 1995, paved the way for a free market-based economy, and helped establish processes of liberalization, privatization, and globalization, this in turn enabled free entry of multinational corporations into the countries in the South, including India.⁵² Tissa Balasuriya observes that the international institutions within the UN system are proposing or imposing a single solution to economic and social problems in all poor countries in terms of the new policies: to force the poor countries to serve the interests of the rich and advanced countries.⁵³ The disturbing question is whether the new economic order will bring justice to all sections of society, or will merely increase the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor. The available evidence suggests that with the onset of

⁵¹ Two International Seminars on Globalization: Documents, *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 62, no. 3 (1998): 200,203. On the occasion of the 500 years after Vasco da Gama arrived in India the Indian Social Institute and Vidyajyoti, College of Theology, Delhi, organized two related International conferences on 'Colonialism to Globalization: Five Centuries after Vasco da Gama' and 'Globalization from the Perspectives of the Victims of History,' respectively.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Tissa Balasuriya, "Recolonization and Debt Crisis" in *Globalization: A Challenge to the Church*, P. Jagadish Gandhi and George Cheriyan, ed. (Bangalore: Association of Christian Institutes for Social Concern in Asia and National Council of Churches in India-Urban Rural Mission, 1998), 9.

globalization the developed nations and the richer segments of their people receive the benefits, while the under-developed nations and their poor are further marginalized.

The market economy places profit as the end product and the prescribed goal is achieved through any means, the end results of which are exploitation of natural goods, environmental pollution, and displacement of people in the guise of development processes. The human relationship with Earth is controlled by a profit motive which attributes only commodity value to natural and human resources. Thus, the market not only alienates the poor from their physical environment but it makes them face marginalization in their social or economic environment as well.

As time and place evolve into new situations, we will require new patterns of thinking, and theories that are relevant to the changed realities. In the present state of the environment where life itself becomes a struggle for a majority of the poor, women, and indigenous populations, the search for a sustainable environmental economics becomes necessary. This project will verify the feasibility of an alternative economic model based on Gandhian ideals towards a decentralized economy.

The Development Debate

‘Development’ denotes change, meaning a change for the better. It is currently the catchword for discussion in all quarters of societies across the world. This compulsive *mantra* has become the single unifying goal of societies, institutions, and nations. ‘Develop or perish’ has become a universal slogan. Though there is no single all-inclusive definition available, semantically the term ‘development’ is taken to mean

‘growth’ or ‘advancement’ or ‘gradual unfolding.’ Development is a comprehensive and participatory process which integrates economic, political, social, cultural, and environmental elements, bringing goals such as economic growth, social change, and self-reliance.⁵⁴ Neil Carter terms development as “a process of transformation which, by combining economic growth with broader social and cultural changes, enables individuals to realize their full potential.”⁵⁵ While the Western notion of development is identified in terms of growth of national and per capita income, alternative strategies focus on holistic human development. The crucial questions to be raised are ‘development by whom and for whom’ and ‘development towards which goal at what price?’ The development goals of different nations vary in accordance with their economic, political, social, and cultural identities, and as such, all development concepts are contextual. This becomes problematic when the concepts originate in a context that is different from the context in which they will be applied, voluntarily or coercively.

The Indian context demands the discussion to be focused on the complexity of the injustice of poverty, since the majority of the people are poor and dispossessed. In his discussion of the link between development and poverty, C.T. Kurien calls for a de-linking of development and nations since “poverty is not of the nations, but of people,” inasmuch as development is perceived as “dealing with the problem of poverty of some

⁵⁴See Jag Mohan Singh Verma, “Models of Development: A Critique,” and K. Chockalingam, “Development, Deviance and Need for Criminal Justice Planning in India,” in *The Development Debate: Critical Perspectives*, S. P. Srivastava, ed. (Jaipur and New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 1998), 39-40, 263.

⁵⁵ Neil Carter, *The Politics of the Environment: Ideas, Activism, Policy* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 198.

people and the affluence of others within nations and between nations.”⁵⁶ He argues further that any anti-poverty program via “growth” is self-defeating in a system where the majority is poor, leading to the advantage of the rich.⁵⁷ Paulose Mar Paulose rejects a view that is commonly held with respect to poverty and hunger being the worst scenario as far as India is concerned; instead, he identifies the disturbing reality regarding people's ignorance about the bondage and burden which a heartless society has inflicted upon them.⁵⁸ Vandana Shiva rightly describes development as a ‘liberating project,’ “a project for removal of poverty and leveling of socio-economic inequalities” in comparison with the dominant image of development which creates “new forms of affluence for the powerful and new forms of deprivation and dispossession for the weak.”⁵⁹ Once people become aware of these realities, the discussion on development concerns will invariably include issues like human rights, social justice, eco-justice, and sustainable communities, environment, and development along with the questions of poverty alleviation and population control. The ultimate goal of development must therefore be the welfare of all, an objective close to the ideal of Gandhian *Sarvodaya*. The *dharma* of development then becomes an attempt towards realization of the full potential of human and environmental resources by liberating them from the clutches of existing unjust structures

⁵⁶ C. T. Kurien, *Poverty and Development* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1974), 9-10.

⁵⁷ C.T. Kurien, “What is Growth?: Some Thoughts on the Economics of Garibi Hatao,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, December 23, Quoted in C.T. Kurien, *Rethinking Economics* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1996), 47.

⁵⁸ Paulose Mar Paulose, “*Vikasanathinte Vedasatra Veekshanam* (Theological Vision of Development)”, In *Haritha Daivasastram* (Green Theology), Mathew Koshy Punnakkadu, ed. (Tiruvalla: Theological Literature Council, 2002), 102.

⁵⁹ Vandana Shiva, “Let us Survive: Women, Ecology and Development” In *Women Healing Earth*, Rosemary Radford Ruether, ed. (London: SCM Press, 1996), 5.

in the economic, political, and cultural milieu.

Environment vs. Development

Environment and development are closely correlated, yet they tend to be so inimical that contemporary discourses are centered on patterns of their interaction. In the past, humanity viewed environment with reverence, thereby maintaining the equilibrium of natural processes. But the increasing use of exploitative technology during the period of industrialization also meant the loss of this primeval sense of innocence and respect towards nature. Greedy impulses in people turned violent: ruthless exploitation of peoples and natural goods followed, leading to ecological crisis. Thus the thrust given to development during the past sixty years has had a direct bearing on the current eco-crisis. The 'Development Decades' of the 1950s and 1960s initiated the severe energy crisis of the 1970s, which in turn led to the debt crisis in the 1980s and now the ecological crisis of the 1990s,⁶⁰ which continues and currently is complemented by an economic crisis. No government can ever make a free choice between environment and development. It follows that development per se is not always the precondition for ecological disasters and that only environmentally conducive planning and endeavors should count for real development. In that case, the desired goals of both environment and development are not in conflict, but rather directed towards the welfare of all, with future implications.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Desmond De Sousa, "Towards a Christian Perspective on Environment and Ecology," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 58, no. 9 (1994): 586.

⁶¹ Rabi Narayan Mohanty, "Environment and Development: A Search for an Alternative Paradigm" in *Environment and Economic Development*, Basudeb Sahoo, ed. (New Delhi: APH Publishing Corporation, 1996), 30.

The World Bank document acknowledges that economic development and sound environmental management are but complementary aspects of the same agenda.⁶² Global initiatives for alternative development strategies provided a paradigm shift towards sustainable development, a concept which evolved with U.N. sponsored summits and conferences.

The Debate on Sustainable Development

During the twentieth century, events leading to and during World War II struck a violent blow against human consciousness and experience, and the post-war scenario provoked discussions on the nature of human existence and the future of the Earth. The unrestricted consumption of natural resources led to environmental deterioration of catastrophic proportions. A new sense of awareness began to emerge to halt this frantic rush to disaster. Two important events in this direction were the Stockholm Conference (1972) and the Earth Summit (1992).⁶³ It was the Stockholm Conference which first placed environmental concerns on the world agenda.

The Stockholm Conference

As a result of growing concern with environmental issues the United Nations General Assembly organized the first major international conference on Human Environment, held in June 1972 in Stockholm. The conference began at a time when

⁶² World Bank, *World Development Report 1992: Development and the Environment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 25.

⁶³ K.M. Mathew, S.J., "In Search of a Theology of the Environment: The Message of the Earth Summit II," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 57, no. 4 (1993): 217.

environmentalists were divided on the question of whether population growth or industrial growth could be the primary cause for environmental damage. While there were disagreements regarding the scientific bases of the environmental crisis, sharp differences arose among the developing and developed nations on how to link goals of environmental protection and development on the same scale.⁶⁴ The Stockholm Conference statement highlights the "need for a common outlook and for common principles to inspire and guide the peoples of the world in the preservation and enhancement of the human environment."⁶⁵ The Stockholm Conference could be considered as the first stride by humanity in the right direction in an endeavor to promote a positive future for Earth, humankind, and all biota.

The Brundtland Commission on "Our Common Future"

In 1984, the United Nations constituted the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED or Brundtland Commission) to formulate 'a global agenda for change' and propose "long-term environmental strategies for achieving sustainable environment by the year 2000 and beyond."⁶⁶ The Commission published its report in 1987 entitled 'Our Common Future,' commonly known as the 'Brundtland Report' after the Commission's chairwoman, Gro Harlem Brundtland. The report called for a strategy that integrated development and the environment – described by the now-common term

⁶⁴ *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2008, s.v. "Stockholm Conference."

⁶⁵ *Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment Stockholm Conference 1972*, Available URL: <http://www.unep.org/Documents/Default.asp?DocumentID=97&ArticleID=1503> (accessed September 5, 2004).

⁶⁶ See Chairman's Foreword, World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), *Our Common Future* (hereafter cited as *WCED*), Indian Edition (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), ix.

‘sustainable development.’ The goal is to provide a growing and sustainable economy while preserving a sustainable environment.⁶⁷

The Brundtland Report defined sustainable development as follows: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”⁶⁸ This definition lays out the two basic concerns for social equity, dealing with both intra-generational and intergenerational aspects, and contains the two 'key concepts' of needs and limits. The concept of needs requires that 'overriding priority' should be given to the essential needs of the world's poor. The notion of limits implies that the current state of technology and social organization imposes limits on the ability of the environment to meet present and future needs, thus requiring both the developing and developed nations to reset their economic and social development goals in terms of sustainability. The report identifies poverty and the unequal distribution of resources as major causes of environmental degradation and maintains that “sustainable development requires meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to satisfy their aspirations for a better life.”⁶⁹ Mahatma Gandhi’s well-known aphorism, “the world has enough for everybody’s need, but not enough for everybody’s greed,”⁷⁰ is a pointer to the cause of

⁶⁷ Ibid., xii.

⁶⁸ *WCED*, 43.

⁶⁹ *WCED*, 8, 43.

⁷⁰ Guha, *Mahatma Gandhi and the Environmental Movement* (Pune: Parisar, 1993), 9.

the prevailing ecological crisis and keeps the current discourse on sustainable development in perspective.

The report observed that environmental damage from global consumption affects the poorest countries and primarily the poorest people, who are incapable of protecting themselves. The growing number of poor and landless people in the South gets involved in a struggle to survive, thereby placing huge pressure on the natural goods base; the results in natural goods depletion and further marginalization or displacement of people. In brief, the Brundtland Report delineates environmental protection, economic growth, and social equity as integral components for sustainable development.⁷¹ The sustainable development discourse revealed a paradigm shift with its primary focus on sustainability, setting up social, economic, and environmental priorities; traditional environmentalism gave prime importance to environmental protection. The notion invariably requires taking stock of the environmental effects of a prospective development project. Citing the case of the Silent Valley hydropower project of Kerala, the Commission reiterated that the abandonment of a hydro project which is likely to “disturb a rare ecological system could be a measure of progress, not a setback to development.”⁷² This observation has repercussions with regard to the question of sustainability of hydropower projects across the river Narmada.

The kaleidoscope of meanings attributed to the concept of sustainable development compels the support of people of varied ideological backgrounds. The

⁷¹ *WCED*, 40-41, 49.

⁷² *WCED*, 52-54.

goals such as the elimination of poverty, the quest for economic and social equity, the emphasis given to democratic institutions in the decision making process, the generation of alternative technologies, cutbacks in military spending, and an orientation away from consumerist lifestyles appear indeed radical in their import.⁷³ The concept of sustainable development, however, seems to endorse the capitalist economic system as the current dominant regime conducive to continued economic growth, and maintain a conspicuous silence about the spiraling consumption pattern in the North. Skeptical about the folly of “seeking solutions to our problems within the framework of the current development pattern,” Anupam Mishra, an environmentalist in India, indicates the limitation of the WCED findings since the Commission itself evolved as part of a framework which could also be held responsible for the present crises. Mishra formulates a criticism being voiced in the South that “the world’s major financial institutions and governments represent oppression, and the concept of sustainable development as used by them is no more than a thin veneer serving to conceal the bitter pill of exploitation and tyranny.”⁷⁴

The discourse on sustainability warrants a fundamental transition in the ways in which our economies are currently structured and natural goods are being utilized. It means a radical break from the past towards truly sustainable development. The global

⁷³ Neil Carter, *The Politics of the Environment: Ideas, Activism, Policy* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 199, 211-213. Neil Carter discusses at length about ‘ecological modernization,’ as a variation of the notion of sustainable development, which many industrialized countries have comfortably endorsed. Conceding that the eco-crisis is a structural outcome of capitalist society, the narrower concept of ecological modernization envisages an ‘eco-friendly’ reform of existing economic, social and political institutions with the help of green technologies, environmental audits and partnership between a decentralized state, corporate industry, scientists and environmental groups.

⁷⁴ Anupam Mishra quoted in Thijs de la Court, *Beyond Brundtland: Green Development in the 1990s*, trans. Ed Bayens and Nigel Harle (New York: New Horizons Press, 1990), 118-119.

dialogue on sustainable development continues through UN sponsored conferences and summits. In 1989, the WCED Report was debated in the UN General Assembly, which decided to organize a UN Conference on Environment and Development.

The Earth Summit

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, known as the 'Earth Summit,' was held at Rio de Janeiro (June 3-14, 1992) to reconcile worldwide economic development with environmental protection. The topics discussed included biodiversity, global warming, sustainable development, and preservation of tropical rain forests. The leaders of 178 nations signed the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development which took sustainable development as its core principle. The conference adopted Agenda 21, a comprehensive, international plan of action to achieve a more sustainable pattern of development in the 21st century.⁷⁵

At the Rio Earth Summit the discussion between the leaders of the North and the South was based on the central question of sustainability vs. survival. The North focused on the sustainability of Earth as the point of departure for the debate. Eco-crisis, in that case, demands preservation of the environment as an immediate global agenda. For the South, however, the survival needs of the majority of their people and their struggles for existence were of prime importance. The starting point for discussion was that justice in economic and political liaison between the North and the South would help prevent the

⁷⁵ "Earth Summit: UN Conference on Environment and Development," URL: <http://www.un.org/geninfo/bp/enviro.html> (accessed June 10, 2004).

plunder of Earth's goods.⁷⁶ Many participants were of the view that the burden of moral responsibility cannot be lessened by some face-saving technical resolutions or legislation alone. But the debates generally ignored the crucial question of the causes and origins of eco-crisis. What becomes mandatory when this is discussed is a radical change in the political and economic systems, to be supported and strengthened by social and moral imperatives.

The Rio Declaration

The Rio Declaration confirmed the integral connection between environmental issues and development by stating that "in order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it (Principle 4)." The Declaration's 15th, 16th and 17th Principles set out three other important ideas that are now widely accepted by governments: first, the "precautionary approach" stipulated that "when there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation." Second, the "polluter pays" principle required that "the polluter should, in principle, bear the cost of pollution." Third, the 17th principle outlined 'environmental impact assessment' as a powerful instrument to be employed by a competent national authority to evaluate the adverse impact of proposed activities on the environment.⁷⁷ These principles are important guidelines for determining the environmental sustainability of

⁷⁶ Desmond De Sousa, "Towards a Christian Perspective on Environment and Ecology," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection VJTR* 58, no. 9 (1994): 585-586.

⁷⁷ *Rio Declaration*.

any development project, as is evidenced in the case of the Silent Valley project in Kerala, where evaluation led to its withdrawal. But the Narmada hydroelectric projects demonstrate a blatant disregard for these vital norms.

From Rio to Johannesburg Summit 2002

A follow-up gathering "Earth Summit +5," which was a special session of the U.N. General Assembly which met in New York on June 23-27, 1997, reaffirmed that Agenda 21 remains the fundamental program of action for sustainable development and stressed the need to accelerate its implementation in a comprehensive manner.⁷⁸ The World Summit on Sustainable Development, convened in Johannesburg, South Africa, September 2-4, 2002, reaffirmed a global commitment to sustainable development. The agenda for the Johannesburg Summit was to put sustainable development into action. The Summit assumed "a collective responsibility to advance and strengthen the interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars of sustainable development — economic development, social development and environmental protection — at the local, national, regional and global levels."⁷⁹ At Johannesburg, decisive steps were taken towards 'constructive partnership for change' ensuring global cooperation for sustainable development, linking together governments and people across national boundaries.⁸⁰ These multilateral partnerships, tied to government commitments, will provide integral

⁷⁸ Program for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, *Nineteenth special session, Agenda item 8-Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly*, 11th plenary meeting, 28 June 1997, para.3, <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/spec/aress19-2.htm> (accessed June 3, 2004).

⁷⁹From Our Origins to the Future": Para. 5, *Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development*, http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/WSSD_POI_PD/English/POI_PD.htm (accessed June 3, 2004).

⁸⁰ Para. 16, 31, *Johannesburg Declaration*.

tools and additional resources to promote implementation of sustainable development.

The Nexus of Development and Eco crisis in India

State of India's Political Economy

After Independence, as a democratic nation, India implemented various development schemes and programs, with the backing of large human and economic resources providing sustained economic growth and basic minimum services for social development. Gandhi visualized a specific development paradigm for India to build up the nation and her political economy by enhancing the accumulation of capital in the rural sector through indigenous industries. Gandhi set his priorities on the rural poor and emphasized self-reliance and decentralization as the basic tenets for development. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, had a different perspective and introduced a mixed economic system for India directed towards a socialist pattern of society through democratic planning. V. Mathew Kurian gives a detailed account of the implementation of the Five Year Plans in modern India. The First Five Year Plan began in 1951, followed by the next plan based on the twin objectives of economic growth and social justice. It prescribed a two-pronged industrialization strategy by building up growth oriented heavy and key industries in the public sector, and promoting light industries for employment generation, with a view to ensure social justice. The plan outlaid community development programs, initiated land reforms, and promoted cooperative organizations to strengthen village economies. The Third Plan (1961) targeted a balanced development of both industrial and agricultural sectors. Severe

foreign exchange crises in the 1970s and 1980s compelled India to approach the World Bank and the IMF for loans.⁸¹ In July 1991 The Narasimha Rao government started the New Economic Policy by accepting the World Bank-IMF prescription of ‘Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP),’⁸² conditions which were contrary to the legacy of Nehruvian economic policies.

Removal of poverty has always been on the top of the agenda of India's Five Year Plans. The Eighth Five Year Plan of India (1992-97) identified ‘human development’ as the ultimate goal of the development process, rendering priority to goals such as employment generation, population control, illiteracy, education, health, and provision of drinking water and adequate food.⁸³ During this plan period an average growth rate in GDP⁸⁴ of 7.1 per cent was maintained, showing a significant impact of the new economic policy with the processes of deregulation and globalization. While the Ninth

⁸¹ V. Mathew Kurian, “Indian Political Economy in the Post-Independent Period,” *Theology for Our Times* (Bangalore: ECC) no. 6 (August 1999): 114-119.

⁸² SAP included market friendly measures like liberalization of imports, devaluation of Indian currency, and privatization of public sector undertakings and reduction of subsidies, import duty, and taxes. SAP led to Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization, commonly referred to as LPG especially by people of India.

⁸³ Ministry of Environment and Forests, *India-Country Profile, Implementation of Agenda 21: Review of Progress made since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, 1992*, Dated 19 December 1994 (hereafter cited as *Agenda 21: India-Country Profile*), <http://www.un.org/esa/earthsummit/india-cp.htm> (accessed June 4, 2004), Information Provided by the Government of India to the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development Fifth Session, 7-25 April 1997, New York, 15.

⁸⁴ Traditionally, the level of per capita income has been regarded as a summary indicator of the economic well-being of a country and growth targets have therefore focused on growth in per capita income or per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Development is equated with economic growth and measured by the magnitude of the GDP being the monetary value of all the goods and services in the economy.

plan (1997-2002) has given priority to agriculture and rural development, the Tenth Plan targets the feasibility of doubling the per capita income during the next ten years and 8.0% GDP growth for the period 2002-2007. While admitting that earlier reforms were centered on the industrial economy and reforms in the agricultural sector were neglected, the Approach Paper views enhancement of agricultural development as a core element since growth in this sector is likely to lead to the widest spread of benefits to the rural poor, including for women agricultural workers to assure them of gender equality.⁸⁵ Planning has been the cornerstone of the Indian approach to economic development since independence and the country made significant progress through Five Year Plans, which reflected the changing imperatives of the times.

An assessment of the post-Independence period of Indian political economy will reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the state planning process and more importantly, the new economic policy. The major accomplishment of the Indian state, as a political institution, is its enduring parliamentary democracy amidst a plurality of castes, classes, languages, and religions. The maintenance of planning as the mainstay of the economic administration has proved to be a remarkable achievement. The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments have provided a political support base for decentralized planning through local administrative bodies. But the important question now is which segments of society will be affected by the Structural Adjustment Programs, and in what way. Commenting on the process of economic reforms initiated by the Government of India as an important departure, Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen note that while there is too

⁸⁵ *Approach Paper to the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007)*, Planning Commission, Government Of India, New Delhi (1st September, 2001), 1, 3, 5.

much government interference with controls that stifle economic initiatives in some fields (such as restrictions in trade), the Indian economy suffered from insufficient and inefficient activity in many other fields (particularly in basic education and elementary health care).⁸⁶ The adverse impact of the policy is likely to be more on the weaker sections like women, the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and other oppressed classes of the society. The underinvestment in the social sector has to be effectively tackled while the overactive control regime is streamlined so that the imbalance in government policy could be rectified. The responsibility of the government is to provide a safety net to the weaker sections by empowering them to have access to basic minimum needs like food, shelter, clothing, education, health care and more importantly, employment opportunities. The Tenth Plan appears to have acknowledged the importance of such bold initiatives.

The thrusts of the New Economic Policy, however, inflict direct and indirect impacts on the natural and social environments of the country. Specifically, promotion of exports of products and resources from primary sectors like agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and mining with a view to augment foreign exchange reserves, and deregulation of industries without adequate assessment of environmental impacts, are policies that would have deleterious effects on the environment as well as the livelihood securities of small farmers and weaker sectors. Utsa Patnaik, an Indian Economist, has raised a critical voice about the impact of the economic reforms on the agricultural sector. She posits that “the gains made in agriculture and food availability over four decades have

⁸⁶Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, *India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 202, 203.

been wiped out in a single decade of reform,” and singles out the State of Andhra Pradesh which registered more than 3,000 recorded cases of farmer suicides during 1999-2004.⁸⁷ Though the economic reforms may ultimately be beneficial by enhancing the supposed ‘trickling down effect’ of increases in wealth, eventually reducing the condition of poverty, there are yet no clear mechanisms in sight for any effective control of environmental degradation. The industrial and agricultural development projects are taking a toll on land, forest, and water. A discourse on the political economy of the country will naturally lead the discussion to the state of the environment in the country.

State of India’s Environment

The Country Profile on India submitted to the Earth Summit 1997 at New York by the Ministry of Environment and Forests⁸⁸ (MoEF) of the Government of India (GOI) outlines some major initiatives towards the implementation of Agenda 21 and presents a rather bright picture of the state of India’s environment. The report specifies the geographical statistics of India as having a land frontier of 15,200 km., a sea coast length of 7,500 km.; India is the seventh largest country in the world with a total geographical area of 3.28 million sq. km. of which 23.2 percent is specified as forest area.⁸⁹ However, the latest survey results (2001) show a considerable decline: 20.55% is now the total

⁸⁷ Utsa Patnaik, ‘Rural India in Ruins,’ *Frontline*, Volume 21 - Issue 05, February 28 - March 12, 2004, <http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl2105/stories/20040312007001600.htm> (accessed February 3, 2004).

⁸⁸ The Ministry of Environment and Forests is the nodal agency in the Government for environmental protection and responsible for Natural Resource Management.

⁸⁹ *Agenda 21: India-Country Profile*, 6.

forest cover of the country, out of which 41 per cent is degraded forest.⁹⁰ The loss of forest cover takes a definite toll on environmental sustainability, and on provision of the forest produce needs of indigenous people, industry, and other sectors. Another major concern is that India has experienced an expansion of degraded land area from 130 million hectares in 1987 to 188 million in 1993.⁹¹ Population stabilization is a vital precondition for sustainable development in India. Over the past five decades, according to the Census 2001, India's population has grown nearly three-fold to one billion, from 361 million in 1951. India is now the second most populous nation in the world. The National Population Policy, 2000, alerts, "India's current annual increase in population of 15.5 million is large enough to neutralize efforts to conserve the resource endowment and environment."⁹² The success or failure of population stabilization programs has a direct bearing on human and economic development in India.

India places high hopes on the trade policy components of the reform process to provide additional resources for economic growth in the context of sustainable development. On changing consumption patterns, the report by GOI, *India-Country Profile: Agenda 21* endorses an awareness campaign for conservation of resources and moderation of demands, acknowledging the influence of Gandhian perspectives.⁹³ The

⁹⁰ Ministry of Environment and Forests, GOI, *Annual Report 2003-04*, <http://envfor.nic.in/report/report.html> (accessed June 17, 2004), 5.

⁹¹ Reidhead P. W., Gupta S. and Joshi D., *State of India's Environment Report; A Quantitative Analysis*, [Report no. 95EE52] (New Delhi: Tata Energy Research Institute, 1996), pp. 31.

⁹² Ministry of Environment and Forests, *State of the Environment: India 2001* (New Delhi: MoEF, GOI, 2001), 9.

⁹³ *India-Country Profile: Agenda 21*, 23.

report highlights the measures taken to stabilize population growth since 1952 when the Family Planning Program initially began. One other major initiative is the notification by MoEF in 1994 making it obligatory for all developmental activities to get clearance from the ministry, in compliance with an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) study.⁹⁴ EIA, initially used for the appraisal of river valley projects, was later made mandatory for thirty categories of developmental activities such as industrial and infrastructure projects. The report attributes due credit to the role of over ten thousand voluntary organizations in popularizing eco-development, conservation, and alternative approaches, and more importantly, providing basic services like drinking water facilities, sanitation, and road development.⁹⁵ Realizing the need for international cooperation in dealing with the issue of sustainable development, India has signed and ratified a range of international conventions and agreements on environment and related issues and has been successfully implementing them. But India is no exception to the global phenomenon of ecological degradation and depletion of natural resources.

The crucial difference between the environmental problems facing India and those of the developed countries is that in India they are more immediate, and livelihood-threatening in nature. Rapid population growth and poverty put serious constraints on sustainable development.⁹⁶ But as the population growth and poverty levels in India are declining significantly, problems of population and poverty could not be taken as the sole

⁹⁴ *India-Country Profile: Agenda 21*, 30, 31.

⁹⁵ *India-Country Profile: Agenda 21*, 40.

⁹⁶ World Bank, *World Development Report 1992*, 26.

culprits of the current crisis; in this context, other factors which are responsible need to be explored as well. It appears that under-development and under-utilization of resources by the natives, on the one hand, and extensive exploitation by the colonial powers, on the other, were partly responsible for the perpetuation of poverty in pre-independent India. Under the current state of political economy and environment, there is every chance of poverty, unemployment, and inequality to persist due to ever-increasing depletion and destruction of the environment. In a significant analysis, the Approach Paper to the Tenth Plan reiterates that “environmental management and economic development are mutually supportive aspects of the same agenda. A poor environment undermines development, while inadequate development results in a lack of resources for environmental protection.”⁹⁷ But the questions remain: development for whom, in which direction, and on whose side? While there is still a major apprehension regarding the increase in the rate of population, rapid economic growth has indeed led to many adverse consequences and unforeseen environmental problems. Pollution in India’s air and water, soil degradation, deforestation, desertification, shrinking rivers and wetlands, inadequate public health and sanitation facilities, growing water scarcity, falling groundwater tables, and overextraction of water for irrigation and industrial purposes are some of the environmental problems that need to be placed first in the state agenda before any poverty eradication or population control program can make significant progress. Within the wide spectrum of environmental issues, this study will focus special attention on issues related to forests and rivers, as these form the context out of which Chipko

⁹⁷ *Approach Paper to the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007)*, 8, 9.

Andolan and Narmada Bachao Andolan emerged as two significant environmental movements in India.

Forests provide much of the natural wealth of a nation: food, fodder, fuel, fertilizer, and fiber are among the goods derived from forests. The shrinking of forest cover in India has been mainly due to deforestation for agricultural and industrial purposes. The increasing depletion of forests has contributed to inadvertent floods, denudation of catchment areas of rivers, soil erosion, and changes in the micro-climate, thereby driving the country eventually towards ecological disaster. The Forest (Conservation) Act of 1980 declared India's forests as an environmental and social resource rather than as a commercial resource. The National Afforestation and Eco-Development Board (NAEB) pays special attention to regeneration of degraded forests and imposes strict controls over diversion of forests to other uses.⁹⁸ The National Forest Policy of 1988, which *inter alia* sought to maintain environmental stability, marked a radical shift in priority in favor of conservation in order to ensure environmental stability and ecological balance, including atmospheric equilibrium. It also envisaged active participatory management of the forest by the local communities by launching the Joint Forest Management (JFM) program in June 1990. In its recently released draft National Environment Policy, MoEF proposed new initiatives such as attributing legal recognition to the traditional rights of forest-dwelling tribes.⁹⁹ This proposal will indeed rectify a

⁹⁸ *India-Country Profile: Agenda 21*, 47, 48.

⁹⁹ B.S. Padmanabhan, "For Sustainable Solutions," *Frontline*, Mar. 12 - 25, 2005, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl2207/stories/20050408001710300.htm> (accessed June 3, 2004).

historical injustice meted out to the indigenous population. History is replete with instances of human-inflicted violence on soil. The age-old practice of uprooting the original inhabitants of the land and transferring the legal rights to private ownership continues even today, but under the pretense of development. Displacement of project-affected people, mostly tribals, raises the question of their physical and cultural survival.

For centuries, human civilizations have flourished on the fertile valleys of major rivers. Rivers carry the lifeline for India with fourteen major river systems and nearly a hundred medium and minor river systems. Though India is one of the wettest countries in the world, getting an average rainfall of 1170 mm, the country could not make the best use of the natural endowment and miserably failed to arrest the devastating annual cycles of floods and droughts.¹⁰⁰ Precipitation is confined to only about three or four months in a year during monsoon and varies from 100 mm in the western parts of Rajasthan to over 10000 mm at Cherrapunji in the north-eastern state of Meghalaya.¹⁰¹ With the loss of large tracts of forests and vegetation which formed a cushion in the past as they retained monsoon water, a high rainfall would now cause heavy floods, while a variation below normal would create droughts. In the State of the Environment 2001 Report, MoEF admits that the most pressing problem in India in the coming decades would be the availability of fresh water. The shortage of water resources will be due to the cumulative effect of factors like urban growth patterns, increased industrial activities, and overuse of

¹⁰⁰ Md. Tarique, "Water Crisis in India," In *Environmental Economics and Development*, ed. Jiwitesh Kumar Singh and Debendra Kumar Das (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 2004), 156, 162.

¹⁰¹ Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR), *National Water Policy 2002* (New Delhi: MoWR, GOI, April 2002), 1.

fertilizers and chemicals in aggressive farming methods. The National Water Policy (1987) stipulates that drinking water should be given priority over the use of water for other purposes.¹⁰² However, large hydro-power and irrigation projects, which form the largest consumers of fresh water, get priority in state planning. The National Water Policy 2002 calls for an integrated and multi-disciplinary approach to the planning, formulation, clearance, and implementation of water resources projects, including catchment area treatment and management, assessment of environmental and ecological aspects, the rehabilitation of affected people, and command area development.¹⁰³ The hydro projects raise socio-economic issues such as the questions of environmental sustainability, equity in the distribution of water, and proper resettlement and rehabilitation policy for the projected affected persons.

Water, the symbol of life in different cultures and a precious resource for sustaining life, was once considered a common property, the distribution of which was done accordingly. With the emergence of the new economic policies, the international monetary agencies themselves are leading the initiatives to proclaim water a commodity or product so that its distribution could be privatized.¹⁰⁴ Procuring water has thus become a laborious task for women who are traditionally assigned the role of fetching water for household utilities; they are being estranged from their own land due to displacement behind the veil of development, specifically with the dam projects. Water,

¹⁰² MoEF, *State of the Environment: India 2001*, 5.

¹⁰³ MoWR, *National Water Policy 2002*, 1, 4.

¹⁰⁴ Shripad Dharmadhikary, "Prepaid Water," *The People's Movement* 1, no.5 (2004): 18.

the most abundant life sustaining resource, has thus become a precious ‘commodity,’ the struggles for which are struggles for life. Launching the ‘Water for Life Decade,’ Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General opined that “the world’s water resources are our lifeline for survival, and for sustainable development” and that “we must show that water resources need not be a source of conflict. Instead, they can be a catalyst for cooperation.”¹⁰⁵ Participatory management of natural goods, especially water, demands a holistic approach that integrates social and economic development that is both equitable and sustainable, and includes protection of natural ecosystems. For the majority of the poor people in India, the problem of addressing the more critical issues like water shortage and lack of sanitation facilities takes priority over the larger ecological problems the world is facing today, like ozone layer depletion. Eco-degradation makes the equilibrium in nature out of balance and the question now is how to relate the critical and real problems of the common people with global environmental concerns. It is by linking the local and global challenges that we will be better able to tackle the issues effectively.

Struggles for Survival by the Poor, the Tribals, and Women

The ecological crisis is integrally related to nature and to people’s struggle to sustain first, their life, and second, their livelihood. Among human communities, the most affected are the poor, the *Adivasis* (indigenous and tribal people), and women who live very close to nature. For them life has become a struggle for survival.

¹⁰⁵ Message of the Secretary-General to Launch The "Water for Life" Decade-22 March 2005, <http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/> (accessed May 5, 2005).

The Poor: The Moral Priority of a Nation

Elimination of poverty remains an enduring task in India as a political, economic and moral priority of the nation. The exploitive lifestyle of the northern nations as well as the wealthy and middleclass sections of southern countries could be traced as being responsible for laying the seeds of poverty across the world; this is a fact which the wealthy nations rarely admit. In a bid to meet their subsistence needs, the poor are forced to exploit the natural resource base, thereby becoming “both the victims and agents of environmental damage.”¹⁰⁶ Walter Fernandes, a social scientist, traces the origins of the condition of poverty and associated environmental degradation to the advent of colonization and the accompanying patterns of development. The major motive of colonization in the course of the industrial revolution was the acquisition of raw materials, which in turn required control of the land and water resources. Viewing fundamental natural goods, soil and water, the newly formed independent nations began large-scale exploitation of forests, rivers, and agriculture with a profit motive. The urban middle class people are more concerned about the intrinsic worth and aesthetic value of nature in the form of forests, animals, and rivers which need to be protected. Tribal societies, on the other hand, are dependent on natural goods for their sustenance, and the sole means of their livelihood. The next stage of economic exploitation is that of a market economy or trade-based economic structure. Soil and water became materials for trade with productive value. With the introduction of legislation passed in 1984, the state possessed unlimited rights to acquire land for development purposes and the bill

¹⁰⁶ World Bank, *World Development Report 1992*, 30.

promulgated in 1987 for irrigation and generation of electricity enabled the state to control the water resources, eventually leading to privatization of soil and water.¹⁰⁷

Poverty alleviation has remained an ethical requisite while the agenda to safeguard the interests of the middle class and the wealthy received undue priority in development planning over these years, a matter of grave mismanagement on the part of the government.

Population Growth-Poverty Nexus and Environment

There is a wide-spread assumption that unlimited population growth is the major reason for abject poverty. Paulose Mar Paulose silences this criticism by bringing the example of China. This, the most populous nation, once struck down due to foreign invasions and internal conflicts, resurged victorious. It eliminated conditions of poverty by effective measures to contain population growth by maintaining a supportive chain of a community oriented action plan. Mar Paulose opines that the blame is put on the issue of population growth in order that the vile of the rich and the powerful who maintain the world economic structure is made invisible. The government, however, maintains another version of the origins of poverty in India: poverty results from backwardness in industrialization, technological know-how, and production capability. The truth is that the nation witnessed tremendous economic growth after independence and yet the majority of the people are struggling below the poverty line, a fact which points to the roots of the problem lying elsewhere. Mar Paulose is emphatic in elucidating the cause

¹⁰⁷ Walter Fernandes, “*Aagolavatkaranavum Paristhithiyum* (Globalization and Environment),” in *Haritha Daivasastram* (Green Theology) Mathew Koshy Punnakkad (Tiruvalla: Theological Literature Council, 2002), 69-91.

of poverty as a fundamental condition created by human action which evolved through an unjust social framework. He indicates that "poverty is the byproduct of wealth, exploitation, and injustice."¹⁰⁸ This affirmation appears to be true in the Indian society which is stratified into different levels separated on the basis of caste, class, religion, and language. A powerful and wealthy minority controls the economic system, depriving the poor majority of any rightful share in the allocation of natural goods or in the decision-making process. People's participation in decision making and natural goods management is an essential pre-requisite for social transformation, and alleviation of poverty is possible only through radical changes in the social structure. Small scale initiatives by local people can ensure just and equitable distribution of natural goods.

Garibi Hatao: A Moral Imperative

Identifying poverty as the primary ill of Indian society, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi proposed '*Garibi Hatao* (Remove Poverty)' as a political slogan and implemented a twenty point program to eradicate poverty. Participating in the 1972 Stockholm Conference on Human Environment, Indira Gandhi proclaimed that "poverty is the worst polluter."¹⁰⁹ In India, as in the rest of the world, where the natural goods, economic wealth, and political power are clustered under the sway of a few, *Garibi Hatao* as a slogan has to gather political will and strength so as to be effective to bring about the noble goal of fundamental social change that would enable the poor, the weak,

¹⁰⁸ Paulose Mar Paulose, "*Vikasanathinte Vedastra Veekshanam* (Theological Vision of Faith)" in *Haritha Daivasastram*, Mathew Koshy Punnakkadu ed. (Tiruvalla: Theological Literature Council, 2002), 100-101.

¹⁰⁹ See Amita Baviskar, *In the Belly of the River: Tribal Conflicts over Development in the Narmada Valley* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 25.

and the marginalized to have greater control over natural goods for their subsistence. The World Development Report 1992 categorically states that “alleviating poverty is both a moral imperative and a requisite for environmental sustainability.”¹¹⁰ Instead of offering a preferential option for the causes of the poor, the policies of the governments tend to be often more inclined to the interests of the powerful industrial lobbies and multinational corporations, which opt for a preferential discrimination of the poor and the marginalized.

Poverty and Eco-justice

The nexus between economic exploitation and ecological deprivation is a reality involving instances of injustice. Massive deforestation events leading to climatic changes and the extensive displacement of the tribal poor from their habitat for the sake of development projects give ample evidence for such connections which deny justice. The relationships between human beings and nature tend to be unequal and exploitative because the human exhibits unlimited control and misuse of natural resources without even bothering about the need to preserve them for posterity. While emphasizing the concerns of the developing countries, the World Development Report admits that to alleviate poverty, sustained and equitable economic growth is essential.¹¹¹ Jurgen Moltmann succinctly makes his position clear on issues of justice in this statement: "We shall not be able to achieve social justice without justice for natural environment; we shall not be able to achieve justice for nature without social justice."¹¹² Poverty, the

¹¹⁰ World Bank, *World Development Report 1992*, 30.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹¹² Jurgen Moltmann, *The Future of Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979) 130.

worst form of economic injustice, is a source of ecological degradation and as such, stimulates the struggles of the poor and the marginalized for justice; these are, in fact, ecological campaigns. The ecological movements in India bear witness to this reality.

Tribals: The Indigenous Heritage of a Nation

Tribal, *Adivasi* (literally meaning ‘original inhabitants’), and ‘indigenous’¹¹³ are terms which are used interchangeably to denote the original population in India. The MoEF document *India-Country Profile: Agenda 21* presents the whole population of the country as indigenous to India. The Constitution of India does not define Scheduled Tribes as such. According to the 1991 census the Scheduled Tribes form 8.08 % of the total population of India, while the Scheduled Castes account for 16.48 %.¹¹⁴ The Tribal populations remain oppressed, and deprived economically and socially. They are not indigenous in the same sense as the original, native peoples of the American and Australian continents. However, the tribal or *Adivasi* populations in India come under the purview of the UN definition of indigenous peoples. Amita Baviskar is even cautious about the use of the terms ‘tribes’ or ‘tribal’ in contrast to the group of castes because of the porosity of the boundary between them ever since they have coexisted, for centuries,

¹¹³ ‘United Nations Guide for Indigenous Peoples’ defines indigenous peoples as “the inheritors and practitioners of unique cultures and ways of relating to other people and to the environment. Indigenous peoples have retained social, cultural, economic and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live. Despite their cultural differences, the various groups of indigenous peoples around the world share common problems related to the protection of their rights as distinct peoples.” The document presents an estimate of 300 million indigenous people in more than 70 countries worldwide. See ‘United Nations Guide for Indigenous Peoples,’ *Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations System: An overview, Leaflet no 1*, 4, <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/racism/00-indigenousguide.html> (accessed July 17, 2004).

¹¹⁴ *1991 Census of India*, <http://www.censusindia.net/scst.html> (accessed July 17, 2004).

in India.¹¹⁵ This study will mainly use the term ‘tribes’ or ‘tribals’ since the GOI documents refer to the tribal indigenous population as Scheduled Tribes. Without providing an adequate definition of Scheduled Tribes, the Constitution of India Article 366(25) refers to scheduled tribes as those communities who are scheduled in accordance with Article 342 of the Constitution. As per the notified schedule, there are 533 tribes. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA), which functions also as the nodal agency for tribal welfare, points out that the literacy rate of Scheduled Tribes is around 29.60 percent, as against the national average of 52 percent; more than three-quarters of Scheduled Tribes women are illiterate.¹¹⁶ This is a clear indicator of the downtrodden condition of the tribals.

While discussing the unresolved issues in tribal development, the Approach Paper to the Tenth Plan admits the plight of the tribals in India today:

From the viewpoint of policy, it is important to understand that tribal communities are vulnerable not only because they are poor, assetless and illiterate compared to the general population; often their distinct vulnerability arises from their inability to negotiate and cope with the process of integration with the mainstream economy, society, cultural and political system, from which they were historically protected as the result of their relative isolation. Post-independence, the requirements of planned development brought with them the spectre of dams, mines, industries and roads on tribal lands. With these came the concomitant processes of displacement, both literal and metaphorical — as tribal institutions and practices were forced into uneasy existence with or gave way to market or formal state institutions (most significantly, in the legal sphere), tribals found themselves at a profound disadvantage with respect to the influx of better-equipped outsiders into tribal areas.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Amita Baviskar, *In the Belly of the River: Tribal Conflicts over Development in the Narmada Valley* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 44.

¹¹⁶ MoTA, GOI, *Annual Report (200-01)*, <http://tribal.nic.in/index1.html> (accessed December 15, 2004).

¹¹⁷ *Approach Paper to the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007)*, 7.

Tribal peoples are pushed out of their livelihood and resource bases both by the corporate bodies and the state governments when many state-sponsored development projects make them domestic refugees through mass displacement. The conflict deepens when the indigenous populations are kept from their livelihood, resources, trade centers, and even market. The Tenth Plan attempts to tackle these issues by a comprehensive National Policy for Empowering Tribals through their integrated development.¹¹⁸

The tribal social system is for the most part an unorganized economic structure based mainly on subsistence economy. The tribal people consider preservation of forest, protection of living beings, and conservation of other natural goods as an imperative duty. Their ecological consciousness thus turns out to be just and ethical. Displaced from their traditional lands, they face double alienation: first from the benefits of technology-based development, and second, from their own land, life, and culture for the sake of development for the benefit of others.¹¹⁹ The people who resist being displaced from their habitat for the sake of development projects become refugees in their homeland. Development projects, which do not confer any benefit on tribals directly, render them landless and uprooted, and eventually run into an undeclared global war against indigenous peoples and nature.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 11.

¹¹⁹ Xavier Jayaraj, et al., "Ethical Perspectives on Technology and Ecology," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 57, no. 4 (1993): 229.

Women-Children: Their Wealth and Future Prospects

Women who encounter unequal relations in the social, political, and economic realms of society are the primary victims of environmental degradation at both the local and global levels. In India, where society is stratified on the basis of castes, *dalits* are placed outside the caste system as “untouchables,” on racial lines along with the tribal populations. Like the dalits, institutionalized inequalities often render women alienated within the Indian Society.¹²⁰ Probably the first victims of any environmental degradation are the women among the poor. In this respect, a tribal woman would face double alienation. Caught between poverty and environmental degradation, poor women who interact with the environment are the worst victims. Deforestation, which often results in fuel wood crisis, forces village women to travel for miles in search of wood. The community requires women to bring water for cooking and washing from distant places. Fodder scarcity also affects women first, since the care of livestock falls on their shoulders as their responsibility. This burden on women in turn has a direct impact on children who are denied of motherly care during infancy. Girls face triple alienation as they are forced to stay home while their mothers go in search of food, water, fuel, and fodder. They are then entrusted with household activities, thereby being discouraged from going to school. The project-affected women in Narmada valley are oppressed primarily because they are women; they face double alienation since they are *dalits* and tribals, and are displaced from their own land due to the dam building project.

¹²⁰ The word *dalit* is understood to have one or more of the following meanings - means "burst, split, scattered, dispersed, broken, crushed". In India, *dalits* are placed at the lowest rung in the caste hierarchy based on ritual purity and occupation, and outside the *varna* system. The Scheduled Castes prefer the term '*dalit*' as it represents a misplaced and downtrodden identity.

While pursuing a discussion on women's involvement with natural goods, Sandhya Venkateswaran traces the impact of ecological destruction on women, and their complete marginalization from government-initiated environmental management policies and programs. She further points out that women need not be viewed as mere victims of ecological degradation but as managers of traditional systems of natural resources management.¹²¹ This fact is evident from women taking a leading role in the ecological movements like Chipko and Narmada Bachao Andolan; women generally shy away from taking political responsibilities in the government, or involvement with government-sponsored programs. This reluctance has to be viewed in the context of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Bills (1992) providing women a third of all elected offices in the local system of *Panchayati Raj* (self-governance), in both the rural and urban administrative bodies. The MoEF document *India-Country Profile, Implementation of Agenda 21* highlights a radical shift in emphasis with regards to the approach of successive Five Year Plans towards women. There is a transition of policy initiatives from 'welfare' to 'development' and finally to 'empowerment' of women.¹²² The document gives further assurance of women's involvement in the conservation of environment.

Considering the strong impact of environmental factors on the sustenance and livelihood of women, full participation of women will be ensured in conservation of environment and control of environmental degradation. Further, women will be

¹²¹ Sandhya Venkateswaran, *Environment, Development and the Gender Gap* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995), 223-225.

¹²² *India-Country Profile, Implementation of Agenda 21*, 89.

involved and their perspectives reflected in the policies and programs of management of eco-system and natural resources.¹²³

Women play a very crucial role in protection and conservation of the environment and thereby help to maintain the delicate ecological balance. Environmental movements like Chipko and NBA drew vital inspiration from the ecological perspectives, political will, and moral strength of women in solidarity. Every struggle of women is a struggle for life and survival. Both women and children are natural caretakers and managers of the environment and as such, they form the wealth and ensure the future of a nation and its ecosystems.

Development-Displacement

The poor are uprooted from their homeland in the name of development and what they lose in the process is their soil and habitat. The number of people who are displaced is on the rise due to various development projects which deny their identity, culture, and spirituality which form the core of their existence. Such displacement forces them to leave their soil and agricultural lands and move to the peripheries of society, thereby creating more slums and concomitant environmental misery. The plight of those communities dependent on community wealth and nature, when displaced from areas affected by projects, is miserable as they are afflicted by poverty. The people who were displaced from the state controlled land are deprived of any compensation, and their numbers are unaccounted-for. Fernandes depicts the escalating numbers of displaced people as crossing fifty million, half of whom lost their land due to hydro and irrigation

¹²³ Ibid., 91.

projects; the rest were forced to leave their homeland for projects related to industries, mining, roads, defense, tourism, and human resource development.¹²⁴ With the powers vested in the governments, the authorities give priority to development projects and neglects people's subsistence needs. The resultant sidelining of people's interests means an increase in the conditions of poverty, leading to further alienation.

Conclusion

A meaningful and relevant search for alternatives will involve deliberate efforts on the part of the afflicted minorities. They must derive real alternatives, in the context of the life experiences of their struggles for a livelihood in the wake of the new economic system. An ecological vision will provide legitimacy to any alternative endeavor in which basic human values and rights are upheld and nourished. An alternative strategy has to derive its strength from the stories of people's struggles and afflictions. It becomes imperative that alternative planning envision sustenance of life and equitable distribution of natural goods as the basic norms while preserving soil, water, and air as life-sustaining natural capital for the use of posterity. Therefore, sustainable development is placed as a primary category in the search for alternatives though the means of achieving it are rather complex and difficult for India with its large population and mass poverty. A developing nation like India must take bold initiatives towards sustainable development goals while population control and poverty alleviation programs should continue as political, economic and moral imperatives.

¹²⁴ Walter Fernandes, *Aagolavatkaranavum Paristhithiyum* (Globalization and Environment), In *Haritha Daivasastram*(Mal), ed. Mathew Koshy Punnakkad (CSS: Tiruvalla), 79-80.

Ecological crises may involve local problems with global implications, the magnitude of which could be either big or small. Large scale exploitation of natural goods by development projects with a profit motive contributes to ecological degradation. Therefore, solidarity and local cooperation of people who share common concerns and strategies for resistance becomes a social imperative. Here emerges the significance of environmental movements with broader and clearer vision to uphold human rights and preserve environmental benefits. Only such movements will be capable of identifying and resolving ecological problems of grave concern.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CHIPKO MOVEMENT: STRUGGLE FOR A FOREST

Introduction

Environmental Movements in India evolved as people's response to the emerging new threats to their survival. The depletion of natural goods such as water, forests, and land largely contributed to this threat. The prime focus of these Movements has been to conserve such life-supporting means on which most of the poor, the tribal people, and women in India depend for survival. *Andolan* (movement) is a term widely used in India for social movements in general.

Both Chipko Bachao Andolan and the Narmada Bachao Andolan emerged in the post-Independence era. Local communities and local leadership launched them to control local supplies. These grassroots movements gathered momentum by engaging in varied struggles over natural goods, livelihoods and autonomy. An analysis of these two environmental movements in India reveals a common ground in the basic ideologies and strategies which they have adopted. Both movements rely on nonviolent methods of protest in the Gandhian ideological tradition. While the Chipko Movement is mainly a response to the question of forest management, the Narmada Movement deals with water management. A historical narrative of these two movements will reveal how their commitments to social justice and environmental concerns have benefited indigenous communities.

The Chipko Movement of India emerged in the Himalayan foothills. It achieved great significance among the environmental movements for its successful struggle against deforestation and thereby protecting the environment and society. The word *Chipko* means "to embrace" or "stick to," signifying the strategy adopted by the movement to protect the Himalayan forests from logging.¹²⁵ Women, being dependents on the forests for fuel, fodder and water for their subsistence, played a significant role in the Chipko Movement as its vanguard. The Chipko Movement took birth in the northern part of former Uttar Pradesh consisting of eight Himalayan districts of Uttaranchal (recently renamed as Uttarakhand) state. The mountainous region of the Himalayas is the home of several sacred places of Hindu worship and the watershed of the river Ganga (Ganges).

Forests as Central to Indian Civilization

Indian civilization is often called the '*aranya samskriti*,' which means the culture of forest.¹²⁶ India celebrates a unity in diversity with its mixed cultural milieu which corresponds to the rich and diverse heritage of forests. Vandana Shiva (hereafter Shiva) depicts the difference between the response of the western and the eastern civilizations to the ecological and ethical questions by quoting Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore. In *Tapovan*, Tagore highlights the distinctive feature of Indian civilization by defining the life in the forest as the highest form of culture:

¹²⁵ Vandana Shiva and Jayanto Bandyopadhyay, *Chipko: India's Civilisational Response to the Forest Crisis* (New Delhi: INTACH, 1986), 1.

¹²⁶ Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1988), 55.

Contemporary western civilization is built of brick and wood. It is rooted in the city. But Indian civilization has been distinctive in locating its source of regeneration, material and intellectual, in the forest, not in the city... The culture of the forest has fueled the culture of Indian society.¹²⁷

Indian religious tradition venerates nature as sacred, having strong roots in the *aranya samskriti*, fostering an ecological vision. For the tribal and rural people of India, forests form the context of their life, being a critical means for their subsistence since they provide food, fuel, fodder, and water. While new technologies have turned the forests into agricultural lands denuding the forest cover, development projects and subsequent deforestation threaten the livelihood and cultural tradition of indigenous peoples.¹²⁸ The forests and the people of the Himalayas now face multiple environmental problems.

Environmental problems of the Himalayas

Apart from the increase in the rate of population, the contributing causes which pave the way to ecological problems in the Himalayas include extraction of fuel wood and timber for domestic or commercial needs, uncontrolled grazing, and forest fires. It is coupled with alternating floods and droughts due to accelerated developmental activities and geological disasters such as earthquakes.¹²⁹ They altogether create imbalances in the fragile ecosystem. Indian Government and other agencies point to the increasing rate of

¹²⁷ Rabindranath Tagore, *Tapovan* (Hindi), Tikamgarh: Gandhi Bhavan, undated, 1-2, in Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive*, 55.

¹²⁸ Vandana Shiva and Jayanto Bandyopadhyay, *Chipko: India's Civilisational Response to the Forest Crisis* (New Delhi: INTACH, 1986), 14.

¹²⁹ Madhu Kishwar, "A Himalayan Catastrophe: The Controversial Tehri Dam in the Himalayas," <http://free.freespeech.org/manushi/tehri/tehri.html> (accessed June 14, 2005).

population as the major factor contributing to the environmental degradation. But the Chipko Movement insists that population increase is only a symptom of the real problem, viz., a lack of control over local raw materials by local people.¹³⁰ The events leading to the evolving Chipko struggle could be traced back first to the removal of forests from local community management and then to the subsequent control by the state or private enterprises. The resultant environmental tangles have a direct bearing on people.

Alienating the forest people from their homeland began when the British colonized the Indian forests by introducing the Forest Acts of 1878 and 1927, thereby severing the access and rights of the people to the forests. British commercial interests made the forest goods into a commodity and labeled the people to be trespassers in the forests of which they were once custodians. Villagers resorted to nonviolent protests in the form of 'forest *satyagrahas*' despite severe repression from the colonial government.¹³¹ The postcolonial era witnessed further alienation of people from forests leading to the Chipko Movement. Urbanization as well as the need to facilitate troop movements across the Himalayan borders needed construction of new roads, which in turn accelerated soil erosion. The rapid expansion of cash crop cultivation and mining also triggered massive deforestation. The state policy of scientific forestry favored the replacement of indigenous forest diversity with timber-yielding eucalyptus monoculture plantations, making it harmful to the forest ecosystem. After completing a four-thousand

¹³⁰Jack D. Ives and Bruno Messerli, *The Himalayan Dilemma: Reconciling Development and Conservation* (London and New York: The United Nations University and Routledge, 1989), 242.

¹³¹ Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1988), 66.

seven hundred and eighty kilometer Chipko foot march in three hundred days through the Himalayas, Sunderlal Bahuguna (hereafter Bahuguna) remarked: "The Himalayan crisis is not an isolated event. It has roots in the materialistic civilization, in the spiral of demands, ever-increasing but never satisfied."¹³² The conflict is therefore between ecology and a particular type of economy.

Evolution of the Chipko Movement on Ecological Foundations

Among the various Indian environmental movements, Chipko is the most well-known and distinctly, one of the earliest struggles towards conservation of life-supporting provisions. It is a movement which germinated out of Gandhian ideals sown in the Himalayan soil, encouraging a culture of conservation of forests across the nation. Chipko could well take the credit for the now famous mantra that the forests provide air, water, and soil, which are the basic needs for life; whereas the official perspective viewed forests as a wealth of raw materials. Paul Routledge shows how locale and place are important considerations for tracing the origin of the Chipko Movement. Uttarkhand contains a major share of the state's natural wealth including forest, mineral supplies, and hydroelectricity as well as tourist and pilgrimage attractions, making it the target of exploitation by private and government agencies. Routledge remarks that according to the activists, 'Uttarkhand has become a colony within the state,' "an internal colony, a

¹³² Sunderlal Bahuguna, "What man does to the mountain and to man," *Future* 1983(1): 6-11, quoted in Jack D. Ives and Bruno Messerli, *The Himalayan Dilemma*, 267.

domestic colony, exploited for and by outsiders."¹³³ The economic and ecological costs of development programs coupled with exploitation by the 'new colonists' pushed indigenous people away from the sources of their subsistence. These processes precipitated the emergence of the Chipko Movement.

Origins of the Chipko Movement

Ramachandra Guha (hereafter Guha) traces the origins of the Chipko Movement from a historical *cum* sociological perspective. Guha points to its central feature of historicity in its association with past movements that sought answers to similar questions on linkages between the state and the peasantry.¹³⁴ The antecedent of the Chipko actions goes back to the protests in 1731 by Bishnoi people of Rajasthan who opposed a decision by the Maharajah of Jodhpur to fell *khejri* trees, which they considered sacred. Amrita Devi, a woman, led the Bishnois in the struggle and prevented the axmen from logging the trees by embracing them, the protests costing the lives of three hundred and sixty three protesters.¹³⁵ Guha records various forms of peasant resistance to British-dictated forest laws. Peasant resistance involved *dhandak* (drawn from '*dand kiye gi*,' an

¹³³ Paul Routledge, *Terrains of Resistance: Nonviolent Social Movements and the Contestation of Place in India* (West Port, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1993), 79.

¹³⁴ Ramachandra Guha, *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), xiv, 173.

¹³⁵ George A. James, "Ethical and Religious Dimensions of Chipko Resistance," in *Hinduism and Ecology: The Intersection of Earth, Sky, and Water*, ed. Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions, 2000), 507.

admonition by mothers to hush children) refusing to cooperate with new rules governing forest use and the officials who would impose them.¹³⁶

Routledge draws parallels with *dhandak* as a nonviolent mode of resistance antedating Gandhi's method of *satyagraha*. The first instance of resistance began in 1821 when the British formed the Trial Forest Settlement in Kumaun which was the first act of restriction imposed on Himalayan forest use. The Indian Forest Act of 1878 and its revision in 1927 aimed mainly to safeguard economic interests of the government rather than protection of the environment and the wellbeing of local communities.¹³⁷ As the Independence Movement gathered momentum, Gandhi used *satyagraha*, the fight for truth, as a tool against material exploitation especially in Champaran to resist compulsory plantation of indigo in place of food grains. In 1930 Gandhi led a massive movement of civil disobedience in Dandi, known as 'salt *satyagraha*' against the exploitative Salt Law. Inspired by the salt *satyagraha*, peasant resistance continued in the Himalayas, marked by occasional forest *satyagrahas* leading to formation of the Tehri *Kisan Andolan* (Tehri Peasant Movement) in 1944.¹³⁸ In the same year Sri Dev Suman, a Gandhian who had earlier inspired Bahuguna, died after an eighty-four day fast in Tehri jail. According to Bahuguna, the establishment of ashrams by Gandhi's English disciples Mira Behn and Sarala Behn in the early 1950s paved the way for a new awakening among the women in the Himalayan districts. Mira Behn realized that the sporadic floods in the Indo-Gangetic

¹³⁶ Guha, *Unquiet Woods*, 67.

¹³⁷ Routledge, *Terrains of Resistance*, 82.

¹³⁸ Routledge, *Terrains of Resistance*, 82, 83.

plains were because of deforestation caused by replacement of oak forests with pine, a species which retains less water in the soil.¹³⁹ Sarala Behn trained women for social work and handpicked Vimla Behn who later married Bahuguna; together they continued the struggles in Gandhian footsteps.

In the 1960s Mira Behn and Sarala Behn founded the Uttarakhand Sarvodya Mandal, which took a lead role in organizing and empowering women to fight against alcohol consumption by the adult male population.¹⁴⁰ They also addressed issues like protection of forest rights and establishment of local forest-based small industries. The women's prohibition movement, which turned successful, provided a legitimate platform for organizing women and thus it became a forerunner of the Chipko agitation in the 1970s.¹⁴¹

Chipko Actions

The devastating floods of July 1970 in the Alakananda valley inundated nearly one thousand kilometers of land and washed away several bridges and roads. This incident gave a new twist and direction to the popular movements, as it helped the villagers realize the explicit connection between massive deforestation and ecological disasters. Dashauli Gram Swarajya Sangh (later named the Dashauli Gram Swarajya Mandal and from now on referred to as DGSM), was a village cooperative society

¹³⁹ Sunderlal Bahuguna, "Chipko: The People's Movement with a Hope for the Survival of Humankind" in Sunderlal Bahuguna, Vandana Shiva and M.N. Buch, ed. (Contributing authors), *Environment Crisis & Sustainable Development* (Dehra Doon and Malaysia: Natraj Publishers and Third World Network, 1992), 769.

¹⁴⁰ Rajiv Rawat, "Chipko and the Women of Uttarakhand," May '96, <http://bostonglobalaction.net/UK/chipko.html> (accessed June 27, 2005).

¹⁴¹ Shiva, *Staying Alive*, 72.

formed with a major objective of generation of local employment. It took up issues like prohibition, untouchability, and local use of the forests by organizing meetings and processions under the leadership of *Sarvodaya* leaders like Sarala Behn and Chandi Prasad Bhatt (hereafter Bhatt).¹⁴² Swami Chidanandji of Rishikesh correlated the message of the 1972 Stockholm conference with the traditional ecological vision of the Indian spiritual tradition through his month long tour of the Himalayan villages in 1972. It set the stage for the launch of a struggle for community rights of the forests.¹⁴³ It was during the protest meetings in 1972 that the folk poet Ghanshyam Raturi composed the famous Chipko song popularizing the term *Chipko*, describing the method of embracing the trees to prevent them from logging:

Embrace the trees
Save them from being felled;
The property of our hills,
Save them from being looted.¹⁴⁴

In 1973 the forest department turned down repeated requests by DGSM for allotment of ash trees to make agricultural tools, however, it allotted ash trees for the Symonds Company in the Mandal forest near Gopeshwar. This incident provoked DGSM to organize meetings and Bhatt suggested the technique of ‘*Chipko*,’ as a protest method to protect the forests. In March 1974 twenty seven women under the leadership of Gaura Devi of village Mahila Mandal (women’s club) saved many trees from logging in Reni

¹⁴² Guha, *Unquiet Woods*, 156.

¹⁴³ Bahuguna, “Chipko: The People’s Movement,” in Bahuguna, et al., *Environment Crisis*, 769.

¹⁴⁴ Vandana Shiva and Jayanto Bandyopadhyay, *Chipko: India’s Civilisational Response to the Forest Crisis* (New Delhi: INTACH, 1986), 9.

forest. This was the first major instance of women's participation in the movement. As a result, the government abandoned the contract system and set up Van Nigam (Forest Corporation) to monitor the use of forest.¹⁴⁵

Bahuguna's fast could not prevent the auction of the Adwani forests in October 1977 and the felling was to take place in December 1977. Bachhni Devi came forward to lead a large group of women to protect the forests even against the wishes of her own husband who obtained a local contract to cut the forest. Chipko activist Dhoom Singh Negi took a fast in the forest itself and women recited from sacred texts and tied sacred threads to the trees as an expression of their vow of protection. Three volunteers guarded each tree. The police and axe men hastily withdrew. Shiva describes how women confronted the forest officials in the Adwani forest; "We have come to teach you forestry," and the officials retorted; "You foolish women, how can you who prevent felling know the value of the forest? Do you know what forest bear? They produce profit and resin and timber." And the women sang back in chorus:

What do the forests bear?
Soil, water and pure air.
Soil, water and pure air
Sustain the earth and all she bears.¹⁴⁶

The Chipko slogan brought the ecological issues to the frontline in the environment-development debate. Its concern was mainly with long-term protection of

¹⁴⁵ Guha, *Unquiet Woods*, 158-161.

¹⁴⁶ Shiva, *Staying Alive*, 75-77.

rural sustainable livelihood whereas the earlier peasant movements took economic concerns as primary.

In 1980 the Government of India (GoI) created the Ministry of Environment to replace the Ministry of Forests, which was a clear indication of a shift in emphasis from commercial interests to an ecological vision. The then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi held talks with Chipko leaders in 1980. The Chipko demand to declare Himalayan forests as protected forests instead of production forests for commercial exploitation also figured in the talks. The Chipko protests won a major victory in 1981 with a 15-year ban on green felling above 1000 meters in the Himalayan forests, when the government passed the Indian Forest Conservation Act. Bahuguna kept the momentum by taking a 4,780 km long strenuous Chipko foot march from Kashmir to Kohima to contact villagers in the long Himalayan range and to spread the message of Chipko.¹⁴⁷

The Chipko Movement continues its actions even in these days through an active reforestation program under the aegis of DGSM. A remarkable feature of the eco-development camps is the joint participation of DGSM workers, students, academic personnel, government officials, voluntary organization workers, and local villagers, transcending economic, ethnic, or cultural barriers. In Chamoli district the DGSM and Bhatt launched an Integrated Watershed Development Project in cooperation with the departments of the GoI. In Tehri Garhwal district, Bahuguna and other Chipko activists

¹⁴⁷ Vandana Shiva in association with J. Bandyopadhyay, Pandurang Hegde, B.V. Krishnamurthy, John Kurien, G. Narendranath, Vanaja Ramprasad, and S.T.S. Reddy, *Ecology and the Politics of Survival: Conflicts Over Natural Resources in India* (New Delhi/Newbury Park/London: Sage Publications, United Nations University Press, 1991), <http://www.unu.edu/unupress/unupbooks/80a03e/80A03E08.htm> (accessed July 18, 2005).

organized similar schemes for afforestation and conservation of forests. The Uttarkhand Sangharsh Vahini (USV), which has more inclination towards a Marxian ideology, steers projects in Almora and Nainital districts.¹⁴⁸ The Chipko Information Center at Bahuguna's Silyara ashram continues to be the nerve center of Chipko movement.

Diverging Ideological Trends and Leadership

Different scholars describe the Chipko Movement variously as a peasant movement, an eco-feminist movement, or Gandhian movement. Guha traces the Chipko origins as a peasant movement, and Shiva points to the leading role of women inspired by feminist concerns, while both scholars highlight the Gandhian influence on its leadership and methods.

Chipko as a Peasant Resistance

Peasants have had a genuine stake in reclaiming the integrity of their forests as subsistence means. They defended forests to safeguard their traditional forest-based production. Ramachandra Guha positions the Chipko Movement on a historical continuum of peasant resistance. While commercial interests played a major role in the earlier conflicts of peasant resistance demanding local distribution of forest goods, the Chipko Movement's concern is mainly about their social and ecological management. As discussed earlier, the nonviolent strategies adopted by the peasant movements included *dhandak* and forest *satyagraha*. Guha argues that the role played by external ideologies in

¹⁴⁸ Routledge, *Terrains of Resistance*, 92-94.

the Chipko Movement is 'a severely limited one.' But he admits that the Movement has an important ethical dimension with its underlying notions of morality and justice being "intrinsic to a history of protest against state restrictions on peasant access to forest produce."¹⁴⁹ Merging with the national Independence Movement, the peasant movements gave new directions to both the national and environmental struggles with their ecological vision and political method.

Chipko as an Eco-Feminist Movement

Chipko Movement inspired Vandana Shiva to explain the eco-feminist with the link between women and ecology.¹⁵⁰ Shiva claims that the pioneering environmental movement got its inspiration from the feminine principle of nature and forest engraved in the Indian religious tradition. The active participants of this movement were mostly women, since they had a vital stake in the economic and ecological aspects of the local community, as they fought for their subsistence needs. Therefore, women were quick to identify and positively respond to the environmental issues. Shiva provides a list of prominent women leaders of Chipko movement which includes Mira Behn, Sarala Behn, Vimla Behn, Gauri Devi, and Bachhni Devi and depicts the men of the movement as their students and followers.¹⁵¹ Shiva paints the Chipko struggle as “explicitly an ecological

¹⁴⁹ Guha, *Unquiet Woods*, 176.

¹⁵⁰ Shiva, *Staying Alive*, 70-72.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 55-68.

and feminist movement.”¹⁵² Paul Routledge, however, views that even though most of the Chipko activists were women, they did not have a major share in the ideological leadership of the movement.¹⁵³ But the strongest local supporters of the movement were women, a fact which Guha, who is skeptical about the eco-feminist analysis, admits when he states that women were more consistent participants in peasant resistance than men.¹⁵⁴ The anti-alcohol campaigns under the *Sarvodaya* leaders saw the active involvement of women. Differing gender interests also resulted in the struggles with men swept up in the vortex of the market economy while women struggled to preserve subsistence-oriented peasant economy. The women who took part in the Chipko action were *ipso facto* responding to specific situations which warranted ecological actions to resist environmental destruction and denial of access to their subsistence base. It was an effort to reclaim economic and ecological control on forest reserves.

Chipko as a Gandhian Movement

Gandhian activists and leaders strongly influenced formation of the Chipko Movement. Shiva makes a categorical statement that the Chipko Movement which took place in post-Independence India is “historically, philosophically and organisationally an

¹⁵² Ibid., 76.

¹⁵³ Routledge, *Terrains of Resistance*, 96.

¹⁵⁴ Ramachandra Guha, "The malign encounter: the Chipko Movement and competing visions of nature", in Tariq Banuri & Frederique Apfel Marglin, *Who Will Save the Forests? Knowledge, Power and Environmental Destruction* (Zed Books: London, 1993) pp. 80-113.

extension of the traditional Gandhian *satyagrahas*.¹⁵⁵ Gandhians like Mira Behn, Sarala Behn, Sri Dev Suman, Bahuguna, Bhatt and others provided the link between the pre- and post-Independence eras making Gandhian ideals and methods relevant in present-day situations. Bahuguna thought of Chipko movement as a humble effort to materialize the message of Indian culture as revived by Mahatma Gandhi.¹⁵⁶ Guha expresses his reservation against placing a Gandhian label on the Chipko Movement at the level of popular participation, whereas its leaders like Bahuguna and Bhatt “exemplify the highest traditions of Gandhian constructive work.” Guha, however, avows that “there is the veneer of Gandhianism with which Chipko is cloaked,” with the popular movement using techniques of nonviolence and led by Gandhians.¹⁵⁷

The movement’s tactics involved mainly nonviolent strategies like *satyagraha*, fasts, and rallies of protest and persuasion. Forest *satyagraha* and later the tree-hugging Chipko strategy employed these tools effectively. While referring to peasants as those who never use swords and will never be subdued by the sword, Gandhi defines passive resistance as a significant method used in *satyagraha*, carrying forward an ancient Indian tradition; “...the nation at large has generally used passive resistance in all departments of life. We cease to co-operate with our rulers when they displease us.”¹⁵⁸ Bahuguna evoked ‘fasts until death’ as a means of protest to persuade positive responses from the

¹⁵⁵ Shiva and Bandyopadhyay, *Chipko*, 7.

¹⁵⁶ Sunderlal Bahuguna, “The Message of Aranya Culture and Tradition: A Continual Renewal,” in Sunderlal Bahuguna et al., *Environment Crisis*, 486.

¹⁵⁷ Guha, *Unquiet Woods*, 176-177.

¹⁵⁸ M. K. Gandhi, *CWG, Hind Swaraj* (VOL. 10: 5 AUGUST, 1909 - 9 APRIL, 1910), 295-296.

authorities, much in the same manner Gandhi used them during the Independence movement. Bahuguna pioneered a series of symbolic Chipko foot marches called *padayatras* (invoking the images of religious pilgrimages as well as the Gandhian tradition of foot marches) across the Himalayas to spread the Chipko message and gather support. Chipko integrated regions, as well as ethnic groups, as it spread from the easternmost to the westernmost Uttarakhand.¹⁵⁹ The *padayatras* enabled people to come together across lines of traditional divisions like caste, culture, traditions, and ideologies.

Unity in Diversity: One Movement and Three Methodologies

Madhav Gadgil and Guha identify three groups of social movements in India, distinguishing them as “crusading Gandhians, ecological Marxists, and appropriate technologists.”¹⁶⁰ The first group endorses the Gandhian model of development and considers villages as the basic units for development. The People’s Science Movements represent the second group. The third group steers a middle course with a call to appropriate technology. Their aim is for a working synthesis of both modern and traditional models of development. The celebrated Chipko Movement has representatives from all the three groups with Bahuguna and *sarvodaya* workers falling in the first category of ‘crusading Gandhians.’ The Uttarakhand Sangharsh Vahini (USV) represents the ‘ecological Marxist’ group, while Bhatt and DGSM forms the third wing called the ‘appropriate technologists.’ Guha pictures the birth of Chipko in the Alakananda valley with Bhatt and his colleagues in the DGSM taking the initiative. Later it moved

¹⁵⁹ Routledge, *Terrains of Resistance*, 97.

¹⁶⁰ Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha, *Ecology and Equity: The Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 107-110.

eastwards to Kumaun where the left-wing students of the USV spearheaded the protest and it moved westwards to the Bhagirathi valley, where Bahuguna and his associates led the movement.¹⁶¹

Chandi Prasad Bhatt, who was groomed as a *Sarvodaya* leader in the 1960s by both Vinoba Bhave, a disciple of Gandhi, and Jaya Prakash Narayan, a Gandhian Socialist, is regarded as the pioneer of the Chipko Movement. It was his suggestion to resort to the Chipko technique at Mandal. He continues his leadership by guiding people in the afforestation program with the help of DGSM. The eco-development camps exemplify a grassroots level campaign where the villagers play a distinctive role in afforestation initiatives. Gandhian disciple Sarala Behn trained Bahuguna and his wife Vimla as *Sarvodaya* workers in the 1940s and Bahuguna organized several Chipko protests and gave a wider audience to the Chipko cause by his foot marches, fasts, writings, and lecture tours.¹⁶² Guha draws an interesting comparison between the two Chipko leaders. Bahuguna ardently follows the Gandhi of the *Hind Swaraj* with his uncompromising denunciation of industrial society, whereas Bhatt and his group work to impart a new ecological meaning to Gandhi's ideal of *gram swaraj*, or village self-reliance.¹⁶³ Bahuguna works in a 'prophetic mode' with his wide teaching tours, whereas Bhatt gives importance to localized reconstruction efforts and appropriate technology. Bahuguna encourages tree farming and favors a total ban on green felling, thereby giving

¹⁶¹ Ramachandra Guha, "A Gandhian in Garhwal," *The Hindu, Sunday Magazine*, Jun 02, 2002, <http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/mag/2002/06/02/stories/2002060200010100.htm> (accessed June 18, 2005).

¹⁶² Ramachandra Guha, *Mahatma Gandhi and the Environmental Movement*. The Parisar Annual Lecture 1993 (Pune: Parisar, 1993), 3-4.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

the villagers control over forests. Bhatt, on the other hand, is for a ban on green felling in sensitive areas and supports large-scale afforestation drives involving both the state and the villagers.¹⁶⁴ Bahuguna, the popular Chipko leader, could well be considered as a ‘professing Gandhian’ while Bhatt, as a grassroots level activist, a ‘practicing Gandhian.’

The ideology of the USV has a strong affinity towards Marxist theories. Unlike the streams of the movement led by Gandhian leaders, USV does not share the doctrinal emphasis on nonviolence endorsed by both Bhatt and Bahuguna, but allows violent uprisings as well for resolving conflicts. USV has no hesitation to confront the state to drive its resources towards grassroots level construction work such as afforestation.¹⁶⁵ Most USV activists are students.

The motivations behind Chipko actions over time were so complex that it would be too simplistic to portray the movement either as a peasant resistance, a feminist struggle, or a Gandhian movement. On the complexity of narratives of the Chipko story, Thomas Weber rightly points out that “there are in fact almost as many Chipkos as there are descriptions of the movement.”¹⁶⁶ Chipko reflects a unity in diversity much in the same fashion as the Indian identity of being one nation with diverse traditions. Chipko has become one multifaceted movement with diverse methodologies and actions, yet it has a focus on its goals. Being a successful social movement, it continues to inspire ecological struggles across the world.

¹⁶⁴ Guha, *Unquiet Woods*, 180-184.

¹⁶⁵ Guha, *Unquiet Woods*, 184.

¹⁶⁶ Thomas Weber, *Hugging the Trees: The Story of the Chipko Movement* (New Delhi: Viking, 1988), 11.

New Movements Emerging

Bharat Dogra records the emerging new trends and movements in the Chipko framework. The movement resisted the onslaught of mining practices (limestone quarrying) in the ecologically fragile and sensitive zones in the Himalayas. Beej Bachao Andolan (Save the Seeds Movement-SSM) which began during the decade of the nineties in Tehri Garhwal district, received enthusiastic response from women farmers who preferred traditional indigenous seeds over the monoculture seeds which the government agencies provide.¹⁶⁷ The SSM took a foot march from Arkot to Askot to spread their message to the villages of Uttarakhand. These movements highlight the close connection between environmental protection and sustainable livelihood.

This dissertation will now discuss in detail the Anti Tehri Dam Movement since it deals with a dilemma which the Himalayan population currently faces and has many parallels with the Narmada Bachao Andolan. The Chipko leader Bahuguna who dedicated his life to ‘save the Himalayas’ is the major warrior and inspirer of the Himalaya Bachao Andolan.

Himalaya Bachao Andolan: Anti-Tehri Dam Movement

First conceived in 1949, the controversial Tehri hydroelectric project was endorsed by the Planning Commission of GoI in 1972. The earth and rock dam, which has been under construction since 1978, is the fifth tallest in the world with a projected

¹⁶⁷ Bharat Dogra, “Linking Environment Protection to People's Livelihood,” *Frontier* 33, no. 15 (2000), <http://frontierindia.scriptmania.com/F17page6.htm> (accessed June 27, 2005).

height of 260.5 meters. The Tehri dam is located in the Himalayan mountain ranges across river Bhagirathi, the main tributary of the river Ganga, about 1.5 kilometers (km) downstream of the confluence of the rivers Bhagirathi and Bhilangana in the Tehri-Garhwal District of Uttaranchal State. Incorporated in 1988, the Tehri Hydro Development Corporation (THDC) began to harness the Bhagirathi River and its tributaries at Tehri as a multipurpose river valley project. Expected to generate 2400 MW of peak power in three stages, Tehri Hydro Power Complex will also provide irrigation to 2.7 lakhs (1 lakh is equivalent to a hundred thousand) hectare acres (ha) and stabilize irrigation in the existing 6.04 lakhs ha of land in UP. The project also intends to supply 162 million gallons a day of drinking water to a population of 4 million in Delhi and 3 million in western Uttar Pradesh.¹⁶⁸ After receiving the green signal from the Union Power ministry to close two tunnels (T3 and T4) the Uttaranchal government hailed it as “a new chapter in development.” The THDC claims it as a milestone in constructing the Tehri dam, the “world’s fifth and Asia’s largest” dam.¹⁶⁹ But the dam, according to the THDC officials, will submerge Tehri town and affect thirty-seven villages completely and eighty-eight villages partially. Tehri dam will flood 5,200 hectares of land and affect 5,291 urban families. The reservoir will drown 42.5 square km of fertile valley land.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ *Tehri Hydro Development Corporation Ltd.* (THDC) official web site, URL: <http://thdc.nic.in/> (accessed May 29, 2005).

¹⁶⁹ T.K. Rajalakshmi, “Trouble in Tehri,” *Frontline*, Jan. 05-18, 2002, URL: <http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl1901/19010330.htm> (accessed March 20, 2004).

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

The Tehri Bandh Virodhi Sangharsh Samiti, founded in 1978, took early leadership in the protest movement against the project, when the initial construction of the project began.¹⁷¹ The anti-dam movement reached its peak during the 1980s and 90s when Sunderlal Bahuguna took the lead role through his *padyatras* (foot marches) and hunger fasts in a bid to save the Himalayas and the river Ganga.

The Himalayas is known to be a young and fragile mountain range. Heavy rains and denuded hills cause heavy erosion, landslides, and floods in the region. The Tehri project area stands in one of the world's most active seismic zones with a fault lying less than fifteen km beneath the site that can unleash disastrous earthquakes. In 1991 a quake measuring 6.6 on Richter scale rocked Uttarkashi (the Tehri dam site just 45 km away from the epicenter of the quake). It highlighted seismic vulnerability and the aftermath of Chamoli quake (1999) and Bhuj quake (2001) rekindled the debate on dam safety. K S Valdiya, former director of Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology and a member of the Joshi Committee, averred; "Siltation will take place much faster than expected. The life of the dam will only be about 30-40 years, not 100 years as claimed by the THDC."¹⁷² According to a study by the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, the Gangotri Glacier, the main source of Bhagirathi, had receded eight hundred meters in forty years.¹⁷³ And with global warming likely to augment melting the glaciers, the major question is

¹⁷¹ Shekhar Pathak, "Tehri Dam: Submergence of a Town, Not an Idea," *Economic and Political Weekly* XL, no. 33 (August 13, 2005), 3637-3639.

¹⁷² Kushal P.S. Yadav, "India: Tehri Dam: Controversial dam becomes a grim reality," <http://lists.iatp.org/listarchive/archive.cfm?id=43426> (Accessed June 3, 2005).

¹⁷³ Usha Rai, "Submerging Travails," URL: <http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/mag/2002/07/14/stories/2002071400130800.htm> (Accessed June 3, 2005).

how much water will be available for the reservoir. Despite the adverse reports by several expert committees set up by the government to look into various aspects of the project, which favored its scrapping, the officials continued to construct the dam. Today the issues of resettlement and rehabilitation of the project-affected people as well as the major environmental concerns remain unresolved.

Displacement and Rehabilitation

According to the 2002 Status Report of the Public Works Department of Tehri, the dam will displace 12,547 families officially recognized as project-affected. Even among them only half of the fully affected and very few of the partially affected families were resettled.¹⁷⁴ The Central Government revised its Rehabilitation and Resettlement package based on the Hanumantha Rao Committee Report (1977). Murli Manohar Joshi Committee (2001) looked into two aspects of the project, its safety and its impact on the purity of the river Ganga. Its terms of reference did not include the issue of rehabilitation while according to Bahuguna the agitators' main demand was just and fair rehabilitation.¹⁷⁵ The rural rehabilitation policy envisages providing land for the displaced villagers in the nearby districts. The residents of old Tehri town were entitled to house plots in the newly developed New Tehri Township. A majority judgment of the Supreme Court of India in September 2003 removed all legal hurdles for the ongoing construction of the Tehri project. But the Court maintained that tunnels one and two

¹⁷⁴ *Tehri Dam: IRN Fact Sheet*, October 2002, <http://www.irn.org/programs/india/021022.tehrifactsheet.pdf> (accessed July 18, 2004).

¹⁷⁵ T.K. Rajalakshmi, "Trouble in Tehri," *Frontline*, Jan. 05-18, 2002.

should remain closed until rehabilitation work is complete.¹⁷⁶ But the problem of rehabilitation and compensation has remained a knotty issue with most of the affected people remaining stranded and displaced. It prompted environmentalist Bahuguna who led the battle to save the Himalayas to say: “This is a dam built with our tears.”¹⁷⁷

The Death of a River

To construct the Tehri dam on the major tributaries of the river Ganga will eventually result in the death of a ‘holy river,’ a unique symbol of Indian civilization and culture. Madhu Kishwar comments on the paradox of turning a holy river into a dirty drain which will be a ‘civilizational assault’ on the people of India apart from uprooting the people of Tehri.¹⁷⁸ The Tehri Hydro project will provide water for the Suez-Ondeo Degrémont Drinking Water Production Plant in Delhi through the Upper Ganga Canal up to Muradnagar in Uttar Pradesh and then through the 3.2 meter diameter giant pipeline to Delhi. Suez- Degrémont of France signed a 2 billion rupees contract with the Delhi Jal Board (Delhi Water Board) to erect the plant which in 2002 began supplying 635 million liters a day.

Vandana Shiva and others cite Delhi water privatization as a clear example to show that 'private-public partnership' in water amounts to public cost and private gain.

¹⁷⁶ “SC Removes All Hurdles for Tehri Dam Project,” <http://www.rediff.com/news/2003/sep/01tehri.htm> (accessed July 12, 2004).

¹⁷⁷ Usha Rai, “Submerging Travails.”

¹⁷⁸ Madhu Kishwar, “A Himalayan Catastrophe: The Controversial Tehri Dam in the Himalayas,” <http://free.freespeech.org/manushi/tehri/tehri.html> (accessed June 14, 2005).

Suez provides drinking water to Delhi using Ganga's waters, the lifeline of northern India. Suez now controls India's agricultural security whereas a hundred thousand people face eviction from their homes for the Tehri Dam. Shiva and others succinctly state that "the Tehri Dam disaster is a microcosm of a violent process which in the name of development, displaces sustainable communities and destroys their sustainable lifestyles, converting them into environmental refugees who are forced to migrate to large cities and urban settlements."¹⁷⁹ Large dam projects provide opportunities for planned robbery of the valuable forest goods such as timber, mineral wealth, and especially, water by the State and transnational corporations. The transfer of water from the Tehri project to Delhi is a case of flagrant injustice meted out to the hill people of Uttaranchal and UP, denying their rightful share of water and other forest goods. While the rural poor face deprivation, the urban elite reap the benefits because of transfer of goods from the poor regions to the rich. Shiva points out that the Suez-Degrémont does not pay any of the social, ecological or financial cost either to the government or people for dam construction or water. Yet the Corporation sells water to the people of Delhi at a high cost. On the eve of the 60th anniversary of the Quit India Movement (8th of August 2002), people from Tehri Garhwal region declared at Haridwar that "Our mother Ganga is not for sale." The Haridwar Declaration pledged that the local community will retain the right over the local water sources. The participants launched a movement called the '*Jal Swaraj Abhiyan*' (The Water Democracy, Water Sovereignty Movement) to defend the integrity and

¹⁷⁹ Vandana Shiva, Afsar H. Jafri and Kunwar Jalees, " 'Ganga is not for sale,' Suez – Degrémont and the Privatization of Ganga Water," <http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/global/vshiva2.html> (accessed August 15, 2005).

sanctity of the rivers.¹⁸⁰ The movement organized a Ganga *Yatra* (Ganga Journey) from Tehri to Delhi in March 2003 in which Bahuguna and other activists participated.

A dam on a river is a metaphor and damming a holy river turns out to be a religious metaphor. That is why the Chipko leader Bahuguna called river Ganga 'the country's lifeline, both religious and social,' and argued that Ganga is vital to the sanctity of the land and of the Hindu religion.¹⁸¹ Placing side by side the cultural and religious values of the region, it is not merely a question of displacement but of preserving cultural heritage of the hill people and the ecological balance of the region.

From Chipko to Tehri: Withering of Environmental Activism

It is ironic that the forests once protected by Chipko activists, who hugged the trees to protect them from loggers in the 1970s, face large-scale felling of trees, as the Tehri Power Project nears completion. There is little scope for any resistance to save the fragile forests from further destruction. Bharat Dogra cites Kunwar Prasun, a Chipko activist who charts out the major difference between the Chipko and Tehri struggles. Prasun is of the opinion that the economic stakes involved were relatively small during the Chipko years. However, the stakes were high for Tehri, when people had to face a massive hydroelectric project costing billions of dollars to build the dam. At the stage of project approval the officials did not count the environmental costs involved in felling

¹⁸⁰ Vandana Shiva, "Water Peace VS Water Wars," http://www.vshiva.net/articles/water_peace_wars.htm (accessed June 29, 2005).

¹⁸¹ Prem Panicker, "Bahuguna at Kumbh, Sounds Alarm over Damming Ganga," January 20, 2001, <http://www.rediff.com/news/2001/jan/20kumbh.htm> (accessed August 28, 2004).

trees. But Prasun and other activists were able to reduce the extent of damage of tree cover with the villagers and activists getting involved in the decision-making process.¹⁸² Prevention of any further destruction of the ecology of the Himalayas and the river systems is crucial for the ecological well-being of Northern India. The local governance of the people needs to be strengthened to be a partnership in development. Mini and micro hydro projects would ensure the needs of the local people for power and irrigation with less environmental costs.

Despite the three hunger strikes of Bahuguna in 1992, 1995 and 1997, the stance of the anti-Tehri dam movement got softened during the last decade. This happened even after its leaders widened the perspective and scope of the struggle to call it the 'Himalaya Bachao Andolan (Save Himalaya Movement).' Bahuguna remained its sole warrior when the local, national, and international support gradually withered away. Reflecting on the inevitable fate of the struggle, Bahuguna reiterated: "Truth never dies, it ultimately prevails, no matter what. Our goal is to have a comprehensive Himalaya policy to save the hills."¹⁸³

Though the larger environmental and developmental issues in the Tehri case regressed to be less prominent, those unsettled issues remain important and real. Shekhar Pathak, a Nainital-based journalist, pulls out some lessons learned from the Tehri Movement when he argues that social silence should not be interpreted as cultural defeat.

¹⁸² Bharat Dogra, "High Voltage Environmental Activism," *India Together*, June 2004, <http://www.indiatogether.org/2004/jun/env-voltage.htm> (accessed May 28, 2005).

¹⁸³ Purnima S. Tripathi, "My fight is to save the Himalayas," Interview with Sunderlal Bahuguna, *Frontline* (Aug. 14 - 27, 2004), <http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl2117/stories/20040827002803600.htm> (accessed September 2, 2004).

Instead, "any change in the politics of environment must necessarily entail a corresponding change in the environment of politics," requiring a new culture of protests transforming a movement into a catalyst for social and political change.¹⁸⁴

The Tehri Project reveals a clear pattern how the state acquires local common reserves and eventually transfers them to corporations for profit. The Tehri dam remains as a symbol of destructive development since it destroys both the Himalayas and the river Ganga. The project is a mirage of deceptive development since it uproots native hill people from their homes and the benefits go to people living elsewhere.

Influence on Environmental Movements

The celebrated Chipko Andolan, variously described as a peasants' movement, an eco-feminist movement, a Gandhian movement, or an ecology movement of the Himalayan foothill regions, continues its struggle in diverse forms today. Shiva describes the Chipko movement's significance as it evolved through major social and political events transcending the multiplicity of actors and events involved, contributing to a reinforcement of social change.¹⁸⁵ Guha points to the fusion of "the 'private' (peasant movement) and the 'public' (ecological movement) profiles that has lent to Chipko a distinctive quality and strength."¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Shekhar Pathak, "Tehri Dam: Submergence of a Town, Not an Idea," *Economic and Political Weekly* XL, no. 33 (August 13, 2005), 3639.

¹⁸⁵ Shiva, *Staying Alive*, 68.

¹⁸⁶ Guha, *Unquiet Woods*, 196.

The Chipko Movement evolved over a thirty year period because of multidimensional encounters over forest goods at the ecological, economic, and cultural levels. The movement leaders and the participants at the grassroots have set an example of nonviolent Gandhian resistance for indigenous and marginalized people across the world. The Chipko Movement has been instrumental in forming a new national forest policy which reflects more responsiveness to the needs of indigenous people and ecologically sensitive development.

Chipko came to be a signal victory for the environmental movements, providing new directions and impetus to people's movements and concerns. As a shining symbol of grassroots level activism, Chipko provides a blueprint for environmental movements. It articulates the tension between the state and the people over the rights to natural goods and between methods of action and gender issues in environmental action.

CHAPTER FOUR

NARMADA BACHAO ANDOLAN: STRUGGLE FOR A RIVER AS THE LIFELINE OF A PEOPLE

Introduction

Human history is replete with conflicts over natural wealth. Development initiatives by governments in recent times have only intensified the struggles. The increasing threats of water scarcity must never be sources of conflicts but avenues for cooperation towards sustainable water management. While the Chipko Movement was mainly a grassroots and gender-based movement to protect forests, the NBA has tribals and farmers as the driving force behind the struggles for water and forest which are the source of their livelihood. The newfound ecological consciousness and emergence of environmental movements occur mainly because of the socio-ecological and economic impact of lop-sided development models. Those models aim at short-term goals of control and exploitation of natural goods at the expense of the poor.

Humanity faces a severe water crisis mainly because of water mismanagement. This has a direct toll on the poor. It is a global crisis with vast economic, social, cultural and environmental implications requiring an equitable management of water. Calling for a sustainable management of water, the report of the UN sponsored World Water Assessment Program (WWAP) [WWRD Report 2006] states: “There is enough water for everyone. The problem we face today is largely one of governance: equitably sharing this

water while ensuring the sustainability of natural ecosystems. At this point in time, we have not achieved this balance."¹⁸⁷ Who has the right to water and its benefits? Such questions need top priority, and socially and ecologically responsible management decisions, in order to promote equitable and sustainable sharing of water in the present and for the future.

Shortage of water is one of India's greatest problems, in both urban and rural areas, and control of water goes hand in hand with dominance over other people at all scales. Deforestation, silting up of reservoirs, as well as unlimited exploitation of groundwater are some of the reasons for drought-flood cycles. Droughts and floods are thus human-made or rather state-made disasters. Though water is the most plentiful and essential substance on earth, spatial as well as temporal disparity in water availability also contributes to scarcity of water in some regions. Asit K. Biswas and Cecilia Tortajada note an interesting link between significant climatic variations and politico-economic disparity of different regions. Most of the developed nations fall in temperate regions with evenly distributed precipitation every year. The less developed nations, on the other hand, are placed in tropical as well as semi-tropical areas with seasonal monsoon rainfall necessitating storage of water for the rest of the year.¹⁸⁸ The argument becomes strong on why we do not harness the rivers that empty their waters to the sea. It was Aldo Leopold who framed the "Round River concept," picturing the biotic continuum as a

¹⁸⁷ *Water: A Shared Responsibility* (Executive Summary), UN World Water Development Report 2, 2006 (WWDR 2), 3, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001444/144409E.pdf> (accessed February 23, 2007).

¹⁸⁸ Asit K. Biswas and Cecilia Tortajada, "Development and Large Dams: A Global Perspective," *Research Report, 2002* (Mexico: Third World Center for Water Management, 2002), 8-9.

stream or rather "a river that flowed into itself, and thus sped around and around in a never ending circuit" of life.¹⁸⁹ In similar terms, Medha Patkar questioned the economics of building big dams: "We will have only big dams but no river running underneath it (sic)."¹⁹⁰ Taming a river by building huge dams across it could thus result in the death of a river (forced to well up along human-made contours) as it becomes a saddled lake or reservoir.

River valleys work as cradles of human civilization, and the sacred river Narmada which flows between the Vindhya and Satpura ranges in Central India is no exception. The Narmada River valley with its specific geographical space, whose natural boundaries could well hold and sustain a great civilization from the ancient past, also formed a natural defining line between North and South India.¹⁹¹ But today, the valley has emerged as a battleground of conflicting views between the aspirations of the indigenous populations who face displacement, and the profit motive of the transnational agencies and State planners. *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (Save Narmada Movement-hereafter NBA) epitomizes the voices and nonviolent struggles of the people who face submergence and displacement. It raises pertinent questions leading to a relevant discourse towards an alternative development paradigm which is environmentally sustainable and socially justifiable.

¹⁸⁹ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac: Part III (A taste for Country)*, *The Round River* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 188.

¹⁹⁰ "Too Much Reliance on Technology is Bad: Medha Patkar," *Times of India* (Bangalore) 6 February 2003; <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/36601785.cms> (accessed January 21, 2007).

¹⁹¹ David Frawley, "An Ecological View of Ancient India," *International Journal of Humanities and Peace*, 19:1 (2003): 48.

Large Dams Debate: Modern Temples vs. Tombs of Tribal Heritage

The issues and complexities involved in the large dam controversy are large. There can be a strong case made for large dams, but there is an equally strong case against them.¹⁹² Dams for water storage continue to be a preferred choice for meeting various demands of water use in irrigation, energy, and industry. They are used to control flood or drought and provide freshwater for drinking purposes *sans* their deleterious environmental and social impacts. The dam proponents argue that water is essential for both drinking and agriculture. Rainwater harvesting and other alternatives are ineffective in drought hit areas having low annual rainfall. They point out that with the rapid increase in population, technological solutions such as big dam related irrigation projects become necessary to ensure water for agriculture.¹⁹³

State planners view large dams as monuments to progress and brand them as symbols of self-sufficiency, using a nationalist rhetoric, thereby affirming a country's technological autonomy. Opening the Nangal canal in July 1954, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru described national development in religious terms: "As I walked round the site I thought that these days the biggest temple and mosque and gurudwara is (*sic*) the place where man works for the good of mankind."¹⁹⁴ Dams have evoked religious

¹⁹² For a strong statement of the case against dams, see Patrick McCully, *Silenced Rivers: The Ecology and Politics of Large Dams* (London: Zed Books, 1996), and for a rather balanced report, see *Dams and Development: A New Framework for Decision-making: The Report of the World Commission on Dams* (London: Earthscan Publications Ltd, 2000).

¹⁹³ Gail Omvedt, "An Open Letter to Arundhati Roy," June 1999; <http://www.narmada.org/debates/gail/gail.open.letter.html> (accessed 3 November 2003).

¹⁹⁴ J. Nehru, 'Bhakra Nangal', in S. Gopal (ed), *Jawaharlal Nehru: An Anthology* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), 214.

symbolism such as being the 'secular temples of modern India' as Nehru found it. Nasser, the president of Egypt, stated, "In antiquity we built pyramids for the dead. Now we build new pyramids for the living."¹⁹⁵ A big project is thus epitomized as a major politico-economic and psychological intervention in a community's life and self-definition.

Dams have turned out to be tombs of tribal heritage as well, making them signs of sacrilege. Dams also have become the centerpiece of development debate, over questions of human rights and environment, due to massive displacement of populations. The objective centrality of dams in development projects has made it an easy target for resistance against such massive projects. Large dams incite opposition because of several social, environmental, economic, and security reasons. There occurs a deliberate exaggeration of their benefits, but social and environmental costs are hidden. In essence, a dam decides that only the privileged receive a fair share of the river water while excluding others who should also have a fair share.

American anthropologist and a longtime World Bank consultant, Thayer Scudder notes; "I now consider that in most cases, large dams, and especially those over 60m in height, are part of a flawed paradigm that causes an increasing disconnection between the necessary environmental health of river basins and the current needs of people and governments for the provision of water, energy and food."¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ Hussein M. Fahim, *Dams, People and Development: The Aswan High Dam Case* (New York.: Pergamon Press, 1981), 14, Quoted in Thayer Scudder, *The Future of Large Dams: Dealing with Social, Environmental, Institutional and Political Costs* (London: Earthscan, 2005), 6.

¹⁹⁶ Thayer Scudder, *The Future of Large Dams: Dealing with Social, Environmental, Institutional and Political Costs* (London: Earthscan, 2005), 16.

Large dam projects often raise the question of equity when people in the submergence area have to bear the social costs, while those in the project command area reap all the benefits. Ashish Kothari calls big dam projects "ecologically unviable and socially unjustified" as they involve large displacement of people and submergence of natural ecosystems: the Narmada project has both.¹⁹⁷ Centralized projects like large dams are mostly unsustainable, partly due to the profit motive of those in authority who plan and complete the projects with blatant disregard to the all-important environmental and social issues. Dams displace people and destroy places.

Roy brings in an interesting relative analogy involving what big dams mean to a nation's development and what nuclear bombs mean to the military. "They are both weapons of mass destruction, both weapons governments use to control their own people, both twentieth century emblems that mark a point in time when human intelligence has outstripped its own instinct for survival."¹⁹⁸ So, dams become intrinsically destructive in nature.

While the current trend in the developed world is not in favor of large dams, the developing countries like China and India continue to hold them to be good as rational and *pukka* (complete) development solutions. NBA exposed the flawed rationale of Sardar Sarovar Dam construction through mass people-based actions and nonviolent protests. The mission statement of the dam building authority, however, is optimistic. The official website of the Sardar Sarovar Nigam Limited states its mission; "Harnessing

¹⁹⁷ Ashish Kothari and Gail Omvedt, "Big Dams in India: Necessities or Threats?," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 31, no. 4 (1999): 52.

¹⁹⁸ Arundhati Roy, *The Greater Common Good* (Bombay: India Book Distributors, 1999), 61, 62.

the untapped waters of the Narmada for survival of millions of people and environmentally sound sustainable development of the western India by providing the essence of life- Water and Energy.¹⁹⁹ The question looms large on how far the dreams remain fulfilled.

Officials depict large and centralized schemes for development such as dams as symbols of modernity and progress, and identify them with 'the good.' They weave "a kind of superstition on development" around such specialized projects. Those in authority promote them without adequate and critical project assessments, eventually benefiting the vested political and economic interests of those in authority.²⁰⁰ But the opposition by people's movements could articulate many important and pertinent questions on social and environmental impacts of this brand of development as part of an emerging new critical awareness.

The Narmada River Valley Projects

Narmada River originates from the Maikal ranges at Amarkantak in the state of Madhya Pradesh. It flows one thousand three hundred and twelve kilometers westwards across the state in Central India to reach the Arabian Sea at Baruch in Gujarat, before passing north of the state of Maharashtra. Venerated as a holy river, *Narma-da*, its name

¹⁹⁹ "Mission," Sardar Sarovar Narmada Nigam Limited, <http://www.sardarsarovardam.org/main.htm> (accessed September 3, 2007).

²⁰⁰ Sanjay Sangvai, ed., *For a True national Interest - Save Narmada Valley* (Pune: NBA Support Group, 2002), 3.

means literally “endower of bliss.”²⁰¹ The social and physical geography of the valley is diverse ranging from the rich peasants of Nimad plains, fisher folk, dalits, and indigenous tribals of the mountain ranges. The ritualistic pilgrimage on the banks of river Narmada is known as *parikrama* (circumambulation). It starts from Amarkantak, the source of the river. The pilgrims walk with the river always on their right, never crossing the river except at its mouth at Bharuch. Performing a ritual *parikrama* means to 'circle the world.'²⁰² Damming the river Narmada implies complete denial of the ritual of *parikrama* with permanent constructions crisscrossing the river destroying the purpose of the sacred traditions.

Sardar Sarovar Project

The development initiatives in the Narmada Valley envisage building thirty large, one hundred and thirty-five medium, and three thousand small dams. The dams will strangle one thousand three hundred and twelve kilometers long Narmada and its tributaries into a series of lakes, thereby ravaging the lives and livelihoods of twenty million people. In this study we will concentrate our discussion on the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) which looms large in controversy since its construction began in 1961 when Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru laid the foundation stone. SSP is a multipurpose project, the terminal dam on the river Narmada in Gujarat, to provide power, irrigation,

²⁰¹ Sanjay Sangvai, *The River and Life: People's Struggle in the Narmada Valley*, rev. 2^d ed. (Mumbai, Calcutta: Earthcare Books, 2002), 8.

²⁰² Chris Deegan, "The Narmada: Circumambulation of a Sacred Landscape," in *Hinduism and Ecology*, 396, 97.

and drinking water. Claude Alvares and Ramesh Billoray provide a detailed study of the SSP dam's impact, and expose the large-scale manipulation that led to the approval of the project. Their treatise on Narmada branded the SSP as the "greatest planned environmental disaster," and the government summarily banned their book when they published it in 1988.²⁰³

The Narmada debate that stretched over two decades in timeline is unique with its multitude of voices raising more questions than receive answers. This multiplicity of voices is obvious as each stakeholder uses the rhetoric of some key ideas such as 'sustainable development' and 'human rights.' The proponents and the opponents of development projects interpret these concepts very differently. Various UN-sponsored debates, conventions, or commission reports and legal interpretations by the Courts provide additional variations to these meanings. Here there is need to answer some vital questions. What purpose does the government serve to the people of Narmada valley by completing the project? What does this development mean for the people? Who takes care of the rights of the socially marginalized people; the victims of modern development initiatives? Who decides the content and mode of development and eventually the fate of those called to sacrifice in the guise of 'national or public interest,' the rulers or the ruled? And more importantly, what does 'democracy' mean for the displaced population when they have no part in decision-making? The Narmada debate brings up a complex terrain of multifaceted social, political, ecological, and ethical issues.

²⁰³Claude Alvares, Ramesh Billoray, *Damming the Narmada: India's greatest planned environmental disaster* (Penang: Third World Network/Appen, 1988). The ban is cited in Sanjay Sangvai, *The River and Life*, 2nd Revised Edition (Mumbai and Calcutta: Earthcare Books, 2002), 48.

In the volume edited by William F. Fisher, *Toward Sustainable Development*, the writers represent the conflicting views on the Narmada debate. The proponents of the Narmada projects endorse the view that large-scale, centrally controlled projects are able to meet the growing demands for water, food, and energy. The opponents think that these top-down schemes are incompatible with sustainable development, thus creating serious repercussions on human habitation and environment. One interesting feature of the debate is that both the defenders and the resisters of the project are using the "same moral vocabulary of social justice and the same economic rhetoric of sustainable development."²⁰⁴ Significant dispute exists about the projected costs and anticipated benefits. The officials argue that the project will bring benefits in the form of drinking water for forty million people and irrigation of one million and nine hectare acres in three states. In addition, the project offers one thousand four hundred and fifty MW electricity at a marginal cost of displacement of fifty one thousand four hundred and forty-seven PAFs.²⁰⁵

The critics, however, insist that there is an overestimation of projected benefits and underestimation of the socio-economic and environmental costs. The major flash points of the disagreements over the Sardar Sarovar projects were issues of Resettlement and Rehabilitation (R&R) and the environment. Fisher points out that these diverging perspectives present two basic analytical methods towards development, assuming either

²⁰⁴ William F. Fisher, "Development and Resistance in the Narmad Valley," in William F. Fisher, ed., *Toward Sustainable Development: Struggling Over India's Narmada River* (Jaipur, New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 1997), 8.

²⁰⁵ SSNNL: "Benefits," <http://www.sardarsarovardam.org/benefits.htm> (accessed 5 June 2008).

the positive potential or negative impacts of development. The debate also leads to a third approach that uses resistance as a tactic in it to propel development initiatives aimed at alternative solutions or means.²⁰⁶ In the Narmada debate religious tradition, ecology, economics, and politics intersect to form crossroads of moral arguments involving issues of human rights, social justice and participatory and sustainable development. Both the opponents and proponents of the Narmada project earnestly "use the same moral vocabulary of social justice, and the same economic rhetoric of sustainable development, and similar evocations of the legacy of Gandhi." But what they mean by these symbols "differs profoundly."²⁰⁷

Thus, the social drama around Sardar Sarovar is replete with a multiplicity of actors or stakeholders. They include politicians, bureaucrats, and technocrats of various departments of four state governments, three union ministries, and the Prime Minister's Office. The NWD Tribunal which gave its award in 1979 set the stage for debate. The Supreme Court of India is the arbiter of the dispute. The most long-standing environmental movement (NBA) is at the center stage of the debate and struggle, and not the least in the list: millions of indigenous peoples affected by the project.

²⁰⁶ Fisher, "Development and Resistance" in *Toward Sustainable Development*, 15, 28, 39-40.

²⁰⁷ Fisher, "Sacred Rivers, Sacred Dams" in *Hinduism and Ecology*, 405, 409.

Sardar Sarovar Project

Creation of the Project: Lifeline of Gujarat

Sardar Sarovar dam in Gujarat is one among the thirty big dams and one hundred and thirty-five medium sized dams and over three thousand mini dams built across the Narmada and its tributaries. The Narmada Valley Project also envisages setting up an extensive canal network in Gujarat to take the Narmada waters to drought-prone areas in Gujarat and Rajasthan. Sardar Sarovar has meanwhile become a 'symbol' representing economic development, by bringing benefits to many while costing hundreds of thousands of indigenous people cultural and economic deprivation, and simultaneously causing irrevocable damage to the natural environment.²⁰⁸ The 138.68 meter-high (above mean sea level), 1.2 km-long dam is to provide water, irrigation, and electricity to parched millions in the riparian states and Rajasthan. Often depicted as the 'lifeline' of Gujarat (which was how Urmila Patel, wife of former CM of Gujarat described the SSP in 1993), the project emerged as the 'only solution' for the water-deprived Kutch and Saurashtra regions.²⁰⁹

When declaring the Sardar Sarovar dam construction complete, Narendra Modi, the chief minister of Gujarat said on December 31, 2006 that "India has taken a leap ahead. The dam will change the future of the country."²¹⁰ Asserting the promises by the state as false, environmental groups led by the NBA fought a long battle to stop the dam

²⁰⁸ Bradford Morse and Thomas Berger, *Sardar Sarovar: Report of the Independent Review* (Ottawa: Resource Futures International (RFI) Inc., 1992), 6.

²⁰⁹ Roy, *The Common Good*, 6.

²¹⁰ "Dam of discord built on year's last day," *The Telegraph* (Calcutta), 1 January 2007, 1.

construction since it would cause displacement of people, many of whom are poor and tribal farmers. NBA leader Medha Patkar reiterated: “The Sardar Sarovar Dam is a classic case of cheating the poor.... It has been built to destroy the economy of rural India.”²¹¹ Such are the conflicting views in the debate. In this study we will discuss in detail the Sardar Sarovar project as a representative case among the Narmada Valley Projects in the continuing ‘dam debate’ in India.

Tribunal Award

The Sardar Sarovar Project is an Interstate multipurpose project on the river Narmada in Gujarat involving the States of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan. But, clogged with controversy, the dam construction took a long and winding road. Though envisaged in the year 1946, because of the dispute about sharing the waters of the Narmada between the riparian States, the Project could not begin. The GoI therefore set up the Narmada Water Dispute Tribunal (NWDT) in 1969 under the Interstate Water Disputes Act (1956), to arbitrate on the dispute about sharing of Narmada water. The NWDT gave its award in 1979, apportioning water and power benefits from the project to the riparian states.

The important terms of the Tribunal Award included the mandatory provision of ‘land for land,’ instead of cash compensation. The Award required a master plan for rehabilitation by the governments within two years, and the orders to have no

²¹¹ Ibid.

submergence without rehabilitation.²¹² But the commission grossly underestimated the number of PAFs²¹³ as 6603 because of faulty surveys, a figure which swelled to the present official figure of 51447 at the Full Reservoir Level (FRL) of 138.68 m (455 feet). The project will drown about 37533 hectares of land affecting 244 villages in the three states.²¹⁴

Balakrishnan Rajagopal recalls the Tribunal Award as inadequate to deliver justice for various reasons. He views the Award as a political construct incapable to dispense justice on various counts especially by making it an interstate dispute, denying the voices of the affected people heard or accounted for. The Tribunal succumbed to political pressures with provisions that were based on faulty assumptions. For instance, it had to accept the State government's calculation of total amount of water as 28 MAF,²¹⁵ whereas the Tribunal's own calculations remained at 22.6 MAF. Rajagopal further states that the Tribunal did not have the liberty to search for any alternative to the project. Besides, the Tribunal could not consider the issues of human rights issues related to indigenous people or address the question of environmental impacts, since it came under

²¹² *Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal*, "Final Order and Decision of the Tribunal," 12 December 1979, Geneva: International Environmental Law Research Centre, Clause XI, 5-7, <http://www.ielrc.org/content/c7901.pdf> (accessed April 12, 2007). The document is hereafter referred to as *NWDTA*.

²¹³ The PAF (Project-affected Family) is a technical term, which means that the family is legally recognized as entitled to the rehabilitation package.

²¹⁴ "Highlights/Submergence Details," Narmada Control Authority, http://nca.gov.in/rnr_index.htm (accessed September 24, 2007). The Narmada Control Authority (NCA) is state machinery comprised of representatives from all the riparian states and the central government, set up in 1980 to implement the directions and decision of the NWDT.

²¹⁵ *NWDTA*, Clause IX, 3. Million Acre Feet; one acre-foot is the amount of water it takes to cover one acre to a depth of one foot; equivalent to 325,900 gallons or 1,233 cubic meters.

a statute adopted in 1956. It was much before the international community took such issues seriously.²¹⁶ Tribunal Award 1979 mandated to rehabilitate all affected families at least one year before submergence, directing resettlement with irrigable land for land owning families that would lose twenty-five percent or more of their property.²¹⁷ However, it failed to provide rehabilitation for landless encroachers (mostly tribals) and widows.

Also, the state governments have failed to estimate the correct number of PAFs and identify the land for rehabilitation leading towards evolution of a rehabilitation master plan as stipulated in the conditional environmental clearance by MoEF in 1987.²¹⁸ Finally the GoI approved the project after considering its impacts on environment and forests also after getting clearance from concerned departments in 1987. Despite the fact there exists a detailed plan for the dam construction, there is no clear scheme for R&R until now.

However, in 1995, responding to a petition filed by the NBA, the Supreme Court of India restricted the SSP to 80.3 meters, suspending the work till 1999. Since then, the Court allowed the construction to continue in increments of five meters, with clear injunctions to complete the rehabilitation at least six months before submerging the area. The Narmada Control Authority (NCA) is an interstate review committee, set up in 1980

²¹⁶ Balakrishnan Rajagopal, *Limits of Law in Counter-Hegemonic Globalization: The Supreme Court and the Narmada Valley Struggle* (New Delhi: Centre for the Study of Law and Governance, JNU, 2004), 12-13.

²¹⁷ *NWDTA*, Clause XI, Sub clauses IV (2) (iv) and VI (7), 7-8.

²¹⁸ Department of Environment & Forests, "Environmental Aspects of Narmada Sagar and Sardar Sarovar Multipurpose Projects," December 1986, <http://www.ielrc.org/content/c8601.pdf> (accessed March 23, 2006).

under the stipulations of the NWDTA as a mechanism to impose its decision. Its latest decision to grant permission to raise the height of the SS dam from 110.64 to 121.92 meters came on 8 March 2006.²¹⁹ Now the dam construction is complete at the height of 121.92 meters whereas the rehabilitation is incomplete even for the height of 110.64 meters.

Grave Questions

Economic Feasibility: Provision of Drinking Water or Electricity

Ashish Kothari calls it a 'fifty-year old myth' that only a Narmada dam can quench the thirst of Gujarat and Rajasthan. He argues that, instead, the project is about promoting the thirst of big farmers, industries, and city dwellers, thereby satiating the greed of contractors and politicians while repeating a failed model of 'development.'²²⁰

Benefit-Cost Ratio

There are serious doubts about the probability of the claimed benefits of the SSP, whereas there is severe criticism for gross misjudgment of the economic, human, and environmental costs. Besides, the accuracy of the benefit-cost ratio often goes wrong since the calculations reflect exaggerated figures meant to justify the economic feasibility of any project despite scrutiny by governmental agencies. Vinod Mathew reports that from the early estimates of Rs.64.06 billion in 1986-87, the project cost spiraled to

²¹⁹ "Important Dates," *Narmada Control Authority*, http://nca.gov.in/imp_date.htm (accessed January 31, 2007).

²²⁰ Ashish Kothari, "Against a people's movement," *Frontline*, Volume 18 - Issue 15, Jul. 21 - Aug. 03, 2001, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl1815/18150850.htm> (accessed January 21, 2007).

Rs.160 billion in January 2004 with a projected cost of Rs.350 billion (\$10 billion) on completion.²²¹

On the technical scale, Rahul N. Ram infers that the decline in the estimated water flow from 27.22 MAF (NWDTA estimates) to 22.69 MAF (based on currently available flow data) distorts the entire project. Then the SSP is likely to irrigate only 44-52% of the 1.8 million hectare acre. This means that less water is available for irrigation, power and drinking water, resulting in a decrease in the benefit-cost ratio of the project that is already at a marginal 1.13, well below the government standards of 1.5.²²² The power benefits will also be significantly low dropping from 1450 MW to a final 50 MW once the canal network reaches completion: the project consumes more power than it generates for Gujarat.²²³ The “moral imperative of supplying drinking water” thus becomes a political rhetoric to justify the SSP in Gujarat to benefit forty million people of Gujarat and specifically the drought-affected Kutch and Saurashtra regions.²²⁴ The official web site details the benefits of the project with proposals to provide drinking water by 2021, but it keeps an obvious silence about the total project costs.²²⁵ As there is no detailed plan yet available, the question remains: When will water reach its supposed real destination beyond the rich urban elites in the Ahmedabad-Baroda corridor? The majority

²²¹ Vinod Mathew, “Bonding the Narmada dam,” *The Hindu Business Line*, March 31, 2004, <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/2004/03/31/stories/2004033100100900.htm> (accessed March 16, 2008).

²²² Rahul N. Ram, *Muddy Waters: A Critical Assessment of the Benefits of the Sardar Sarovar Project*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi: Kalpavriksh, 1993), 6.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 37-38.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

²²⁵ “Benefits,” <http://www.sardarsarovardam.org/benefits1.htm> (accessed June 5, 2008).

gets all the benefits of the project, but for the affected minority it costs their livelihood through displacement. Besides the high tide of financial costs, the SSP mounts up social and environmental costs by unleashing 'tidal waves' to submerge entire villages and displace populations. As with other large dam projects, the calculus for profits and loss with SSP thus shows minimal benefits downstream and enormous costs upstream.

Alternatives

Resistance to dams obviously opens questions of alternatives. Dam construction is not the only choice for water management, as is obvious from the various initiatives by the autonomous, decentralized choices that are available. Now the first consideration before the NBA is to demand involvement of the project-affected victims in the decision making. Second, it may call for decentralized development projects and claim alternative sources of livelihood to the affected people. To borrow a phrase, 'the interests of the greater common good' must still prevail.

Large projects cause irrevocable alterations in the ecosystem rendering any volte-face to traditional alternatives impossible. Kothari advocates the use of alternative technologies since they involve a revival of traditional knowledge and a "whole matrix of sustainability, democracy, governance and participation." He calls for a dialogue between the modern and traditional perspectives especially by involving "those who are marginal

to the dominant model" and are capable of identifying sustainable traditional alternatives.²²⁶

Scudder thinks alternatives to mega projects become preferable once the horizon of environmental and social impact assessment expands to include all habitats and affected populations. Sometimes, major changes in design and operation will suffice to make a large project viable and sustainable.²²⁷

Even at this late hour, there is scope for alternative plans aimed at sustainable development of the Narmada valley. The new paradigm can ensure sustainability and equity, minimum displacement and submergence, prioritization of water for drinking, farming and industrial uses, and more importantly, decentralized planning and implementation by the local community. NBA calls for a "just and sustainable development plan" for the valley incorporating an extensive and "comprehensive integrated watershed management and in situ rainwater harvesting," with groundwater development and micro irrigation schemes.²²⁸ A visit to village Bilgaon in Maharashtra gave me a firsthand experience of how decentralized alternatives such as a running-of-the-river micro hydro project could create such a new paradigm for development in the valley. Anil and Madhu, two engineers from the People's School of Energy in Kerala started the mini hydro project on river Uday, a tributary of river Narmada at Bilgaon in

²²⁶ Smitu Kothari, "Damming the Narmada and the Politics of Development," in Fisher ed. *Sustainable Development*, 426-429.

²²⁷ Thayer Scudder, "Development-Induced Impoverishment, Resistance and River-Basin Development," in Christopher McDowell, ed., *Understanding Impoverishment: The Consequences of Development-Induced Displacement* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1996), 74.

²²⁸ NBA, "Towards a Vision of a Just and Sustainable Development of the Narmada Valley," [Draft for discussion] (Baroda: NBA, 1996), 3.

2002. Twelve hamlets can now generate fifteen KW of electricity, what everyone now calls “people's energy.”²²⁹ The Bilgaon people have now access to cheap electricity to pump water during daytime and light the village at night.

Engineer Suhas Paranjape and social scientist K. J. Joy proposed an alternative plan in 1995 to reduce the height of the dam, bringing down the submergence behind the dam by seventy percent. Instead of mass storage year-round in the reservoir, the plan proposed distributing river water to storage tanks and wells locally. It also proposed 'run-of-the-river operation' of hydropower plants.²³⁰

Nafisa Barot and Ashoke Chatterjee trace the effort by activists in Gujarat in community-led planning and management of water to pro-poor gender sensitive approaches. *Swavalamban Abhiyan* (movement of self-reliance) is one such project that monitors Narmada water distribution. The *Lok Manch* (People's Forum) sets up the *Swajaldhara* (self-reliant water scheme) helping rainwater harvesting, revival of local ponds, and recharging wells. It involves coalitions between government, communities and NGOs. The whole process of self-reliant water management predicated the belief that "users of water are the best managers of water."²³¹ The advantage of small schemes lies in the fact that the displaced become the beneficiaries of the dam with local water

²²⁹ Conversation with Sukhlal a farmer who runs a convenience store at Bilgaon, *Research Journal*, January 27, 2004.

²³⁰ Suhas Paranjape and K.J. Joy, "Alternative Restructuring of the Sardar Sarovar: Breaking the Deadlock," *Economic and Political Weekly* 41 (February 2006): 601-602.

²³¹ Nafisa Barot and Ashoke Chatterjee, "Vision, Plan and Reality: Challenges & Experiences from Gujarat, India," (paper presented at the Dakar Forum, Ahmadabad, November 2004) 3-4.

management. Large projects, on the other hand, disrupt the environment and threaten the wider affected population by denying their livelihood as a result.

Submergence or Displacement

There is a growing recognition of the social, environmental, economic and political implications of large dams, raising pertinent questions about the rationale behind big projects which forcibly uproot people. The voices of the uprooted and the resettled populations are not simply cries in the wilderness, but they form the central experiences of millions of people around the world displaced because of development projects.²³² Resettlement means not only losing a physical space; it represents the loss of one's livelihood.

Displacement is both undemocratic and unjustifiable as it denies people the right to protect their land and livelihood. The political (and economic) question is whether the state has powers to redefine the rights of its citizens in the 'national' interest. *Satyajit Singh* terms displacement and resettlement in the Narmada valley as political issues, the conflict being primarily a battle between the state and the people.²³³ *Li Heming* and others probe four possible reasons for reluctance of oustees forced to rehabilitation sites that are far-off. Cast into a 'refugee-like' strange environment, oustees face difficulty to

²³² The Webster's New World Dictionary enunciates 'displaced person' as meaning: "a person forced from his country, esp. as a result of war, and left homeless elsewhere." *The Webster's New World Dictionary* (1970), s.v. "Displaced person."

²³³ *Satyajit Singh*, "Introduction," in John Dreze, Meera Samson and *Satyajit Singh*, eds., *The Dam and the Nation: Displacement and Resettlement in the Narmada Valley* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1.

rebuild livelihoods, problems with integration into the host community, and loss of socio-cultural networks.²³⁴ It is ironic to note that a country like India which boasts herself as the 'world's largest democracy' lacks a comprehensive national rehabilitation policy and that millions of her displaced people are "refugees of an unacknowledged war."²³⁵

Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha identify three broad categories of Indian population distinguished by their ecological context and size of resource catchments. "Ecosystem people," the first category, forms one half of the population who survive by cultivating and harvesting food and other limited local goods. Displaced from their homes for the sake of development projects, the second class of people are "ecological refugees." A third category of people, termed "omnivores," devour and deplete earthly goods indiscriminately. Ecological refugees can become omnivores when they seek new pastures in alien lands often endangering the environment by depleting natural goods.²³⁶ This is a useful ecological and sociological classification, reflecting the direction in which development schemes displace huge sections of affected people as did the Narmada project.

In India most 'environmental refugees' are indigenous people who face forced internal migration because of development projects. These voiceless people are habitually not entitled to any reparation. Here Nehru's tribute to the tribal people becomes noteworthy: "We must approach the tribal people with affection and friendliness and

²³⁴ Li Heming, Phil Rees, Paul Waley, "Reservoir Resettlement in China: Past Experience and the Three Gorges Dam," *The Geographical Journal* 167, no.3. (2001): 195.

²³⁵ Roy, *The Common Good*, 11, 12.

²³⁶ Gadgil and Guha, *Ecology and Equity* 3-4, 32-33.

come to them as a liberating force. We must let them feel that we have come to give and not to take something away from them.”²³⁷ This eulogy is in striking contrast with Nehru's earlier speech, while laying the foundation of India's first major river-valley project, the Hirakud dam in Orissa. Nehru then urged the oustees, “If you have to suffer, you should suffer in the interest of the country.”²³⁸ The question often raised is why displacing indigenous people can be justified for the nation, but an additional vital question remains: Why is there denial of an acceptable rehabilitation package? The latter question is about the absence of a national policy of rehabilitation to date. The more pertinent question then becomes: When will the tribals achieve self-confidence to better represent themselves in the larger society, or rather be able to demand their legitimate rights?

Thayer Scudder, being unable to point to a single project of successful rehabilitation of displaced populations, laments; "Forced resettlement is about the worst thing you can do to a people next to killing them."²³⁹ Medha Patkar recollects the lament of a tribal leader on the agony of displacement. Pointing to an old tree, the tribal leader remarked; "We are like this tree, you cannot replant us anywhere else without killing

²³⁷ Jawaharlal Nehru cited in *The Tribal People of India*, Government of India Press, 1973, 5, Quoted in Smitu Kothari, "Whose Nation?: The Displaced as Victims of Development," paper presented at a workshop on “Displacement and Resettlement,” held at the Delhi School of Economics on January 21-23, 1995; <http://www.dams.org/docs/kbase/submissions/soc161.pdf> (accessed March 12, 2007).

²³⁸ Jawaharlal Nehru cited in *The Bombay Chronicle*, April 12, 1948, Quoted in Kothari, "Whose Nation?"

²³⁹ Thayer Scudder quoted in Chris Lang, "Laos: Cutting the trees to save the forest," *WRM Bulletin* 44 (March 2001); [e-journal]; <http://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin/44.html#Laos> (accessed March 15, 2007).

us."²⁴⁰ The National Tribal Policy (draft 2006) rightly admits that "displacement is a multidimensional trauma, with far-reaching impacts, which cannot easily be compensated." Some of the broad features of the Policy include a mandatory "principle of least displacement," exploring "all the technological/ financial/ displacement alternatives" with reasons given to justify the least displacement in the proposed project.²⁴¹ The draft also proposes some important provisions like mandatory consultation with the community before displacement, a rehabilitation package including compulsory 'land for land' compensation and a right to get employment.²⁴² Nevertheless, on the verge of submergence, a tribal villager protested the way the Sardar Sarovar project treats the tribal people: "We cannot be treated like monkeys on trees, who will simply climb up to a high plane when the water rises. We demand land—for all the families."²⁴³ The new Tribal policy aims to safeguard the interests of the tribal populations facing displacement because of development projects. But with Narmada projects the new policy is likely to remain only a tactical plan until the government shows the political will to implement it into an action plan.

Often the poor, once abandoned because of big projects, begin to face the agony of endless displacement. Most of the displaced poor end living in slums and subsequently

²⁴⁰ Medha Patkar's address during a *dharna* before the Maharashtra state HQ, *Research Journal*, January 21, 2008.

²⁴¹ Ministry of Tribal Affairs, GoI, "The National Tribal Policy 2006 (A Policy for the Scheduled Tribes of India)" (Draft), 8-9, <http://tribal.nic.in/finalContent.pdf> (accessed February 13, 2007).

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Patel, Anil, "What Do the Narmada Valley Tribals Want?" in Fisher ed., *Toward Sustainable Development*, 185.

suffer multiple displacements. Vasudha Dhagamwar and others view displacement as a phenomenon disrupting social life in a family and community causing physical and psychological strain. Since larger populations of displaced people are women, who are less mobile than men, the collapse of the social and family units affects them most.²⁴⁴ Smithu Kothari argues that if displacement becomes inevitable, then the resettlement must "take place in the same ecosystem and in a similar cultural-linguistic zone" and provide an opportunity to raise standards of living.²⁴⁵ Obviously, displacement to another linguistic state, hundreds of kilometers apart like Gujarat, fragments the cultural and ancestral ties of SSP oustees. Informed consent of the displaced people must be a precondition in the decision-making involving big projects.

Displaced women face double alienation since they lack equal rights for land and compensation. The Tribunal Award shows particular hostility to the rights of women. The award treats every major son as a separate family.²⁴⁶ Thus women heads of households as well as single women lack the privileges of compensation and rehabilitation.

PAF-Rehabilitation and Resettlement

The Supreme Court judgment 2000 defines the Project-affected Families (PAF), as a significant term referring to those landed 'oustees,' legally entitled for the

²⁴⁴ Vasudha Dhagamwar, Enakshi Ganguly Thukral, and Mridula Singh, "The Sardar Sarovar Project: A Study in Sustainable Development?" in Fisher ed., *Toward Sustainable Development*, 278-279.

²⁴⁵ Smitu Kothari, "Whose Nation?"

²⁴⁶ *NWDTA*, Clause XI, Sub Clause I, 5.

rehabilitation package as by the Tribunal Award.²⁴⁷ Lack of proper R&R is a common trait of all dam related projects in India, of which SSP is an example of blatant violations of norms. Governments often handle rehabilitation hesitantly as an act of charity to the displaced populations. The irony remains in the fact that there exists no comprehensive plan or policy for R&R whereas all other aspects of the projects such as the technical and economic features are worked out in detail. In India, the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 and its amended 1984 version grant the legal framework to the State's right to take over land for the sake of “public purpose.”²⁴⁸ Ravi Hemadri and others count displacement as inevitable in big projects. By placing the long-term benefits of such projects in the balance, 'the sacrifice of the few for the larger good is justified,' even at the cost of severe socio-cultural, psychological, economic, and ecological damage.²⁴⁹ But how can such development initiatives which ignore the rights of the displaced populations in favor of a privileged minority be just and rational?

On March 15, 2005, again the Supreme Court interpreted the NWDTA as well as its own 2000 judgment underlining the Tribunal's provision of land-based rehabilitation. The order strongly reiterated that no submergence (so, raising the dam height) should

²⁴⁷ Ibid., *NWDTA* refers to them as ‘*oustees*’ meaning “any person who since at least one year prior to the date of publication of the notification under Section 4 of the Act, has been ordinarily residing or cultivating land or carrying on any trade, occupation, or calling or working for gain in the area likely to be submerged permanently or temporarily.” For reference on ‘PAFs’ see *Narmada Bachao Andolan vs. Union of India*, Judgment of 18 October 2000 (Majority Judgment) case No. 319 of 1994 (Hereafter referred as SC Majority Order 2000), <http://www.ielrc.org/content/c0001.pdf> (accessed January 3, 2006), 14, 34.

²⁴⁸ *Land Acquisition Act, 1894* (As Modified up to 1st September 1985). Ministry of Law and Justice, GoI, <http://dolr.nic.in/hyperlink/acq.htm>; Internet (accessed March 7, 2008).

²⁴⁹ Ravi Hemadri et.al. "Dams, Displacement, Policy and Law in India," Contributing Paper for Thematic Review on Displacement, Resettlement, rehabilitation, reparation and Development, lxxxviii (88), <http://www.dams.org/docs/kbase/contrib/soc213.pdf> (accessed February 12, 2007).

occur without rehabilitating every person affected (whether temporarily or permanently). The Court ratified the term '*pari passu*' as having a direct link with raising dam height *vis-à-vis* progress in R&R "both of which must proceed 'equably' or 'ratably'."²⁵⁰ However, S. Parasuraman calls the *pari passu* policy for R&R of displaced people an "incremental approach" as they face resettlement with approaching construction and submergence. The prolonged process makes the affected people disadvantaged on many counts since time and again they face displacement at the last moment, left with no alternative but to move. This happens irrespective of whether they received any provisions of compensation, land, or other benefits according to the Tribunal award. He goes on to state that political forces in the country are responsible for distorting the procedure of planning itself by beginning projects well before getting clearance from either the Planning Commission or the central government.²⁵¹ The NBA struggle at the moment is seeking rehabilitation according to the conditions stipulated by the NVDT award and court orders. Therefore, the *pari passu* principle simply means the construction must not outpace rehabilitation work. In sum, to make R&R policies effective, a comprehensive plan needs to be in place before the planning phase and well ahead of the project implementation stage, a feat which the Narmada projects failed to accomplish.

²⁵⁰ Supreme Court of India, "Order in Writ Petition (Civil) No.328 of 2002, NBA vs. Union of India Ors.," on March 15, 2005, 18.

²⁵¹ S. Parasuraman, "The Anti-Dam Movement and Rehabilitation Policy," in John Dreze, Meera Samson and Satyajit Singh, eds., *The Dam and the Nation: Displacement and Resettlement in the Narmada Valley* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 27-31.

In the Narmada project, the authorities have hardly ever consulted the oustees on the rehabilitation package or even informed them of their privileges and choices. It naturally results in social protests and inordinate delay in project implementation as has happened in the Narmada valley. Thus the former chairperson of SSNNL C.C. Patel views the SSP as a "victim of time," for wasting much time since the first inception of the project in 1946, and the foundation laid in 1961, because of mounting opposition. It put the management on the defensive, making the cost of delay huge with deferred benefits. The national and the international activist organizations had different objectives, with the former placing their opposition about lapses in rehabilitation and human rights norms, while the latter concerned with the environmental aspects of the project. Patel settles his argument by stressing the need for establishing a balance between environment and development with acceptable yardsticks to "ensure that environmental surpluses are exploited fully and that environmental costs are minimized."²⁵² The argument that the project was a 'victim of time,' however, does not offer a good excuse at least to the lapses made by the authorities in completing the rehabilitation work. This is true for the period between 1994 and 1999 during which the SC stalled dam construction temporarily.

M.S. Gill, a former government official in charge of the SSP in the early 1990s, makes an appeal to "perceive unavoidable resettlement as a development opportunity."²⁵³

²⁵² C.C. Patel, "The Sardar Sarovar Project: A Victim of Time," in William F. Fisher, ed., *Toward Sustainable Development: Struggling Over India's Narmada River* (Jaipur, New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 1997), 71, 80, 87.

²⁵³ M.S. Gill, "Resettlement and Rehabilitation in Maharashtra for the Sardar Sarovar Narmada Project," in William F. Fisher, ed., *Toward Sustainable Development*, 256.

Since successful R&R is difficult to achieve, it is imperative to seek a compromise between economic development and proper resettlement with minimal adverse impacts on people. Gill recommends evolving a policy for participatory development that will bring resettlement as the central concern of the development debate, a concern which gained currency with emerging people's movements.²⁵⁴

Special Rehabilitation Package by GoMP

The State of Madhya Pradesh, having the largest number of project-affected families, commits the biggest violations in R&R through *ex parte* allotments and cash compensations both of which are illegal according to the NDWTA and court rulings. Appointed by the Prime Minister, a team of ministers visited the valley in May 2006 to review the status of R&R. It responded to the outcry of the oustees against the Special Rehabilitation Package (cash award) by the GoMP and called to stop the corrupt practice as it is contrary to the orders of the Court. The report exposed the fact that rehabilitation is "largely paper work" having no relation to the ground reality.²⁵⁵ Devram Kanera, an NBA activist, expressed concern for people forced to accept the SRP instead of land-based rehabilitation. The oustees who are under pressure of existing loans succumb to the offer of money fearing they may not receive anything else if they forfeit the offer.²⁵⁶ A visit to the village Bhilkhera in Badwani district of MP revealed the conflicting claims by

²⁵⁴Ibid, 256-263.

²⁵⁵ "GoM's Confidential Report," *The Hindu*, April 17, 2006, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/2006/04/17/stories/2006041705231100.htm> (accessed February 2, 2007).

²⁵⁶ Conversation with Devram Kanera, NBA activist from Khaper Kheda in MP, *Research Journal*, January 29, 2004.

the GoMP. Kanera took us to some other rehabilitation sites as well with house plots and some buildings in each site; a village office, a health center, an *anganwadi* (nursery school), but with no population, since the oustees refused to move in.²⁵⁷

Inadequate Rehabilitation

The question of rehabilitation is the main bone of contention. From the early estimates by the NWDTA the number of oustee families has risen from 6,147 [Clause XI, Subclause IV (1)] to the official figure of 51,447. In its website, the Narmada Control Authority (NCA) upholds that in total, there are 51,447 Project-affected families (PAFs) in the States of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat, and 43,021 of these are in Madhya Pradesh alone. According to a Status Report of Narmada Control Authority of 31 December 2005, the number of PAFs up to 121.92 meters dam height was 28,742. Of these, the NCA claims that 17,197 PAFs - including 4,729 in Gujarat and 12,468 in Madhya Pradesh, have been resettled. 24778 PAFs, including a backlog of 13,233 PAFs at 110.64 meters were yet to be resettled as on 31 December 2005. According to the estimates of the GoG, out of the 51459 PAFs²⁵⁸ awaiting resettlement, with 11210 already resettled in Gujarat, 19831 PAFs have to wait for R&R provisions, as of June 30, 2007.²⁵⁹ An increase in the dam's height has disproportionate impact on the affected population because of the special topography of the Narmada river valleys being more narrow and steep at the bottom than at the top. In 2005 the Supreme Court held that:

²⁵⁷ *Research Journal*, January 30, 2004.

²⁵⁸ Official figures often vary since they are not based on ground reality.

²⁵⁹ Sardar Sarovar Punarvasat Agency - Government of Gujarat, <http://www.sspa.gujarat.gov.in/newapproach.htm> (accessed April 22, 2008).

"... We are not oblivious of the fact that the river valley of Narmada is shaped like an inverted cone and the area of submergence increases exponentially for the each meter of height raised."²⁶⁰ Given this fact, how is it possible that the number of PAFs between 110.64m and 121.92m is a mere 6598 families after excluding the backlog of 13233 PAFs? On the other hand, according to NBA, there remain 35,000 families living in the submergence zone at 122 meters and over 40,000 families (nearly 200,000 people) facing evacuation at 138.68 meters, the full reservoir level.²⁶¹ The record of rehabilitation thus remains a scheme of numbers with the authorities first making a list of affected families and then deleting thousands by making artificial distinctions like 'permanent' and 'temporary' displacement. Neither NWDTA nor the Courts made any such distinctions. Thus acute lack of rehabilitation remains the hallmark of SSP.

Beginnings of a Movement

Amita Baviskar reports the beginnings of the struggle in the Narmada valley. It started off in the Nimad valley in the submergence zone as an early response to the first Tribunal Award in 1978. Congress politician Arjun Singh led the Nimad Bachao Andolan (Save Nimad Movement) with the support of wealthy farmers and merchants. But the struggle did not last as Singh later supported the Narmada projects as he became the

²⁶⁰ In the Supreme Court of India, Civil Writ Jurisdiction, I.A. No. 10 in I.A. No.4 and I.A. No 11 in I.A. No. 7 In Writ Petition (Civil) No. 328 of 2002, NBA (petitioner) vs. Union of India and Ors (Respondents), SC order March 15, 2005, <http://www.ielrc.org/content/c0503.pdf> (accessed March 24, 2008).

²⁶¹ Yogini Khanolkar, et.al, "Urgent Appeal: Two lakh people, adivasis and farmers, from the Narmada valley cry halt to destruction," NBA Press Release, 1, January, 2007, <http://www.narmada.org/nba-press-releases/january-2007/urgentappeal07.html> (accessed January 31, 2007).

Chief Minister of MP.²⁶² Vasudha Dhagamwar of MARG (Multiple Action Research Group) visited the valley several times between 1983 and 1989 with an objective to find out how much the oustees knew about the Narmada projects, the answer was nothing. Her study first involved the ARCH Vahini²⁶³ and later Patkar and NBA²⁶⁴ associated with her initiatives.²⁶⁵ Up to 1988 the debate centered on R&R provisions for the oustees, but later the opposition surged when questions developed about environmental lapses and state repression.

Medha Patkar started a subsequent attempt to organize opposition to the SSP in 1985. Earlier in the same year, Kalpavriksh and Hindu College Nature Club published a critical analysis of the project. Opposition to the project was mounting because of the World Bank involvement in the project and the Ministry of Environment and Forests mandating detailed study on the two major projects in the NVP. Then ARCH Vahini moved the SC on the Narmada issue in 1985 to ensure the R&R package in Gujarat.²⁶⁶

²⁶² Baviskar, *In the Belly of the River*, 202.

²⁶³ ARCH Vahini (ARCH refers to Action Research in Community Health, since the organization was first involved primarily with the health issues and 'Vahini' means 'stream.') is a Gujarat-based NGO committed to ensure fair and just resettlement and rehabilitation. The group cooperated with the Gujarat government and SSNNL to ensure that the new R&R policy is fairly and justly implemented.

²⁶⁴ Initially organized as state-based units of the SSP oustees, the Narmada Ghati Nav Nirman Samiti (The Committee for a New Life in the Narmada Valley) in MP, the Narmada Dharangrast Samiti (Committee for Narmada Dam-affected People) in Maharashtra, and the Narmada Asargrastha Samiti (Committee for People Affected by the Narmada Dam) in Gujarat, within a span of two to three years, these grassroots groups took the parts of a movement to form the NBA. See the discussion in William F. Fisher, "Development and Resistance in the Narmada Valley," in William F. Fisher, ed., *Toward Sustainable Development*, 23.

²⁶⁵ Vasudha Dhagamwar, "The NGO Movements in the Narmada Valley: Some Reflections," in *The Dam and the Nation*, Drese et al. eds. 93-97.

²⁶⁶ Balakrishnan Rajagopal, *Limits of Law in Counter-Hegemonic Globalization*, 19.

The activists convened local initiatives like large meetings and rallies during the early years of protests in the valley from 1984 to 1988. They provided the oustees with the much-needed information on the Narmada projects, such as specific details about the provisions for rehabilitation and resettlement.²⁶⁷ Such gatherings provided, borrowing Paulo Freire's terms, 'learning opportunities' for *conscientização* through 'dialogue,' thereby 'empowering' the oustees to "achieve critical consciousness of the facts," to engage in transformation and 'humanization' of the realities.²⁶⁸

Dhagamwar makes a critical assessment of the diversified roles of the two diverging movements. Vahini concentrated its work in Gujarat whereas NBA took roots in MP and Maharashtra. While the former aligned itself with the rehabilitation package of the GoG, NBA took a position of opposition to the project. NBA feared that just rehabilitation is impossible since no land is available in the state of Madhya Pradesh. Vahini was confident about the prospective benefits of the project to Gujarat while NBA was skeptical about the promises. Dhagamwar points out the successes of these organizations on different frontiers, with Vahini responsible for enhancing the quality and quantity of rehabilitation package by Gujarat. The NBA could then raise "a worldwide consciousness about the plight of the oustees," under the leadership of Patkar, forcing the World Bank and the donor nations to opt out from the project. Dhagamwar describes the

²⁶⁷ Personal communication with NBA activist Devram Kanera at Badwani, *Research Diary*, dated 29 January 2004.

²⁶⁸ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), 133, 185. The term *conscientização* (translated often as conscientization) in Portuguese refers to the process of "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality." It involves a "critical consciousness" or awareness. See translator's note, 19.

impact of Vahini as one "seeking change within the existing structure" to try to improve the conditions of the oustees, whereas the NBA is "radical, challenging the very fundamentals of the system."²⁶⁹ Thus the accomplishments and impacts of both organizations are in essence complementary though they have taken different ideological routes and strategies, thereby making the dams debate diverse and meaningful.

The Andolan symbolized the political and cultural resistance of the tribals in the valley against state-endorsed development projects that moved beyond and towards alternative indigenous models. Another political organization in the form of a *Sangath* (union) was also in the making, which fought for the tribal rights to land, forest, and water. Baviskar details the history of forming the *Sangath* in the villages of Madhya Pradesh with special focus on Alirajpur, where the *Khedut Mazdoor Chetna Sangath* (Peasants and Workers Consciousness Union) took root among the tribals. As a response to the state's reservation of forests for commercial purposes which violated the legitimate rights of tribals to their subsistence goods, the tribals raised the slogan: "*Jangal jamin kunin se? Amri se! Amri se!* (Whose is the forest land? It is ours! It is ours!)." ²⁷⁰ Baviskar describes how the *Sangath* was instrumental in forging unity among the Bhil and Bhilala tribes to collectively oppose the state, the resistance assuming proportions of an ideological "class conflict" between the exploited and the exploiters. Thus the ideology of the *Sangath* is "ecological Marxist" (taking Guha's representation) in its orientation. The struggle addresses the issue of cultural identity of the tribals, who sometimes reshape

²⁶⁹ Vasudha Dhagamwar, "The NGO Movements in the Narmada Valley: Some Reflections," in *The Dam and the Nation*, Drese et al. eds., 93-97, 101.

²⁷⁰ Baviskar, *In the Belly of the River*, 178.

their ideological stance and move ahead despite the inherent contradictions in their lived reality.²⁷¹ Andolan, however, took displacement of people due to the project as the rallying point to bring together the tribals of the valley as well as the farmers of the Nimad region. It employed the Gandhian strategy of nonviolence to launch a wider ideological struggle building on the foundations laid by the *Sangath*.

With the leaders of tribal and peasant populations affected by the SSP, urban and rural-based activists formed the core group of the emerging NBA, forming alliances and linkages with other movements and support groups across the nation. Thus the movement took shape swelling like a wave to carry the voices and aspirations of the people of the Narmada valley. The NBA logo pictures the solidarity of people joined hand-to-hand with the 'wave' symbolizing the river as well as the dynamics of the movement as an ongoing struggle. And the engraved slogan, *Narmada Bachao, Manav Bachao* (Save Narmada, Save Humanity), represents the tone and content of the movement.

Evolution of a Movement

Naming the movement Narmada Bachao Andolan,' logically followed a cue from earlier movements like the Nimad Bachao Andolan, since it is common in India to term a movement as '*andolan*.' Sanjay Sangvai traces the history of the NBA from 1988-1989 onwards with Medha Patkar coordinating the different organizations and phases involved in the struggle.²⁷² NBA began raising questions about displacement and

²⁷¹ Ibid., 192,244.

²⁷² Sanjay Sangvai, *The River and Life: People's Struggle in the Narmada Valley*, 2nd ed. (Mumbai: Earthcare Books, 2002), 49.

rehabilitation. As happens in most development projects, the government never informed or consulted the affected people but instead clamped the Official Secrets Act on information regarding development in villages around the dam site in January 1989. But there was no confirmed answer to the question of availability of land for rehabilitation, and the cost-benefit aspect of the project was based on inadequate data, as discussed earlier. These facts led the movement to ask for a complete halt of the dam construction and a comprehensive review of the project. Sangvai reports the march by 10,000 people from Nimad and tribal areas to the dam site in February 1989 to raise the slogan "*koi nahin hatega! baandh nahin banega!* (No one will move! The dam will not be built!)". The two-pronged strategy of opposition to the dam and displacement precipitated in the popular slogan, "*doobenge par nahin hatenge* (We will drown but won't move out)." It reflected a strong resolve by people neither to cooperate with dam work nor move out of their lands.²⁷³ NBA supporters met at Mumbai in May 1989 to chart out strategies for struggle in the valley with the initiative of the renowned Gandhian social worker Baba Amte. What followed was the Harsud (in MP) 'Convention against Destructive Development' which mobilized over 50,000 people from 300 organizations to raise the slogan "*vikas chahiye, vinash nahin* (We want development, not destruction)."²⁷⁴

For a brief description of the ensuing struggle up to 1996, I will follow the story line of NBA activist Nandini Oza. GoMP ordered a review of the project following a roadblock agitation by 10,000 people in March 1990. Baba Amte left Anandvan Ashram

²⁷³ Ibid., 51.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 54.

to camp on the banks of river Narmada at Kasaravad, giving a new impetus to the movement on Gandhian lines. MoEF announced the conditional clearance for the project as lapsed. Police stopped the historic Long March to the dam site on December 25, 1990 at the state borders. Then 5000 participants staged a *dharna* (sit in) for thirty-one days and affirmed "*hamare gaon mein hamara raj* (Our rule in our villages)."²⁷⁵ Police repression increased with arrests and beatings, culminating in police fire killing two tribals. A major victory for the movement came in the form of World Bank withdrawal from the project following the report of the Independent Review Committee (Morse Committee) in 1993 finding the project as flawed. Faced with submergence, the affected people organized Monsoon *Satyagraha* at submergence villages from 1993 during monsoon periods prompting the slogan "*dubenge par hatenge nahi*." The struggle intensified by declaring "*Jal Samarpan* (Determination to sacrifice life to rising waters)."²⁷⁶ Participants observed an indefinite fast demanding a review of the project forcing the GoI to appoint a five-member committee. Nandini traces some important events that happened in 1994 when the GoMP asked for a reduction in the height of the dam by nineteen feet accepting the inability to provide land for rehabilitation. The other significant event is NBA filing a Writ Petition in the SC followed by the court directive to halt the construction at 80 meters. From 1996 NBA began a new action plan for *Navnirman* (reconstruction) with programs like starting small hydro projects for irrigation

²⁷⁵ Nandini Oza, "Fight to Stop the Sardar Sarovar Project in India," Environmental NGOs International Symposium on Dams, <http://english.kfem.or.kr/international/symposium/99dam%20fight.doc> (accessed April 23, 2008).

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

and *Jeevansala* (school of life) schools during the stoppage of dam construction which lasted for four years.²⁷⁷ During this time NBA initiated a collective of similar movements in the country to form the National Alliance of People's Movement (NAPM). The Alliance believes in people's democracy and nonviolent means of struggle with a political vision to "Struggle along with Reconstruction."²⁷⁸ Shripad Dharmadhikari, an NBA activist, describes the evolving Andolan: as more facts became available on the environmental impacts and the real benefits of the project, the activists began to oppose the project itself. Thus the struggle was "widened from resettlement to encompass the whole of sustainable development," to ensure meeting "the minimum needs of the maximum population."²⁷⁹

Nationally, apart from forging linkages with other movements, NBA resorted to seek justice through the judiciary by filing a case in the Supreme Court of India. Awaiting the final judgment of the SC, Patkar expressed reservations on the possible outcome in her words, "We are not placing all our eggs in that basket," stressing the need for the struggle to continue at different fronts, "beyond the Narmada River."²⁸⁰ Thus, the long term line of action by the movement became one of addressing the issues comprehensively as part of a coherent opposition to the project, a struggle for participation and justice.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ "About NAPM," [napmindia.org](http://napmindia.org/?page_id=2), http://napmindia.org/?page_id=2 (accessed July 7, 2007).

²⁷⁹ Shripad Dharmadhikari quoted in William F. Fisher, "Development and Resistance in the Narmada Valley," in William F. Fisher, ed., *Toward Sustainable Development*, 23.

²⁸⁰ Medha Patkar, "The Struggle for Participation and Justice: A Historical Narrative (In conversation with Smitu Kothari)," in Fisher (ed.) *Toward Sustainable Development*, 178.

Trans-National Alliances: The Role of Financing Agencies

With the approval of loans for the SS project in 1985 the World Bank entered the scene of conflict. Despite the Bank's guidelines dedicated to sustainable development, it did not complete any environmental impact studies before signing the agreement. The World Bank signed loan agreements with the Indian government for \$450 million, and released a part of the loan before it withdrew from the project after stiff opposition from the affected people. The Loan Agreement added conditional clauses whereby the Bank could cancel the agreement if the environmental impact assessment and rehabilitation preconditions were not met. The World Bank also insisted not to allow any cash compensation in lieu of land.²⁸¹ Medha Patkar appealed before a special US Congressional Hearing on the World Bank's performance in the SSP in 1989. The Hearings initiated an ensuing debate on the project and after an international Narmada Symposium, the Japanese government announced withdrawal of funds to the project.²⁸²

Meanwhile, NBA organized a series of demonstrations in the project area mounting up pressure on the funding agencies. In April 1990 people *gheraoed* (surrounded) the Bank officials in Bhopal and demanded the Bank 'Quit Narmada'²⁸³ echoing the slogan of the Quit India Movement of 1942 under Gandhi's leadership. Tribals and supporters organized the *Jan Vikas Sangharsha Yatra* (People's Struggle for

²⁸¹ *The Indian People's Tribunal on Environment and Human Rights (IPT) Report* (New Delhi: Combat Law Publications for IPT, 2004), 11-12.

²⁸² Lori Udall, "The International Narmada Campaign: A Case Study of Sustained Advocacy," in Fisher ed., *Toward Sustainable Development*, 211-214

²⁸³ Sangvai, *River and Life*, 56.

Development) known as the ‘Long March (December 1990-January 1991),’ from Badwani to the dam site.²⁸⁴ Following the Long March and a twenty-six day fast by Patkar and five activists, the World Bank ordered an Independent Review Commission (IR) headed by former UNDP Director Bradford Morse and Thomas Berger, a Canadian human rights lawyer. People returned to the valley claiming a moral victory and declared; *Hamare Gaon Mein Hamara Raj* (Our rule in our villages).²⁸⁵ The IR Report revealed the serious lapses in project implementation that violated the WB guidelines.

The Morse Committee report exposed the failure of the World Bank and the GoI to carry out adequate assessments of the human and environmental impacts of the SSP. The Report is critical of the violations of loan agreements and Bank policies on resettlement. It terms them as the Bank's ‘incremental strategy’ with conditions imposed and “when the borrower fails to meet them, the conditions are relaxed or their deadlines postponed.”²⁸⁶ IR also exposed the futility of the government’s *pari passu* principle that undermines the environmental protection aspect of the project by allowing the environmental impact studies done as construction continued.²⁸⁷

After an in-depth study of the project, the Morse Commission Report inferred in June 1992 that "...the Sardar Sarovar Projects as they stand are flawed, that resettlement and rehabilitation of all those displaced by the Projects is not possible under prevailing

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Sangvai, *River and Life*, 58-59.

²⁸⁶ Bradford Morse and Thomas R. Berger, *Sardar Sarovar: Report of the Independent Review [IR]* (Ottawa: Resource Futures International, 1992), 56, 355.

²⁸⁷ Morse and Berger, *IR*, 5.

circumstances, and that the environmental impacts of the Projects have not been properly considered or adequately addressed. Moreover, we believe that the World Bank shares responsibility with the borrower for the situation that has developed."²⁸⁸ The Commission therefore asked the World Bank to step back from the projects.

International support came with NGOs like the Narmada Solidarity Network, a coalition of six voluntary organizations in the US including the International Rivers Network, which provided support and solidarity to the NBA struggle.²⁸⁹ Thus, because of the mounting pressures from within the nation as well as the global community, the World Bank had to bow out from the project in 1993. Following the Independent Commission Report, the withdrawal of the World Bank from the controversial project was a moral triumph for the NBA which fought relentlessly for just rehabilitation of affected populations in the Narmada valley.

Another major international initiative was to form the World Commission on Dams (WCD). The WCD report tries to answer some uneasy questions like whether the alarming socio-economic and environmental costs are worth the alleged benefits of large dam projects. The Report argues that the cost-benefit calculation is inadequate for the enormousness of the costs. It proposes a distinctive method, a 'rights and risks approach,' considering the rights of affected populations and the risks to the environment and human descendants. The new approach calls for an open and transparent scheme of participatory

²⁸⁸ Morse and Berger, *IR*, xii.

²⁸⁹ 'Friends of River Narmada' offered a web site recording the history and events of the continuing Narmada struggles. Site address: <http://www.narmada.org/>, <http://internationalrivers.org/>

decision-making involving the affected communities.²⁹⁰ The WCD findings largely supported the NBA position, defining the form and content of the large dams debate.

There are instances of resistance movements that began their political discourse locally, and then elicited major international policy changes, as in the case of World Bank withdrawal from the SSP through national and international linkages. Antony Oliver-Smith, however, is aware of a potential conflict between the affected community and their allies, having differing goals transcending the local context.²⁹¹ But in the Narmada issue, the struggle against the specific problem of *oustees* rehabilitation gained strength by linkages with related issues. These were linkages with issues like human rights, social justice, gender equality, primary health, and education within a larger framework by engaging in such coalitions.

NBA voiced its resistance in multiple spaces, reticulated through its local, national, and transnational linkages. Fischer argues that the local support remained “the heart and soul of the resistance to the dam, the moral sine qua non upon which all actions are based.” Then the broad-based national and international linkages and alliances augmented the struggle at the grassroots.²⁹² The World Bank thus became an international terrain where the role of local resistance movements made significant impacts by effecting key policy changes through a global political debate. Again,

²⁹⁰ *Dams and Development: A New Framework For Decision-making: The report of the World Commission on Dams* (London: Earthscan Publications Ltd, 2000), 206. 320.

²⁹¹ Anthony Oliver-Smith, "Fighting for a Place: The Policy Implications of Resistance to Development- Induced Resettlement," in Christopher McDowell, ed., *Understanding Impoverishment: The Consequences of Development-Induced Displacement* (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1996), 94.

²⁹² William F. Fisher, "Development and Resistance in the Narmada Valley," in Fisher ed., *Towards Sustainable Development*, 26.

linkages within the civil society at the local, national, and global levels forged a larger alliance, forcing accountability on transnational institutions involved in the specific Narmada project.

Shift of the Terrain of Resistance to the National Level: Court Rulings

The withdrawal of the World Bank shifted the terrain of resistance from the international to the national level with the Supreme Court of India taking the center stage of the conflict. In 1994, the NBA filed a Public Interest Litigation in the Supreme Court by the NBA to raise various social and environmental aspects of the dam, and to question the viability of its benefits. The case went on for six years and, meanwhile, the Court stayed the dam construction for four years from 1995 to 1999. During these years the movement consolidated its efforts for village reconstruction and searched for alternatives to the project. Emerging national and international organizations like the National Alliance of People's Movement (NAPM), People's Global Action (PGA), and the World Commission on Dams (WCD) were significant initiatives towards alternative development.²⁹³ The stay of construction work became another major victory for the NBA, thus strengthening the resolve of the affected people.

Yet, the NBA indeed restricted its own hands by approaching the apex Court to resolve conflict between the State and people, despite the outcome of the verdict. The final verdict, delivered on October 18, 2000, gave green signal for construction of the

²⁹³ Sangvai, *River and Life*, 72. The findings of the WCD report have largely endorsed the NBA position, defining the form and content of the large dams' debate.

dam up to a height of ninety meters. It also allowed resuming construction in stages up to one hundred and thirty-eight meters on getting proper sanction from the authorities. The majority judgment delivered by Justices A.S. Anand and B.N. Kirpal allowed dam construction to advance from eighty-eight meters to ninety meters. It permitted further construction in stages only in compliance with the R&R norms as stipulated in the NWDTA.²⁹⁴ One highlight of the 2000 SC ruling was that it reaffirmed the Tribunal Award's proposition that construction should be conditional on rehabilitation to precede submergence. But the majority verdict failed to guarantee any concrete steps to speed up rehabilitation by the State governments according to the Tribunal award. The Court ruling delegated the responsibility to implement the award into the hands of the failing political system. The Court was thus 'washing its hands' not only from its legal responsibility to carry out the award, but from a moral imperative as well, by denying justice to the affected populations. The minority judgment by Justice Bharucha, however, recommended stopping dam construction, and to resume it only after receiving environmental clearance and comprehensive plans for rehabilitation at every five meters.²⁹⁵

Protests erupted after the judgment and the rally at Badwani raised the slogan 'Supreme Court *ne kya kiya? Nyaya ka satyanaash kiya*' - (What has the Supreme Court

²⁹⁴ *Narmada Bachao Andolan vs. Union of India, Supreme Court of India, Writ Petition (civil) No. 319 of 1994*, Judgment of 18 October 2000 (Majority Judgment), AIR 2000 SC 3751, 58, <http://www.ielrc.org/content/c0001.pdf> (accessed January 3, 2006)

²⁹⁵ *Narmada Bachao Andolan vs. Union of India, Supreme Court of India, Writ petition (civil) No.319 of 1994*, Judgement of 18 October 2000, AIR 2000 SC 3751, 10, <http://www.ielrc.org/content/c0002.pdf> (accessed February 6, 2007).

done? It has destroyed Justice!)²⁹⁶ When the verdict came against the stance of the movement, the question loomed large whether to abandon the struggle by accepting the ruling or continue to challenge it by augmenting the struggle even by resorting to violent tactics. With tears in her eyes and in a broken voice, the NBA leader Medha Patkar reacted to the SC judgment, "*andolan ko marne nahin dena hai* (don't allow the movement to die)." But instead of showing signs of helplessness, the tears "reflected both the anguish of Narmada and the resolve of a true *satyagrahi*."²⁹⁷ Though the majority ruling came as a setback to the movement, Patkar remarked that the "the court is bound by laws but people are bound by the laws of earning their livelihood." She made a clear indication about the further course of action; "From a peaceful non-violent struggle, it will now turn into a non-violent war."²⁹⁸ Her words echoed a clear conviction of a nonviolent warrior. Roy quotes Baba Amte reacting to the SC judgment; "the judiciary at times wearing the cloak of priesthood, suffocates the human rights of the poor. Corruption and capital are given legitimacy instead of adhering to the rule of law..."²⁹⁹ It appears that by refusing to listen to people's voice, the SC blindfolded its eyes to turn down justice against the plight of the displaced communities in the Narmada valley.

²⁹⁶ Arundhati Roy, "Scimitars in the Sun: N. Ram interviews Arundhati Roy on a writer's place in politics," *Frontline*, 18, Jan 06-19, 2001; <http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl1801/18010040.htm>; (accessed March 13, 2007).

²⁹⁷ Yogendra Yadav, "Dainik Bhaskar article," <http://www.narmada.org/archive/others/dainik.bhaskar.article.html> (accessed January 19, 2009).

²⁹⁸ Murali Krishnan, "Of Tears and Water," *Outlook India*, 30 October 2000, <http://www.outlookindia.com/> (accessed January 26, 2007).

²⁹⁹ Arundhati Roy, "Scimitars in the Sun," *Frontline*, 18, Jan 06-19, 2001.

In a study of the use of law at multiple levels by the NBA, Balakrishnan Rajagopal details the terrain of contestation between popular struggles and the law in third world societies. The law is both a tool of domination for those in authority and a space for resistance for movements.³⁰⁰ The 2000 October judgment of the SC made the conflict visible and enhanced public debate on the SSP as it created a critical space in the democratic civil society.

Later Rulings: Conflict of Interests

The SC judgment on March 15, 2005 reiterated the need for timely and proper rehabilitation by restating and highlighting the Tribunal award. The judgment acknowledged the basis of dispute between the GoMP and the oustees as the latter opted to remain in Madhya Pradesh instead of settling in Gujarat, the preferred option by the GoMP.³⁰¹

The SC, in its order on May 8, 2006, proposed to wait for the Oversight Group's report and the results of the sample survey to take further stock of the situation until July 2006. But it refused to intervene in the construction of the dam as such. The October 2000 judgment upheld the sanctity of the Tribunal Award and thus placed a ray of hope for the PAFs. However, the May 2006 order quenched any such hope by refusing to intervene in the rehabilitation or dam construction and by it making a seemingly

³⁰⁰ Balakrishnan Rajagopal, *Limits of Law*, 1.

³⁰¹ *In the Supreme Court of India, Civil Writ Jurisdiction, I.A. No. 10 in I.A. No.4 & I.A. No 11 in I.A. No. 7 In Writ Petition (Civil) No. 328 of 2002*, NBA (petitioner) vs. Union of India and Ors (Respondents), SC order March 15, 2005, <http://www.sabrang.com/news/2005/narmadaverdict.pdf> (accessed February 14, 2007).

significant departure of delinking construction from rehabilitation.³⁰² Protesters held placards questioning the failure of the Supreme Court to uphold justice. As one banner said, "In the name of development they were damned. Without proper rehabilitation they are doomed. Now with justice denied they are being drowned."³⁰³

The SC order dated July 10, 2006 endorsed the Prime Minister's decision based on the report of the Sardar Sarovar Project Relief and Rehabilitation Oversight Group headed by V. K. Shunglu. The court further ruled that it will not stop the dam construction since the Gujarat government decided to stop work with the onset of monsoon. It directed the GoMP to accelerate the R&R work during the period.³⁰⁴ The court's decision turned out to be a stamp of approval for the official position about the dam construction as a '*fait accompli*.'

In the Narmada dispute the conflict of interests is not between riparian States, but it is a case of State vs. the people, and the Tribunal did not grant the affected people a hearing. As the government has taken sides with the beneficiaries of the project, at stake are the interests of the victims. Ramaswamy R. Iyer makes an interesting analogy with what Portia told Antonio in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, to "have his pound of Shylock's flesh, but without shedding a drop of blood." Iyer compares that with the Court

³⁰² *Narmada Bachao Andolan (Petitioner) vs. Union of India and Ors. (Respondents) Supreme Court of India, Record of Proceedings I.A. NOS.18-22, in writ petition (civil) No.328 of 2002, Order of May 8, 2006.* <http://www.ielrc.org/content/c0606.pdf> (accessed February 3, 2007).

³⁰³ Shivani Choudhry, "NBA activists protest the Supreme Court's "anti-people" judgment," *One World*, 10 May 2006; <http://southasia.oneworld.net/article/view/132516/1/1893> (accessed May, 15, 2006).

³⁰⁴ *Narmada Bachao Andolan (Petitioner) vs. Union of India and Ors. (Respondents) Supreme Court of India, Record of Proceedings I.A. NOS.18-22 & I.A. No. 23, 24, in writ petition (civil) No.328 of 2002, Order of July 10, 2006,* <http://www.ielrc.org/content/c0609.pdf> (accessed February 5, 2007).

allowing the Gujarat government to raise the height of the dam to 455 feet, but without displacing more than 7000 families as by the calculations of the Tribunal. But the estimate has swelled to a colossal number of 40000 families.³⁰⁵ The SC orders reflected an indifferent stance; it declined to intervene even when the governments violated the terms of the Tribunal award. Yet again, the Court refused to stop dam construction, *de facto* legitimizing illegal submergence and associated displacement.

Governance and Participatory Decision-making

Social movements often find the state-endorsed, dominant development ideology to be aggression against the human rights of the victims of such development, a condition which then becomes a flash point for conflict and resistance. The State governments share a huge burden of guilt for the excessive delay in completing the SSP. They began construction of the dam without enough Environmental Impact Assessment or proper surveys to assess the extent of submergence and displacement of especially the vulnerable tribal populations. Worst of all, the authorities never told the affected people about the impacts of the project. There is a 'clash of rights,' when the collective rights of the dam-affected indigenous populations for natural goods, are placed over against the rights of drought-affected farmers of Gujarat for irrigation and drinking water. Democratic space needs responsible governance by those in authority coupled with the informed consent of the affected people when defining models of development in the national interest for public purposes.

³⁰⁵ Ramaswamy R. Iyer, "A Judgment of Grave Import," in *Narmada Bachao Andolan, People vs. Verdict* 2nd ed. (Baroda: NBA, 2004), 55.

About the prospects of dam building, Thayer Scudder remarked, "In the future, large dams should only be built after participatory decision-making demonstrates that better options are not available."³⁰⁶ If the government could gather more public participation in decision making from the start of the project, the project itself could have created enough employment opportunities for the displaced. The Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who is the central player now in the SSP debate, made a passing reference to the fate of the dam oustees on his Independence Day speech. He said that "When I see large development projects coming up, while one rejoices at the progress that is being made, one worries for those who are displaced, for those who have lost their land and livelihood." The PM continued; "Globalisation certainly has its benefits; but it can also hurt the common man. The challenge for us as a nation is to address this duality - to ensure that while we keep the wheels of progress moving rapidly forward, no section of society and no part of the country is left behind..."³⁰⁷

In a crucial discussion on the symptoms and causes of the current water crisis, the World Water Development Report 2003 argues that it is "essentially a crisis of governance," a case of mismanagement. The Report describes mass poverty as both "a symptom and a cause of the water crisis," and recommends providing the poor "better access to better managed water" as a remedial measure to eradicate poverty. It further lays out the "basic principles of effective governance" as "participation by all

³⁰⁶ Thayer Scudder, *The Future of Large Dams: Dealing with Social, Environmental, Institutional and Political Costs* (London: Earthscan, 2005), 16.

³⁰⁷ Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, "PM's Independence Day Speech, 2006, 15 August 2006, <http://pmindia.nic.in/speech/content.asp?id=365> (accessed February 12, 2007).

stakeholders, transparency, equity, accountability, coherence, responsiveness, integration and ethical issues." These are vital principles found wanting in governing the water crisis in mid-West India.³⁰⁸

The political establishment in India often makes promises and the bureaucracy breaks such promises with political approval while the Judiciary remains a silent spectator, as in the SSP project. In this project political hegemony took over policy decisions while ignoring more important technical aspects like EIA and benefit-cost analysis. Therefore it requires a political and moral will by the government to tackle the resulting problem of massive displacement. The question is not one of distribution or redistribution of precious natural goods. But it involves decentralizing the democratic means of decision-making, leading to a just, sustainable and equitable sharing of the support and livelihood of millions displaced because of big projects.

Taking the Struggles Further at the Local Terrain

Komala Ramachandra reports on the impact of the Court rulings on the people of the valley. Despite waning international support, the struggle continues nationally. People are still holding faith in the legal order and finally settling for the official rehabilitation packages, exhausted after years of intense struggle.³⁰⁹ Courts always have the final word on resolving conflicts. Though the Court rulings, time and again, struck a disappointing note with the accompanying government initiatives, the people of the valley held their

³⁰⁸ "Water for People, Water for Life: Executive Summary," *The UN World Water Development Report* (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2003), 4, 30.

³⁰⁹ Komala Ramachandra, "Sardar Sarovar: An Experience Retained?" *Harvard Human Rights Journal*, 19 (Spring 2006): 280.

voices up with a spirit of truth, keeping the struggle alive. Thus the Narmada struggles touched a chord of solidarity, linking the international supporters and the activists at the national level with the participants of the Narmada movement at the local level.

Satyagraha remained that chord uniting the voices of the *Andolan* continuing its struggles locally.

Mass Movement-Mode of Resistance

Resistance requires building up of alliances locally, while developing new ties with others at the national and transnational levels. Resisters often have to challenge a specific project, driven by a global development perspective with transnational and national interests, in conflict with local environmental consciousness and indigenous visions of development.

First and foremost, it is the local communities that experience the impact of development projects. Therefore, any development debate must begin with the informed participation of the local project-affected people. Though the authorities refused to hear the voices of the people first at the planning and then at the implementation levels, the NBA struggles later provided a democratic space for the people to voice their views and seek their rights.

Ashish Kothari maps the local base of the NBA struggles and calls it the 'central plank of the movement;' the resonating middle-class support came only later 'placing

brick by brick,' on the mass local base.³¹⁰ The two major sections of the mass movement are the tribal (*adivasis*) population living in the hills and valleys on both sides of the Narmada River and the Patidars, the middle-class farmers occupying the Nimad plains in MP. The movement integrated both the marginalized tribals and the wealthy peasants, the latter providing the material goods for the continuing struggle.³¹¹

On March 8, 2006, the NCA allowed raising the height of the dam from 110.64m to 121.92m prompting Patkar and two other activists go on fast saying the R&R is behind schedule.³¹² After moving from her twenty-one day strike at the Jantar Manter in April 2006, Medha Patkar derided the government stand on rehabilitation. The government claimed it would complete rehabilitation of hundreds of families within three months before the monsoon floods, although it could not find land for R&R over the preceding 25 years. Patkar expressed her dismay at the state not responding favorably to the nonviolent people's movement of tribals, dalits, and farmers, strongly supported by civil society. Instead, the state favors 'violence in the name of development.' Patkar expressed NBA's firm determination "to take up the fight far beyond...return to the valley...back to fight with the unprecedented challenge again."³¹³ Every year with the onset of monsoon

³¹⁰ Ashish Kothari, "Big Dams in India: Necessities or Threats?," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 39 (1999):45.

³¹¹ Personal communication with NBA activist Devram Kanera at Badwani, *Research Diary*, dated January 29, 2004. Kanera belongs to the Patidars.

³¹² "SSP: The Narmada Saga," *Frontline*, April 22-May 5, 2006, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl2308/stories/20060505004112400.htm> (accessed February 3, 2007).

³¹³ Medha Patkar, "Take the Fight Far Beyond," *Outlook India*, 17, April 2006, <http://www.outlookindia.com/full.asp?fodname=20060417&fname=narmada&sid=1> (accessed January 26, 2007).

the SSP drowns the land of the tribals but never their spirit of solidarity or resolve to remain *satyagrahis* asserting their right to land and life.

As development-induced displacement has become the hallmark of modernity, the affected people resort to various forms of resistance to reclaim control over their living space. Describing the varied forms of resistance by the displaced communities, Anthony Oliver-Smith infers that resistance includes a continuum of forms falling within the ambit of passive or 'no resistance and active resistance.' Resistance to DIDR (development-induced displacement and resettlement) occurs in multiple contexts and produces a complex array of purposes and initiatives blending environmental, social, cultural, and economic concerns that may focus on resisting specific proposals or general models of development.³¹⁴ Since displacement involves both individuals and communities, the motivations for resistance vary from concerns about mere subsistence to ideological considerations. Thus, in solidarity, local, regional, national, and international organizations with social movements join hands in the struggle of resistance to displacement. The local support base of the NBA groomed the moral precondition for nonviolent resistance, whereas its broad-based alliances with national and transnational movements with similar objectives strengthened its moral impetus for continuing the struggle on various fronts. People continue their struggle, since they know that truth and right are on their side.

³¹⁴ Anthony Oliver-Smith, "Displacement, Resistance and the Critique of Development: From the Grass-roots to the Global," (Refugee Studies Centre Working Paper No.9, University of Oxford, U.K., November 2002), 8-10.

NBA: Ideological Trends and Participants

In Indian history fasting or self-starvation is a uniquely powerful nonviolent weapon of resistance in the struggles for justice and freedom. Gandhi coined the word *Satyagraha* meaning 'soul-force' as a blanket term for his mode of resistance as he employed it effectively in the Indian liberation struggle. NBA's *satyagraha* (nonviolent resistance) often received a violent response from state officials. In 1989 NBA beefed up their struggle by engaging in more forceful, but nonviolent action by calling for a *gaon bandi* (block the villages) campaign, banning (denying) entry of corrupt officials to affected villages.³¹⁵ Medha Patkar and several other NBA members faced intimidation and arrests during peaceful rallies and demonstrations. The police ransacked the NBA offices on many occasions, and destroyed valuable documents. Police resorted to violence against the nonviolent protesters especially targeting women leaders which prompted the National Commission for Women to reprimand the authorities to prevent the police "from becoming a private army working against people."³¹⁶ Intensified state repression strengthened people's commitment and resolve to nonviolent mass action.

Nonetheless, the NBA enjoys the backing of most of the people in the valley who have demonstrated their opposition in various forms of protest. These include meetings, marches, petitions, strikes, public confrontations with authorities, roadblocks, hunger

³¹⁵ Satyajit Singh, "Introduction," in John Dreze, Meera Samson and Satyajit Singh, eds., *The Dam and the Nation: Displacement and Resettlement in the Narmada Valley* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 12.

³¹⁶ "International Campaigns: India, Peaceful Demonstrators Against the Narmada Dam Project Arrested, Beaten, and Intimidated by Police," Sierra Club; <http://www.sierraclub.org/human%2Drights/india/index.asp> (accessed 14 February 2007).

strikes, refusals to move, and forming *samarpith dal* (save or drown squads). The NBA has adopted Gandhian resistance strategies, including the *satyagraha*. Formation of the *samarpit dal* with an ultimate nonviolent strategy threatening *jal samarpan* (sacrifice or dedication in water)³¹⁷ amid rising monsoon floods, proved the strength of the movement to adapt alternative strategies to tackle specific problems. Patkar believes the inherent strength associated with Gandhian nonviolent strategies can be more effectively used today, but feels that "if Gandhiji had been here today, his strategies would have been different." Patkar is aware that while violent strategies hardly ever create results, a nonviolent approach can shake the system, and she alludes to a combination of both as a real possibility in specific conflicts.³¹⁸ NBA's politics of resistance is precisely nonviolent, continuing the vital legacy of Gandhian nonviolence as enunciated by similar movements such as Chipko.

With no effective reparation for the victims of development, charting a violent course of action becomes an inevitable choice for the dispossessed. Therefore, it has required exemplary resolve by NBA leadership to remain nonviolent for over two decades. Nonviolent resistance indeed proved to be a vital tool of negotiation. The government, however, has always shown a cold shoulder to nonviolent protest struggles. Unless the authorities heed to the voice of the displaced communities with patience, corporate-induced political decisions are likely to inflict more conflicts and provoke

³¹⁷ NBA Press Release July 12, 1999. Patkar declared *Jal Samarpan* at the site of the Dhomkhedi *Satyagraha*.

³¹⁸ "Interview: The Strength of a People's Movement," Medha Patkar in conversation with Dunu Roy and Geeti Sen, in Geeti Sen, ed., *Indigenous Vision: Peoples of India, Attributes to the Environment* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1992), 296-97.

violence. This issue receives grave importance as the authorities never consult the project-affected people and the latter have little role in the decision making.

Navroz K. Dubash describes the activist leadership of NBA as having "a value-oriented outlook" with long-term environmental goals, whereas the "power-oriented and goal-oriented oustees" formed the mass of the participants often with short-term interests such as just rehabilitation. Dubash traces the authenticity of the coalition and the coherence of the movement's support base as depending mainly on to what extent the oustees shared the value-oriented stance of the leadership. It depends also on how the tactical framework of the movement evolved having "strong vertical links of legitimacy, emphasizing the importance of the process of conscientization." He notes that the loose organizational frame of the movement and the transparency in decision-making done in open forums promotes conscientization.³¹⁹ Dubash argues that Narmada oustees who, when threatened with the loss of their livelihood, built scattered resistance to the project, helped to shape environmental consciousness. The cause of the oustees "served as the point of crystallization for a movement that is spearheading the penetration of environmentalism into India's political discourse."³²⁰ The partnership involved conscientization about the problems, mobilization for action, and organization. Thus the struggle of the oustees for just rehabilitation and livelihood led to a genuine

³¹⁹ Navroz K. Dubash, "The Birth of an Environmental Movement: The Narmada Project as Seed-Bed for Civil Society in India," (Senior Thesis, Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University, 1990), 121.

³²⁰ Ibid., 119.

environmental consciousness fostering solidarity of the leaders and participants of the Andolan.

But despite NBA's growing international acclaim, some observers have noted tensions between the regional priorities of the local population in the valley and the wider agenda of the NBA. Amita Baviskar, a dedicated opponent of the dam, mentions that the NBA often decides without consulting the people in the valley, and the tribals remain as passive receivers of decisions taken at the top of the pyramid.³²¹ Ranjit Dwivedi reports that some people within the valley consider the NBA to be as filled with empty promises as the dam authorities. They charge the NBA with exploitation by urging them to resist rather than accept resettlement, in order that the NBA would gain political capital in its struggle against the dam.³²² Obviously, the NBA's refusal to compromise with the repressive tactics of the officials in fact hardened the un-negotiating stance of the Gujarat government. This in turn did harm both to the PAFs and the drought-affected populations since both the R&R and the dam project is not yet complete after so many decades of struggle and litigation.

Reacting to criticism that the Andolan is just an issue-based movement, Patkar claims that just as issues based in the micro reality help converge and organize communities for change, people are equally important, making NBA a people-based movement. Patkar affirms that the movement has reached a 'critical phase' in the 'battle'

³²¹ Amita Baviskar, "The Researcher as a Pilgrim," *Lokayan Bulletin*, 9.3/4 (1991): 91-97.

³²² Ranjit Dwivedi, "Resisting Dams and 'Development:' Contemporary Significance of the Campaign against the Narmada Projects in India," *European Journal of Development Research* 10:2 (1998): 135-179.

to fight to the last, a conviction reflected in its programs, slogans, and strategies. She states that having strong roots in the valley, the NBA sticks to a leadership style with a "horizontal division of responsibility" in their core group. Patkar is confident about its innovative and programmatic strategies being effective on different fronts of the struggle.³²³ Though the Andolan has been successful in weaving together the various strands of tribal and caste communities in the Narmada valley, it granted less attention in tackling gender inequalities. Patkar describes how a single issue like the Narmada struggle was helpful as a rallying point for people to come together regardless of caste or community barriers. She is hopeful that Andolan could slowly and gradually address such issues and especially gender problems. *Satyagraha*, rallies, and other nonviolent means of struggle have in fact started this process of bringing people together.³²⁴ Slogans played an important role in bringing solidarity among the participants.

Slogans formed the lifeline of the movement, galvanizing the struggle locally. "*Hamare gaon mein hamara raj* (Our villages, Our Rule)" became the scoring mantra for NBA, reminiscent of the slogans used in the Home Rule Movement under Gandhi's leadership. Sangvai enlists other oft repeated slogans. They are; "*Ladenge, Jeetenge* (We will fight, we will win)," "*Doobenge Par Hatenge Nahin* (We will drown but not move)," "*Vikas chahiye, Vinaas nahi* (We want development, Not destruction)," and "*Narmada Bachao, Manav Bachao* (Save the Narmada, Save humankind)." The beginning verses of the NBA protest song, compiled by Medha Patkar are: "*Narmada ki ghati mein, ab ladayi*

³²³ Interview with Patkar, in Geeti Sen, ed., *Indigenous Vision*, 286, 296.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 288.

jaari hai, Chalo utho, chalo utho, rokna vinash hai (In the Narmada valley, the fight is on, Get up, get going, must stop destruction)³²⁵ These slogans and songs which rekindle the *andolan* spirit best represent the multiple voices of the struggling people of the Narmada valley. Chanted mostly in Hindi and echoed at the *dharnas*, rallies, and *satyagrahas*, these slogans reflect the tribal culture and their right to land and life. These chants energized travel on the long winding road of struggle for survival in the Narmada valley, and reverberated above the flooded river valley the firm resolve and determination of the people.

On the strategies of resistance, the Andolan seeks to address both human rights issues and ecological concerns, making sure that they are not expressed in opposition against each other. Patkar draws out a clear ideological framework in her pursuit of an alternative paradigm of development. Considering the complex link between human and environment, she favors 'democratic socialism' as a political ideology leading eventually to a wider 'environmental socialism.' She clarifies her ideological perspective as "a combination of green and red values and ideas."³²⁶ Pratyusha Basu and Jael Silliman highlight this aspect further. The thrust of the alternative development paradigm to serve the poor and the focus on social justice outlook characterize the "red" aspect of the Andolan. The Andolan's ideology of resistance is against environmental destruction associated with dam construction, a strategy which signals the "green" aspect of the movement, forged networks with other environmental movements across national

³²⁵ Sangvai, *The River and Life*, 106.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 282-82.

boundaries.³²⁷ In sum, the Andolan seeks to balance the interests of both humans and the environment in its brand of environmentalism, instead of fostering a conflict of interests.

Conclusion

NBA: A Story of Success or a Losing Battle?

Scudder identifies certain distinguishing features for the success of a resistance movement, which include the ability of the local leadership to gather institutionalized local, NGO, multilateral, and bilateral donor support. The project-affected people must also have easy access to a government which is accountable, and a responsible judiciary. But Scudder expresses disappointment about the Narmada struggle: "even the existence of all these requirements does not ensure success."³²⁸ It could be a losing battle with the lives and livelihoods of 35, 000 families juggled between the conundrums of decrees by judicial, legislative, and bureaucratic wings of the government as the dam height reaches 122 meters.

Rajagopal analyzes the outstanding impacts of the NBA struggle at the international and national levels as it led to an 'outcome change' with the World Bank forced to withdraw from the project. It also fetched better R&R packages in Gujarat and obtained a stay order from the SC in 1995 to stop the construction. However, the struggle had only a limited impact on the 'decision-making process' to the extent the NCA set up

³²⁷ Pratyusha Basu and Jael Silliman, "Green and Red, Not Saffron: Gender and Politics of Resistance in the Narmada Valley," in *Hinduism and Ecology*, 424.

³²⁸ Thayer Scudder, "Development-Induced Impoverishment, Resistance and River-Basin Development," in Christopher McDowell, ed., *Understanding Impoverishment: The Consequences of Development-Induced Displacement* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1996), 66.

subgroups to monitor environmental and rehabilitation aspects and state level GRAs. He thinks the movement had remarkable impact in terms of 'value change,' since it shaped a "counter-hegemonic effect" at various levels. This included, for example, concerns such as sustainable development and human rights of internally displaced populations gaining added currency in development projects across the world.³²⁹

Effects of NBA as a grassroots movement towards Environmental Socialism

With its ecological underpinnings, NBA, as a political mass movement, led a complex array of socio-economic and cultural struggles and reconstruction in the valley. Despite severe repression by the state, aggressive project authorities, and the undeterred construction of the dam, the Narmada Bachao Andolan continues to follow nonviolent strategies in its struggle, gathering and deepening its support base beyond the valley. Kothari hails the NBA for its contributions to the democratization process nationally, and promotion of a network beyond national boundaries. Democracy entails greater local management of natural goods ensuring "both socioeconomic justice and ecological sustainability," whereas currently, "justice and sustainability are sacrificed at the altar of iniquitous development."³³⁰ Kothari concludes that the movement has made a "profound impact mobilization from local to global," not just on policies and actions related to large dam projects, "but on the politics of development itself."³³¹ Sustainable and equitable

³²⁹ Balakrishnan Rajagopal, *Limits of Law*, 52-53.

³³⁰ Kothari, "Damming the Narmada and the Politics of Development," in Fisher ed. *Sustainable Development*, 441.

³³¹ Ibid.

development happens when the displaced and dispossessed people who lose their livelihood are partners or beneficiaries and not victims of development projects.

The impact of resistance movements in the broader contexts of political discourse begins locally. But they may well be part of an overall process creating a climate for major policy changes of which the World Bank's resettlement guidelines are only the beginning. Rajagopal points out that the Narmada valley struggle had some limited impact on international norms about resettlement and on the World Bank policies. However, it could impart none on domestic law or institutions except for some changes in the rehabilitation package of the state of Gujarat.³³² A population threatened with resettlement employs resistance to gain a bargaining position to improve the conditions and terms of the resettlement project. Then a potential conflict may ensue between the threatened community and its actual and potential allies at local, national and international levels. Those allies may have much broader, more systemic goals, reaching beyond the local context. The local struggles of resistance to resettlement thus weave a reticulated web of global dialogue on sustainable development and concomitant debate on environment and human rights.

The lessons learned from Narmada projects will eventually determine the viability of similar projects in the future. Komala Ramachandra argues that "The fidelity of the institutional and collective memory of the participants in the Narmada movement will determine if this experience is a lesson remembered or, failing this, a condemnation of

³³² Rajagopal, *Limits of Law*, 21.

other communities to repeat their struggle."³³³ NBA has emerged as an emblem, characterizing an extensive struggle for socially and environmentally sustainable development by remaining at the tuft of a wave of mass movements across the world. NBA with its sustained and tireless campaign on the issue of rehabilitation could fetch a good R&R package from the governments. While the NBA has been successful in gathering international and national support for the plight of the displaced people, the Gujarat government has gathered support at the home base for the 'lifeline' of the state. In sum, while the NBA struggles continue at the domestic level with limited successes, it could exert tremendous impact internationally, adding depth to the development debate. What is more inspiring to the movement is the commitment and resolve of the tribals and peasants with the solidarity of the supporters from various quarters which swells under the movement to take the struggle beyond the valley.

Chipko and Narmada Movements as Nonviolent Environmental Movements

The integrative nature of both Chipko movement and NBA is explicit across the nation despite ethnic, geographic, or religious barriers. It brings people together in solidarity as they share responsibility for sustainable development. Both movements witnessed women becoming prominent leaders and participants.³³⁴ This achievement evolved mainly because of women's lead role in the subsistence economy of both the Himalayan and Narmada valleys. In essence, both Chipko and Narmada movements are

³³³ Komala Ramachandra, "Sardar Sarovar: An Experience Retained?," *Harvard Human Rights Journal*, 19 (Spring 2006): 281.

³³⁴ P.P. Karan, "Environmental Movements in India," *The Geographical Review*, 84, no.1 (1994): 32.

test cases of grassroots nonviolent direct action environmental movements. The movements could successfully highlight the natural outcome of resource-intensive demands of development plans that culminate in large-scale environmental destruction and economic deprivation of the affected populations and ecosystem. Though these movements shy away from power politics, they have initiated a new political climate exposing the exploitative nature of the nexus between the different branches of the governments, contractors, politicians and transnational actors. Therefore these movements could raise social consciousness upholding the welfare of the marginalized and the poor, especially women, tribals, and peasants, in India and internationally.

CHAPTER FIVE

DHARMA AS AN ECO-ETHICAL PRINCIPLE

Discourse on the Development of the Notion of Dharma as an Ethical Category

Introduction

Called *Sanathana dharma*, meaning 'eternal law,' Hinduism has the precept of *dharma* at its central core acquiring eternal and universal significance. According to scholars the term *dharma* ("धर्म" in the *Devanagari* script) has variant meanings. Geoffrey Parrinder gives various meanings for the term *dharma* such as "right, virtue, morality, righteousness, duty, law, truth, doctrine and religion." He refers to *dharma* as "the form of things and the power that maintains them."³³⁴ S. Radhakrishnan rightly states; "Next to the category of reality, that of *dharma* is the most important concept of Indian thought."³³⁵ Chaturvedi Badrinath quotes Jayendra Saraswati, the Sankaracharya of Kanchi, affirming that "the concept of *dharma* is undoubtedly central." Badrinath further clarifies the true identity of Indian civilization as '*dharmic*' and not 'Hindu,' the former being a secular view of life and the latter a 'religious' one.³³⁶

³³⁴ Geoffrey Parrinder, *Dictionary of Non Christian Religions* (London: Hulton Educational Publications, 1971), 77. Quoted in Somen Das, *Dharma of the Twenty-First Century: Theological-Ethical Paradigm Shift*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1996), 22.

³³⁵ S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol.1 (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1923-27), 52.

³³⁶ Chaturvedi Badrinath, *Dharma, India and the World Order: Twenty One Essays* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1993), 20, 21.

Historical Development of the Notion of *Dharma*

According to Manu, the Veda or *Sruti* (revelation), the sacred tradition or *Smriti*, customs or *acharas*, and *athmathushti* (good conscience) form the four major sources defining *dharma* as sacred law (*Laws of Manu*, II: 6, 12).³³⁸ The *Smritis* are supplements to the *Srutis* explaining the Vedic rituals and sociological order and are called *dharma-sastras*. Manu *Smriti* states the sacred law and human actions as well as the eternal rules of conduct for all the four *varnas* (castes), the *Brahmana*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaisya*, and *Sudra*, known as the *varnashrama dharma* (*Laws of Manu* I: 107, X: 1-4). Thus the key role of *dharma* was to perform one's duty in society.

Rig Veda, the oldest Sanskrit text, used the term *rta* to denote the laws of the universe. The term *rta* first appears in the first hymn of the first book of Rig Veda.

To thee, dispeller of the night, O Agni, day by day with prayer
Bringing thee reverence, we come
Ruler of sacrifices, guard of Law eternal (*rta*), radiant One,
Increasing in thine own abode.³³⁹

Somen Das describes the connection between the concepts *rta* and *dharma* to denote the principle underlying the cosmic order governing the physical and moral order of the universe. Das describes how *rta* gradually evolved into *dharma* as an ethical category with a continuity of meanings between them.³⁴⁰ Outlining the historical

³³⁸ *The Laws of Manu*, Vols. I-XXV, trans. G. Bühler (London: Oxford, 1886), <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/manu.htm> (accessed October 3, 2010). All sacred texts in Sanskrit and their translations are accessed from <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/>, unless specified otherwise.

³³⁹ *Rig Veda*, Book I, Hymn 1, vs. 7-8, *Rig Veda*, trans. Ralph T.H. Griffith (1896).

³⁴⁰ Somen Das, *Dharma of the Twenty-First Century*, 20.

expressions of *dharma*, Das analyzes it from both corporate and personal perspectives. Bhagavad *Gita* perceived *dharma* as duties performed in conformity with the universal order. At the social level, *dharma* ensured *varnadharma* (caste system) ordering the society into four castes, namely, the *Brahmana* (priestly class), the *Kshatriya* (warrior class), the *Vaisya* (trading class) and the *Sudra* (serving class).³⁴¹ As a means of organizing society, the caste system was a functional ideal which ensured cooperation and harmony in ancient India, though the system later deteriorated to segregation and exploitation.

The *Gita* details *niskamakarma* as duty performed without attachment to the fruits (*Gita*, 3.19). The *Gita*, however, exhorts the wise man to act with a desire towards *lokasangraha* (welfare of all) upholding the order of the world (*Gita*, 3.25). This idea later gained currency with Gandhi realizing the *sarvodaya* ideal for the welfare of all.³⁴² At the individual level, being faithful to the cosmic order, the principles of *svadharma* (natural moral sense), *purusharthas* (human goal) and *ashramadharmas*³⁴³ (four stages of life) helped as useful categories in organizing the individual in the society.

³⁴¹ Krishna says; “*catur-varnyam maya srstam guna-karma-vibhagasah*,” meaning “The four castes were formed by Me by the division of qualities and actions.” (*Bhagavad Gita*, 4.13).

³⁴² Somen Das, *Dharma of the Twenty-First Century*, 32-54.

³⁴³ Manu marked the four *asramas* of life to include *Brahmacharya* (Period of Training), *Garhastha* (Householder), *Vanaprastha* (Forest-dweller), and *Sannyasin* (Ascetic life) (*Laws of Manu*, VI, 87).

Mahanarayana Upanishad states that “धर्मो विश्वस्य जगतः प्रतिष्ठा” meaning ‘*Dharma* is the support of the whole universe.’³⁴⁴ Sivaramakrishna draws from the Katha Upanishad to draw a paradigm of *samanvaya* (harmony) called *purusharthas* forming a cluster of four interconnected values or orientations such as *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*. Directed towards the ideal goal of *moksha* (transcendence), it is *dharma*, the moral order, that endorses both *artha* and *kama*, the economic and erotic behavior of people.³⁴⁵ The *purusharthas* are held in check through moral order called *Rta*. Manu Smriti is concise and brought ‘*Dharma*’ under five heads. *Ahimsa* (nonviolence), *Satya* (truthfulness), *Asteya* (not acquiring illegitimate wealth) *Shoucham* (purity), and *Indriyanigraha* (control of senses) are, in brief, the common *Dharma* for all the *varnas* (*The Laws of Manu*, X. 163).

Dharma notion runs as a thread holding the epic story of Mahabharata. While explaining the meaning of *Dharma* to Yudhisthira, Bhishma explores how difficult it is to define *Dharma*. “Righteousness (*Dharma*) is so called because it upholds all creatures. In fact, all creatures are upheld by righteousness. Therefore, that is righteousness which is capable of upholding all creatures.”³⁴⁶ In *Karna Parva* Krishna explains *Dharma* in the following words:

*Dharanat dharma mityahu dharmo dhara-yate prajaha
Yat syad dharanasamyuktam sa dharma iti nischayaha*

³⁴⁴ Mahanarayana Upanishad, http://sanskritdocuments.org/all_sa/mahanarayana_sa.html (accessed August 10, 2010).

³⁴⁵ M. Sivaramakrishna, *Hindu View of Life: A Contemporary Perspective* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2001), 81

³⁴⁶ Mahabharata, *Shanti Parva*, 12.109. 9-11.

[*Dharma* sustains the society; *Dharma* maintains the social order, *Dharma* ensures well-being and progress of Humanity, *Dharma* is surely that which fulfills these objectives].³⁴⁷

In *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna proclaims the meaning of his descent to sustain and reaffirm *Dharma*. The following *sloka* depicts the divine intervention to protect *dharma*:

Paritranaya sadhunam vinashayacha dushkritam
Dharma samsthapanarthaya sambahvami yuge yuge
 [For protecting the righteous, to destroy the wicked,
 And for establishing *Dharma*, I incarnate again and again in every age].³⁴⁸

The major characteristic of ancient Indian thought is ‘unity in diversity’ rather than uniformity. *Sanatana dharma* is a large umbrella that covers a wide variety of philosophical and ethical formulations. The notion of *dharma* thus incorporates an array of meanings. Manu records the meaning of *dharma* as tenfold. “Contentment, forgiveness, self-control, abstention from unrighteously appropriating anything (obedience to the rules of) purification, coercion of the organs, wisdom, knowledge (of the supreme Soul), truthfulness, and abstention from anger, [form] the tenfold *dharma*”(The Laws of Manu, VI. 92). Drawing from a saying that “*smritis* change but *smriti* remains,” B. Kuppuswami charts the variety of meanings that *dharma* carries. *Dharma* finds its expressions as law, justice, customary morality (*achara*), reflective morality, duty, and conscience. *Sruti* refers to the traditional, universal and eternal principles, whereas, *smriti* stands for derived meanings expressed in the limited and relative sphere of social life making social change conducive to harmony. There are two

³⁴⁷ *Mahabharata, Karna Parva*, 8.69.58.

³⁴⁸ *Bhagavat Gita*, 4.8

forms of *dharma*: first *sanatana dharma*, which orders life with cherished traditional values, and second, *yuga dharma* which is valid only for age, adapting to the needs of the times.³⁴⁹ There is, however, more of a delinking of the modern from the traditional view of *dharma* with the changing present social conditions as different from a stable order based on the caste system in the past. The modern writers bear witness to the changed view.

Contemporary writers do not interpret *dharma* as a code of rules and duties, but as a goal of life with special emphasis on *dharma* as a value or end to achieve. Austin B. Creel contrasts the traditional *dharma* notion as a system of immutable regulations with the contemporary interpretations which are progressive, rational, and adaptive.³⁵⁰ S. Radhakrishnan, a representative of modern Indian writer, affirms: "While the principles of *dharma* are immutable, the rules and regulations in which the principles are embodied are subject to change."³⁵¹ He describes the core principles of the ancient Hindu *dharma* as "not dead shells, but living powers full of strength and suggestiveness." Hinduism is not 'other-worldly,' seeking to flee and renounce life. Radhakrishnan describes it to recognize "four ends of life" like *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *moksha*, bridging "the realm of desires with the perspective of the eternal."³⁵² Somen Das draws from the modern Indian scholars to postulate an essential unity of humankind as the normative content of

³⁴⁹ B. Kuppaswamy, *Dharma and Society: A Study in Social Values* (Madras: Macmillan India, 1977), 19, 24-32.

³⁵⁰ Austin B. Creel, *Dharma in Hindu Ethics* (Calcutta: Firma Klm Pvt. Ltd., 1977), 45.

³⁵¹ S. Radhakrishnan, *Religion and Society* (George Allen & Unwin, 1947), 108.

³⁵² S. Radhakrishnan, "The Hindu *Dharma*," *The International Journal of Ethics*, XXXIII, No. 1 (October 1922), 1-22.

dharma and a cherishable goal.³⁵³ Thus *dharma*, in its modern rendering, associates and disassociates with its traditional understanding, making room for new contextual meanings.

Creel points to how the Hindu writers view *moksha* as ‘transmoral,’ that is, ‘beyond *dharma*’ with *dharma* as a means to achieve *moksha*.³⁵⁴ Gandhi, an ardent follower of *sanatana dharma*, voiced his disagreements with the ideal of *varna dharma* which allowed untouchability as its manifestation. Gandhi’s ideal of *dharma* directed its goal of achieving *Ramarajya*, a future ideological state based on the principles of *ahimsa* and *sarvodya*. This dissertation will discuss Gandhi’s take on *dharma* as an ethical category.

Dharma as an Ethical Category

Dharma is the ethical order that encompasses all life, with the root word *dhr* meaning to support, uphold and sustain. Badrinath asserts the importance attached to *ahimsa* (nonviolence), as the condition of order woven into the fabric of daily life of an individual. Thus *dharma* affirms the right of every individual to live and the right to order his or her life, whereas, a denial of these basic conditions results in *adharma*, disorder and violence. *Dharma* is the sustaining force that unites all life amid *adharma* or disorder of human existence. "The aim of *Dharma* is: To create and sustain individual and social conditions where each individual, in his or her own being, and in relationship with others,

³⁵³ Somen Das, *Dharma of the Twenty-First Century*, 91.

³⁵⁴ Creel, *Dharma in Hindu Ethics*, 64.

is able to explore the potential of his or her life and bring it to fruition in such ways that he or she can."³⁵⁵ Again, *dharma* provides the necessary framework for sustainable development.

Dharma means right relations between an individual and any aggregate like society or a nation-state. Badrinath argues that *dharma* as law was the way of achieving balance between the two. He further interprets the Indian identity as defined by *dharma*, being a secular conception and not a religious one.³⁵⁶ Dharmic thought did not admit any polarity between mind and matter, this-worldly and otherworldly, secular and religious, the flesh and the spirit. This explains the human-centered nature of Dharmic thought. "The secularity of *dharma* secured also its universality, because order is the universal condition of life."³⁵⁷

David R. Kinsley shows the central beliefs of the Hindu religious tradition to "cluster around two concepts, *dharma* and *moksha*." Having a temporal view, *dharma* upholds, preserves, and refines the world and human society. *Moksha*, on the other hand, is a concern aimed at the ultimate release from the world achieved by renunciation. Kinsley finds the *dharma* tradition rooted firmly in the Vedic literature, with Vedic rituals maintaining the cosmic order. In *Bhagavad Gita*, *dharma* stands for both the order of human society and human duty to uphold that order with every action. In such an order, rank and hierarchy accorded at birth and not achieved by merit, define the nature

³⁵⁵ Badrinath, *Dharma, India and the World Order*, 22, 23, 27.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 93, 121.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 128.

of human relations. *Moksha* counterbalances one's *dharma* as eternal destiny liberating one from all limitations.³⁵⁸ The Vedic idea of *dharma* thus followed a ritualistic path with a goal to achieve *moksha* as the end of life.

Making a theological-ethical reinterpretation of *dharma*, Somen Das analyzes the double character of *dharma*. The ontological dimension of the notion of *dharma* indicates the cosmic order (reality) while the deontological aspect suggests the specific duties of people based on that order.³⁵⁹ The ancient sages visualized *Dharma* as that power in the universe which holds things together to ensure stability in society and a moral order. Somen Das, however, addresses the issue of *Dharma* turning exclusive and elitist, thereby legitimizing and tolerating social and economic exploitation in the name of stability, and alienating the poor, the dalits, the tribals, and women. Jotirao Govind Phule, known as the 'Father of the Indian Social Revolution,' organized people who belonged to the outcastes of the *chaturvarana* system to form *Satya Shodhak Samaj* (Society of Seekers of Truth). The movement began in 1873 to uplift and provide education for the untouchables.³⁶⁰ B.R. Ambedkar, known as the 'Father of the Indian Constitution,' assumed leadership of the depressed classes in 1920s and questioned the legitimacy of the *varna* system as prescribed by the Manusmriti.

Ambedkar wrote to Gandhi about temple entry. "If Hindu religion is to be a religion of social equality, then an amendment of its code to provide temple-entry is not

³⁵⁸ David R. Kinsley, *Hinduism: A Cultural Perspective* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1982), 82-84.

³⁵⁹ Somen Das, *Dharma of the Twenty-First Century*, 31.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 235, 245.

enough. What is required is to purge it of the doctrine of *chaturvarnya*."³⁶¹ Gandhi considered untouchability as *adharma* and remarked; "No one can be born untouchable as all are sparks of one and the same Fire."³⁶² Thus *dharma* shows a teleological and ecological dimension with unity of all as a goal of humanity and universe. Gandhi specially draws on the teleological aspect of *dharma* as he formed his ideology and methods. Dalit liberation movement and dalit theology are emerging and progressing well.³⁶³ But this dissertation does not address that movement in particular. The Dalit movement continues the struggle for social equality in Independent India and the Narmada struggle incorporates such a frontier as envisaged by Gandhi, Phule, and Ambedkar.³⁶⁴ The tribals and indigenous people of the Narmada valley look toward to a *dharmic* order which includes tribal and dalit identity and consciousness at its center.

Gandhi: A Practitioner of Dharma

Dharma is central to Gandhian thought as revealed in his writings and methods. Gandhi's reading of many *granthas* convinced him to realize that "...that which stands the test of ahimsa and truth is dharma." Gandhi added: "Whatever appeals to a man's heart is dharma to him. Dharma cannot be reached by the intellect. It can only be reached

³⁶¹ "B.R. Ambedkar's Statement," *The Bombay Chronicle* (February 13, 1933), *CWG*, Vol 59, 514.

³⁶² Gandhi, "Letter to Narandas Gandhi," (September 5-9-1930), Gandhi, *CWG*, Vol. 50, 41.

³⁶³ For some post modern readings see Y. T. Vinayaraj, *Re-imagining Dalit Theology: Post Modern Readings* (Tiruvalla, CSS, 2010).

³⁶⁴ Medha Patkar, Personal interview (January 23, 2004), *My Research Journal*.

by the heart."³⁶⁵ Truth and *dharma* are thus organically related concepts. Gandhi equated *dharma* with truth and nonviolence when he observed; "The only virtue I want to claim is Truth and Non Violence."³⁶⁶ Gandhi adopted truth as his strategy and *ahimsa* as his method. Gandhi elevated truth as one's duty and lifestyle over and above one's intellect and speech.

There was a convergence of influences that shaped Gandhi's thoughts and inspired his actions. Gandhi listed the books that influenced him in this order: The Bible, Ruskin, and Tolstoy.³⁶⁷ It was from the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament that he drew strength as a youth. Gandhi read John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, while travelling to Durban, and it prompted Gandhi to write its Gujarati adaptation called *Sarvodaya*. Leo Tolstoy's writings on bread labor convinced Gandhi about the importance and sacredness of work to earn a living. Gandhi admits that Ruskin's words captivated him, while Tolstoy affected his inner being.³⁶⁸ Ruskin inspired Gandhi for simple living and Tolstoy provided a rationale for nonviolence. Gandhi was also inspired by the American writer Henry David Thoreau's essay *Civil Disobedience*.

Later Gandhi learned Sanskrit to read *Bahagavat Gita*. Having lost his earthly mother long before, Gandhi found solace in his "eternal Mother" and affirms, "The *Gita*

³⁶⁵ Gandhi, "Discussion with Poona Sanatanists," (December 7, 1932), *CWG, Vol.58*, 478,479.

³⁶⁶ Gandhi, "The Crime of Chauri Chaura," *Young India* (February 16, 1922), *CWG Vol.26*, 178.

³⁶⁷ Gandhi, "Interview to S.W. Clemes, *Young India* (February 25, 1920), *CWG Vol. 19*, 336.

³⁶⁸ Gandhi, "Interview to Evelyn Wrench," *The Spectator* (October 24, 1931), *CWG, Vol. 54*, 38.

is the universal Mother."³⁶⁹ Reciting the verses of *Gita* helped Gandhi to find solace in times of distress and struggles. Gandhi gave the title, "*Anasaktiyoga* (literal meaning, 'the yoga of non attachment')" to his translation of *Gita*. "The central teaching of the *Gita* is detachment...abandonment of the fruit of action."³⁷⁰

Gandhi's experiments towards the goal of liberation incorporated practicing *brahmacharya*, vegetarianism, and simple living. Gandhi's autobiography *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* reveals the importance he gave to *Moksha* (liberation), the teleological aspect of Hinduism.

What I want to achieve—what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years—is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain *moksha*. I live and move and have my being in pursuit of this goal. All that I do by way of speaking and writing, and all my ventures in the political field, are directed to this same end.³⁷¹

Gandhian Economist Shriman Narayan traces the 'Gandhian way' to imply two basic principles, namely nonviolence and decentralization, and further states that decentralization is the essence of nonviolence.³⁷² Recollecting his first meeting and continuing friendship with Gandhi, C.F. Andrews views Gandhi as an earnest seeker after truth concerning his own thoughts and aspirations. Andrews observes that while Gandhi's religious perceptions resulted "in a beautiful harmony between action and belief," his

³⁶⁹ Gandhi, "Speech at Banarus Hindu University," *Harijan* (24-8-1934), *CWG*, Vol. 64, 256.

³⁷⁰ Gandhi, "*Anasaktiyoga*," (June 27, 1929), *CWG*, Vol. 46, 164-209.

³⁷¹ Gandhi, "An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth," (February 3, 1929), *CWG*, Vol. 44, 90

³⁷² Shriman Narayan, *Gandhian Constitution for Free India* (Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1946), <http://www.peoplefirstindia.org/chap4.htm> (accessed December 10, 2010).

whole active life became one great "Experiment with Truth."³⁷³ Sukumar Azhikode pictures Gandhi's thought as a stream originating from the Himalaya of Truth. It has love and *ahimsa* as its tributaries flowing through the plains of economic equality (trusteeship) and people's democracy (*swaraj*) providing welfare to the banks of society to merge with the ocean of decentralization.³⁷⁴ Pattery views *Satyagraha* forming a threefold interrelated framework of "rooted-ness in truth (*Satyagraha*), at-one-ness with life (*ahimsa*) and social praxis and vision (*Swaraj*)."³⁷⁵ Gandhi himself makes such a linkage between *Satyagraha*, *Ahimsa* and *Swaraj* visible in an address.

It is not merely a policy with me, it is an article of faith. Non-cooperation and civil disobedience are but different branches of the same tree called *satyagraha*. It is my *kalpadruma*—*Jam-i-Jam*—the Universal Provider. *Satyagraha* is search for Truth; and God is Truth. *Ahimsa* or non-violence is the light that reveals that Truth to me. *Swaraj* for me is part of that Truth.³⁷⁶

It is violence that has a negative connotation and not *ahimsa* (nonviolence), since violence is a negation of truth or reality. Therefore Gandhi is right when he equates *Satya* with *ahimsa* and directs *Satyagraha* as the method of *dharma* towards *Swaraj* as the ultimate goal.

³⁷³ C.F. Andrews, *Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas Including Selections from his Writings* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), 99, 346.

³⁷⁴ Sukumar Azhikode, *Mahatmavinte Margam* (Malayalam) (1959, repr., Kottayam: DC Books, 2010), 25.

³⁷⁵ George Pattery, S.J., "Gandhi the Believer: An Indian Christian Perspective (Delhi: ISPCK, 1996), 12.

³⁷⁶ Gandhi, "Presidential Address at Belgaum Congress," *Young India* (26-12-1924), *CWG, Vol. 29*, 507.

Ahimsa (nonviolence) as an Ecologically Sensitive Paradigm

Ecological consciousness recognizes the fundamental interrelatedness of the living order embedded in the cyclical biological web. It calls for a nonviolent approach towards environment. *Dharma* is the source of right actions. Gandhi quotes two great maxims of Hinduism; "Satyannasti paro dharma," meaning "there is no religion higher than truth" and "Ahimsa paramo dharma," stating "non-violence is the highest virtue."³⁷⁷ *Ahimsa* (अहिंसा in Sanskrit) is derived from the root *hims*, meaning to strike. *Himsa* means injury or harm. Literally translated, *a-himsa* means the opposite of *himsa*, or non-injury or non-violence. Environmental exploitation and destruction are acts of violence. Therefore *Ahimsa*, meaning nonviolence, is an ecologically sensitive paradigm.

Gandhi claims himself not as visionary, but as practical idealist. Gandhi "dedicated his life to the service of India through the religion of non-violence," which he believed to be the core of Hinduism.³⁷⁸ This shows that while Gandhi considered Truth as God, nonviolence formed his religion. For Gandhi, nonviolence was not an intellectual preposition, but "an article of faith, the first and the last."³⁷⁹ Gandhi viewed *ahimsa* guiding him amidst irresistible responsibilities. "Ahimsa requires deliberate self-suffering, not a deliberate injuring of the supposed wrong-doer. In its positive form, ahimsa means the largest love, the greatest charity."³⁸⁰ Gandhi quotes from Patanjali:

³⁷⁷ Gandhi, "Speech at Kumbakonam," *The Hindu* (September 15, 1927), *CWG, Vol.10*, 103.

³⁷⁸ Gandhi, "Doctrine of the Sword," *Young India* (August 11, 1920), *CWG, Vol. 21*, 134-136.

³⁷⁹ Gandhi, "Discussion with a Teacher," *Young India* (27-12-1928), *CWG, Vol.47*, 348.

³⁸⁰ Gandhi, "On *Ahimsa*: Reply to Lala Lajpat Rai," (October, 1916), *CWG, Vol. 15*, 252.

“Hate dissolves in the presence of love.”³⁸¹ Gandhi argues; “All society is held together by non-violence, even as the earth is held in her position by gravitation.”³⁸² Thus Gandhi was optimistic about the efficacy of his experiment with *ahimsa* as with truth especially in the context of India.

Reinhold Niebuhr comments on the advantage of the Gandhian method of nonviolence "as a method of expressing moral goodwill" since "it protects the agent against the resentments which violent conflict always creates in both parties to a conflict..." It is the nonviolent temper that reduces tensions and "preserves a sense of objectivity in analysing the issues of the dispute."³⁸³ Thus Niebuhr is certain about the moral and social efficacy of Gandhi's method. Gandhi's method of nonviolence attracted none other than the American Civil Rights Movement leader Martin Luther King, Jr., who drew inspiration from Gandhi's crusades of nonviolent resistance. King states:

Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale. Love for Gandhi was a potent instrument for social and collective transformation. It was in this Gandhian emphasis on love and non-violence that I discovered the method for social reform that I had been seeking for so many months.³⁸⁴

Gandhi found *Ahimsa* and Truth inseparable, like the two sides of a coin. For him *ahimsa* is the means and Truth is the end and "so ahimsa becomes our supreme duty and

³⁸¹ *Patanjali's Yogadarshanam*, ii. 35, quoted in Gandhi, "Never Faileth," *Young India* (February 20, 1930 *CWG*, Vol. 48, 327.

³⁸² Gandhi, "Working on Non-violence," *Harijan* (February 11, 1939), *CWG Vol. 75*, 47.

³⁸³ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 162.

³⁸⁴ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom*. (New York, Harper, 1958), 96-97.

Truth becomes God for us."³⁸⁵ The ontological and deontological dimensions of *dharma* are made clear in this statement.

Satyagraha as an Ethic of Resistance

Truth is at the heart of Gandhian thought and praxis. The Sanskrit word for *Satya* or truth is *Sat* to mean viewing reality as it is. For Gandhi Truth is the embodiment of God. When asked why he considered God to be Truth, Gandhi concluded; "God is Truth and Truth is God." Gandhi, after his relentless search for nearly fifty years, discovered that the nearest approach to Truth is through love.³⁸⁶ After listening to his inner voice of conscience, Gandhi formed certain conditions for those who wish to make experiments in the spiritual realm for a search after Truth. These are the vows: "the vow of truth—speaking and thinking of truth, the vow of *brahmacharya*, of non-violence, poverty and non-possession."³⁸⁷ Gandhi set up Satyagrahashrams at different places with an elaborated set of vows. The first among them was the vow of truth, followed by vows of non-violence, celibacy, control of the palate, non-possession, *swadeshi*, fearlessness, and untouchability.³⁸⁸ These vows were a necessary precondition for joining the *Satyagraha* ashrams set up as a crucible of such experiments in truth. Ashrams served as training centers for *Satyagrahis* where they experienced *Satyagraha* as a way of life.

³⁸⁵ Gandhi, "Letter to Narandas Gandhi," (July 28 or 31, 1930), *CWG, Vol. 49*, 409.

³⁸⁶ Gandhi, "Speech at Meeting in Lausanne," December 8, 1931, *CWG, Vol. 54*, 268-270.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁸ Gandhi, "Draft Constitution for the Ashram," (Before May 20, 1915), *CWG, Vol. 14*, 453-456.

In this context, it is interesting to note the parallels to what Jesus testified before Pilate. To Pilate's query Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Pilate asked Jesus, "What is truth?" (John 18:37, 38a NRSV). Pilate's question reflects the tone of those in authority who relies on the strength of power rather than accepting the truth in every situation of conflict.

Gandhi coined the term *Satyagraha* (सत्याग्रह in Sanskrit) to encompass his method of nonviolent resistance. Gandhi coined and evolved his method of *Satyagraha* during his period in South Africa from 1893 to 1914 and later in India. Gandhi began to call the Indian movement '*satyagraha*,' to denote "the Force which is born of Truth and Love or non-violence," and eliminating the phrase 'passive resistance.' "Truth (*satya*) implies love, and firmness (*agraha*) engenders and therefore serves as a synonym for force."³⁸⁹

The two cardinal virtues that form *Satyagraha* are *Satya* and *Ahimsa*.

Satyagraha literally means insistence on truth. This insistence arms the votary with matchless power. This power or force is connoted by the word *satyagraha*. ...The force to be so applied can never be physical. There is in it no room for violence. The only force of universal application can, therefore, be that of *ahimsa* or love. In other words it is soul force.³⁹⁰

When asked how *Satyagraha* becomes effective as a method, Gandhi replied; "Satyagraha means utter insistence upon truth. When a man insists on truth, it gives him

³⁸⁹ Gandhi, "Satyagraha in South Africa," Chapter XII (April 26, 1928), *CWG, Vol. 34*, 93.

³⁹⁰ Gandhi, "Some Rules of *Satyagraha*," *Young India* (February 27, 1930) *CWG, Vol. 48*, 340.

power."³⁹¹ Yet, Satyagraha presupposes self-analysis and self-discipline. Gandhi insists: "A satyagrahi will always try to overcome evil by good, anger by love, untruth by truth, himsa by ahimsa. There is no other way of purging the world of evil." A satyagrahi must first mobilize unanimous public opinion against the evil through intense agitation to ensure total noncooperation from society towards the offending individual.³⁹² Gandhi distinguishes two opposing methods to attain one's goal, using *Satyagraha* or *duragraha*. Those who follow *duragraha* become impatient with a spirit of revenge leveled against the opponent. *Duragraha* means the opposite of *dharma*. This is not *dharma* but the opposite of it. Commenting on the futility of wishing to kill an enemy, Gandhi outlines what *dharma* means; "winning him over to our way of thinking and converting him to a friend."³⁹³ According to Gandhi, "there can be no room for even a particle of untruth or cruelty, and no injury to life. The measure of dharma is love, compassion, truth."³⁹⁴ Gandhi used *Satyagraha* as a distinctive force of moral strength for those followed a strict adherence to truth.

Jawaharlal Nehru admired the moral and ethical side of Indian Freedom Movement and its tool of *Satyagraha*. Commenting on *Satyagraha* based on nonviolence, Nehru admitted that what attracted him most was that, "...situated as we were in India

³⁹¹ Gandhi, "Interview to Journalists," *The Friend* (December 12, 1931), *CWG*, Vol. 54, 233.

³⁹² Gandhi, "The Running Sore," *Young India* (August 8, 1929), *CWG*, Vol. 46, 289.

³⁹³ Gandhi, "Preface to 'Antyaj Stotra,'" (April 17, 1918), *CWG* Vol.16, 432.

³⁹⁴ Gandhi, "Speech at Gujarati Political Conference-I," (November 3, 1917), *CWG*, Vol.16, 127-128.

and with our background and traditions, it was the right policy for us.”³⁹⁵ David J. Krieger remarks that the Gandhian "Satyagraha is a self-suffering (tapas), nonviolent (*ahimsa*), search for truth (*satya*)," bridging the gaps between religion and politics, private and public spheres of life, enlightenment and liberation and more importantly between theory and praxis. And what makes the connection credulous is the search for *satya* which is common to all religious inquiry leading to a holistic vision.³⁹⁶ Atharva Veda refers to *satyam grhnanah* meaning 'to hold on to truth (5.17.10).' *Dharma* holds the truth and therefore Dharmic understanding must hold the concerns for the poor, women, nature, the displaced and the dispossessed.

Gandhi viewed *Satyagraha* as a positive movement. *Satyagraha* invariably involves constructive programs along with instances of protest. *Satyagraha* is vibrant and refreshing as soul-force. It accounts to conscious intervention in social issues without any prejudice or profit motive. More than being a means for conflict- resolution, *Satyagraha* proved more effective in the praxis of social transformation. For a *satyagrahi*, means and ends are the same. The methods of *Satyagraha* adopted by both Chipko Movement and NBA move along these lines. It is interesting to note how Gandhi used *Satyagraha* as a moral weapon in the Indian Freedom Movement.

³⁹⁵ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Mahatma Gandhi* (Calcutta: Signet Press, 1949), 41.

³⁹⁶ David J. Krieger, *The New Universalism: Foundations for a Global Theology* (New York: Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1991), 14.

Gandhian *Satyagraha* as Employed in the Indian Freedom Movement

Gandhi did not plunge directly into the Freedom Movement after his landing at Bombay in 1915, despite his success in South Africa. Gandhi made a promise to Gopal Krishna Gokhale, his political mentor that he would travel in India for one year to gain experience and express no opinion till the period of probation is over.³⁹⁷ A.K. Saran outlines the setting in which Gandhi took the mantle of political leadership in India. Gandhi imbibed the legacy of both Gokhale and Tilak, the former leading the reformist and secular strand of nationalism while the latter initiating its religio-social revivalist take.³⁹⁸ Nehru rightly comments that “a leader does not create a mass movement out of nothing.”³⁹⁹ As a leader Gandhi took advantage of his knowledge of Indian conditions and could thus galvanize Indian Freedom Movement as a mass movement.

In May 1915 Gandhi established a Satyagrahashram in Sabarmati, a village near Ahmedabad, a known center for handloom weaving. It is there that Gandhi began his learning how to serve the motherland. The Rowlatt Act of 1919 empowered the British government to imprison those accused on charges of sedition without trial. The Jallianwala Bagh massacre (April 1919), killing 379 civilians, provoked public anger and violence. Gandhi denounced all violence as evil. In August 1920 Gandhi began his first

³⁹⁷ Gandhi, "Interview to 'The Madras Mail,' *The Madras Mail* (April 23, 1915), *CWG, Vol. 14*, 411.

³⁹⁸ A.K. Saran, "Gandhi's Theory of Society and Our Times," *Studies in Comparative Religion*, 3, no. 4 (Autumn 1969), 177-179.

³⁹⁹ Nehru, *Mahatma Gandhi*, 52.

nationwide campaign of *satyagraha* resulting in thousands of *satyagrahis* in prison.⁴⁰⁰ This movement marked the beginning of Indian National Movement to become a mass movement gathering its support base 'from below.' At Chauri Chaura a mob of *satyagrahis* set fire a police station and killed policemen. This forced Gandhi to call off the first *satyagraha* agitation lamenting that it was a "Himalayan Blunder" to launch *satyagraha* without sufficient "soul-cleansing" of the masses.⁴⁰¹ The British arrested Gandhi on March 10, 1922 and he served his longest prison term, about two years. Gandhi called for a boycott of British-made goods and facilities and started the nonviolent non-cooperation movement to achieve the national goal of *swaraj*. Gandhi also began his constructive programs like the Khadi Movement of hand spinning and weaving using Charkha. Gandhi moved a nationwide agitation in 1930 against the Salt Tax and organized Dandi March also known as Salt *Satyagraha*. As Gandhi was about to begin the last of his *Satyagraha* campaigns, the "Quit India" Movement, the British arrested him and other national leaders in August 1942. After World War II, the Hindu-Muslim riots became a liability to the British and the newly elected Labor government in Britain passed the Indian Independence Act in 1947. The partition between India and Pakistan and the transfer of power took place by midnight of August 14-15, 1947.⁴⁰² Gandhi strived hard to bring communal harmony between Muslims and Hindus by

⁴⁰⁰ India.gov.in, "Indian Freedom Struggle (1857-1947)," under "Know India," http://india.gov.in/knowindia/freedom_struggle2.php (accessed October 2, 2010).

⁴⁰¹ *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2008, s.v. "India."

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*

proclaiming fasts. The life of the true *Satyagrahi* came to a halt with a Hindu assassin's bullets on January 30, 1948.

Gandhi fashioned various forms of *Satyagraha* action to sustain the life of a *Satyagrahi*. He made use of different media such as the press, speeches, *bhajans* (songs), daily prayer meetings, processions, and slogans to reach the multitude. The setting up of Satyagrahashram, Charkha and *Khadi* Movement were part of the constructive program envisaged by Gandhi. Civil disobedience, noncooperation movement, boycott, strikes, and fasts were tools that Gandhi employed in *Satyagraha*. Salt *Satyagraha* and Quit India Movement deserve a detailed narration due to their representative nature.

Salt Satyagraha (Dandi March)

In a surprising move, Gandhi announced Salt *Satyagraha* (Dandi March) against the tax on salt. Beginning from the Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi, Gujarat from March 12 to April 6, 1930 he and his followers marched 400 kilometers on foot. They broke the Salt law at the sea beach at Dandi. The slow March that took 24 days to finish was successful to build the movement to a climax not only because it gained international media attention: it had a ripple effect, encouraging people across the nation to break the law by making salt on their own. The British arrested 60,000 *satyagrahis* across the nation. This March stimulated the nation-wide Civil Disobedience Movement, forcing the Viceroy to hold talks with Gandhi and draft the Gandhi-Irwin Pact of 1931. The Pact agreed to form a federal structure to share responsibility between the Indians and the British.

The Dandi March connected hundreds of women who accepted Gandhi's call to take part in the march, made salt, and sold and bought it in the market. Nehru recollects the strong participation by women in the national struggle and their attitude being “more unyielding than that of men.” Salt became a word of power when Gandhi launched his epic struggle of Salt *Satyagraha*. Nehru hails the fresh launch of Indian Freedom Movement with Gandhi’s novel initiative.⁴⁰³ At the beginning of the March Gandhi made his intentions clear. “My aim is to get the Salt Tax abolished. That is for me one step, the first step, towards full freedom.”⁴⁰⁴ Describing the goal to reach as very far, Gandhi affirmed: “For the present Dandi is our destination but our real destination is no other than the temple of the goddess of *swaraj*.”⁴⁰⁵ The outcome of the first mass movement of Salt *Satyagraha* was constructive in that it tested the efficacy of Gandhi’s method of *Satyagraha* at the national level to bring women to the forefront of the struggle. However, the major impact was that it gathered the collective strength of the masses to own the struggle as their own. Thus the Dandi March was the launching pad and testing ground of Gandhian *Satyagraha*.

Quit India Movement

The Indian National Congress declared the final campaign 'Quit India' Movement or the '*Bharat Chhodo Andolan*' in August 1942 in the backdrop of World War II. In a lengthy speech at the AICC meeting at Bombay on August 8, 1942, Gandhi launched the

⁴⁰³ Nehru, *Mahatma Gandhi*, 61-63.

⁴⁰⁴ Gandhi, "Speech at Ahmedabad," (March 8, 1930), *CWG, Vol. 48*, 387.

⁴⁰⁵ Gandhi, "Speech at Dandi," (April 5, 1930), *CWG, Vol. 49*, 16.

final campaign to secure national freedom, The Quit India Movement. The call demanded "Nothing less than freedom" and gave a mantra for the Indian: 'Do or Die.' "We shall either free India or die in the attempt; we shall not live to see the perpetuation of our slavery."⁴⁰⁶ Gandhi was again arrested on 9th August 1942 and imprisoned for two years in Pune. The Quit India Movement ended in 1943, when the British hinted complete transfer of power to the Indians.

Subhash Chandra Bose parted with Gandhi and the Congress to form the Indian National Army and tread a different path towards Indian Freedom by taking sides with the Axis Powers in World War II. Bose's slogan, "Give me blood and I shall give you freedom" voiced a clarion call for the youth of India.⁴⁰⁷ When asked by a correspondent during an interview in 1946 about the INA movement, RIN mutiny and communal riots as possible indications of the failure of Gandhi's creed of nonviolence, Gandhi replied:

This is a dangerous generalization. All you mention can certainly be called himsa but that can never mean that the creed of non-violence has failed. At best it may be said that I have not yet found the technique required for the conversion of the mass mind. ... Whether non-violence has taken roots in Indian life is still an open question which can only be answered after my death.⁴⁰⁸

It could be argued that Gandhi remained unsuccessful in tackling the Hindu-Muslim communal riots with his method of *Satyagraha*. Neither could Gandhi handle the problem of castes and untouchability. Gandhi's faith in his deep-rooted religious convictions placed a hurdle in winning the support of the Harijans as Gandhi called the

⁴⁰⁶ Gandhi, "Speech at A.I.C.C. Meeting," (August 8, 1942), *CWG, Vol. 83*, 197.

⁴⁰⁷ India.gov.in. "Indian Freedom Struggle (1857-1947)."

⁴⁰⁸ Gandhi, "Interview to Associated Press of America," (November 6, 1946), *CWG, Vol. 92*, 456-457.

downtrodden classes in Hindu Society and the Muslims, even though Gandhi's heart longed for religious harmony and social reforms. He was an arch reconciler willing to make compromises, though he upheld firmness of resolve to stand for what he thought was right. Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, and Aung San Suu Kyi are leaders who took Gandhi's notion of *Satyagraha* and translated the method to different settings. The environmental movements in independent India have tried and tested the usefulness of *Satyagraha* as a tool for protest and to promote constructive and sustainable development.

Method of *Dharma: Satyagraha* as Employed by Chipko and NBA Movements

Environmental activism gathers currency in a modern world as environmental exploitation is charted on a high graph. Both the Chipko Andolan and the Narmada Bachao Andolan had specific Gandhian influence. Both Movements took Gandhian techniques of *Satyagraha* as methods of protest. Gandhi talks about the nature of nonviolence to be practiced. In the event of his arrest, the nation must set in motion nonviolence of the activist type and not the passive one. Gandhi is clear that only one who has a living faith in the efficacy of nonviolence must succeed him. Only then can that person discover a nonviolent method at a crucial juncture in a struggle. Gandhi calls on civil resisters to elicit self-regulated mass movements. He makes his method clear:

It will be the duty then of everyone to keep it non-violent and under discipline. ... Whilst, therefore, every effort imaginable and possible should be made to restrain the forces of violence, civil disobedience once begun this time cannot be

stopped and must not be stopped so long as there is a single civil resister left free or alive.⁴⁰⁹

Similarly, once set in motion, a ‘movement’ cannot be stopped. It is significant that the NBA has in its emblem an undulating wave representing this spirit of an ongoing nature. NBA continues its struggle even after the project against which it struggled is nearing completion. Both the Chipko and Narmada Bachao Andolan adapted Gandhian *Satyagraha* methods to evolve novel patterns as demanded in each specific situation. While Chipko prevented tree-felling by women clinging to the trees, Narmada activists declared *Jal Samadhi* against the rising Narmada River to protest and stop the dam building. Slogans formed the refrain of both the movements as a means of expressing their anguish and resolve. Long Marches in the Himalayan region and along the Narmada valley helped gather strength and solidarity. Fasts by its leaders who inherited the Gandhian legacy drew public attention and audience from the authorities. The tribals and villagers suffered beatings at the hands of the police. Constructive programs such as reforestation, commissioning of mini hydro projects, and establishing schools also take place as part of the campaigns.

Vandana Shiva charts the Chipko movement as “historically, philosophically and organisationally an extension of the traditional Gandhian *satyagraha*.” She draws the continuity between the pre-independence and post-independence forms of *Satyagraha* led by Sri Dev Suman, Mira Behn and Sarala Behn, close associates of Gandhi. Sri Dev Suman became a martyr for the cause of the Himalayan people. These disciples also

⁴⁰⁹ "When I am Arrested," *Young India* (27-2-1930), *CWG, Vol. 48*, 347-348.

established ashrams in the Himalayas. They inspired Sunderlal Bahuguna as a new generation leader in the Gandhian tradition.⁴¹⁰ Chandi Prasad Bhatt also belongs to this genre.

Dedicated to a greater cause, a *Satyagrahi* willingly endures bodily suffering to signal a strong spiritual mindset. As in the *Swadeshi* Movement, the activists of today's Environmental Movements show firm resolve to nourish *Satyagraha* as soul-force. In an interview, Patkar describes the dynamics of fasting. She indicates that fasts are often the last resort when one finds them inevitable in any given case and that they are not superficial tactics. Though one gets tired and strained after a fast, a solid result "makes you run immediately after that."⁴¹¹

Critics place the blame on NBA for obstructing the construction work as well as resettlement and rehabilitation. But on a closer look, real obstruction occurred when the government, crippled with lack of land for rehabilitation amidst explicit corruption by officials, was incapable to implement R&R by stalling the rehabilitation while the construction went unabated. Guha writes; "The techniques of suppression, so often used by a state to settle an outstanding conflict, may seek only to intensify and deepen it." In this context, Guha calls the contenting parties to "move beyond self-justification towards acknowledging and embracing the beauty of compromise," rather than being inflexible

⁴¹⁰ Vandana Shiva, *Ecology and Politics of Survival: Conflicts over natural Resources in India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications India, 1991), 4. Chipko Movement. <http://www.unu.edu/unupress/unupbooks/80a03e/80A03E08.htm> (accessed June 20, 2009).

⁴¹¹ "Being Medha: Fasting for a Cause," Medha Patkar Interviewed by Anuradha Sen Gupta/*CNN-IBN*, April 30, 2006, <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/being-medha-fasting-for-a-cause/9141-3-single.html> (accessed January 26, 2009).

and dogmatic. Guha lauds the method of Gandhi: “Gandhi knew when to begin a movement, but also when to call it off, when to challenge an opponent, but also when to talk to and seek to understand him. The only thing he was uncompromising about was the use of non-violence.”⁴¹² The struggles of both the Chipko Andolan and the NBA have a common thread in the way in which they adopted and developed Gandhian *Satyagraha* strategies to mobilize peasants and tribals.

⁴¹² Ramachandra Guha, "The Beauty of Compromise," *India Together*, 02 May 2008, <http://www.indiatogether.org/2008/may/rgh-comprom.htm> (accessed January 26, 2009).

CHAPTER SIX

SWARAJ AND SARVODAYA: ECONOMY AND PRAXIS OF DHARMA

Gandhi's political and economic principles, namely, *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi*, will be reviewed here. The discussion of these principles leads to the ethical notion of *Sarvodaya* directed towards an emerging *Dharma* of Nature. The focus and discussion of this review are on the Gandhian methods as applied by his close associates in independent India. The discussion then moves to the present time to show how the mass movements, especially the environmental movements, use these notions and methods in their resistance. The discourse identifies how successive generations adapt and reinterpret Gandhian thought and actions, thereby making them relevant for contemporary contexts in each era.

Economy of Dharma: Swaraj as an Alternative Development Model

Gandhi is prophetic when he makes a distinction between modernity and tradition. Modern civilization is characterized by "an indefinite multiplicity of human wants," whereas, the "characteristic of ancient civilization is an imperative restriction upon and a strict regulating of those wants."⁴¹¹ Gandhian thought and action can well be placed in the context of an engagement between tradition and modernity. Gandhian vision also offers an alternative to the dominant world-views of liberal democracy and socialism.

⁴¹¹ Gandhi, "Choice Before Us," *CWG, Vol. 38, Young India*, June 2, 1927, 483.

Gandhian Principles of *Swaraj*, *Swadeshi*, and Trusteeship

Gandhi developed his ideology and methods during his stay in South Africa from 1893 to 1914. He interpreted freedom as *Swaraj* (self-rule) beginning at the personal level. *Swaraj* also meant economic decentralization, incorporating ideals of *swadeshi* and trusteeship.

Hind Swaraj: Text and Context of Indian Home Rule

Gandhi proposed his political, religious, and social ideal for India in his *Hind Swaraj* (Indian Home Rule) written in 1909.⁴¹⁴ It is an effort to reconstruct Indian traditions in contemporary contexts. The *Hind Swaraj* is a Gandhian critique of modern industrialism. It attempts to correct the moral degeneration that India suffered with the advent of modern industrial civilization. Gandhi wrote the *Hind Swaraj* as a dialogue between two fictive characters, the 'Reader' and the 'Editor.' Aditya Nigam reviews the *Hind Swaraj* not merely as a political text, but as "an ontological drama staged by Gandhi," set on a political terrain, as a critique of modernity. Nigam argues that Gandhi used his discourse on self-purification to mobilize the community itself for larger social reforms. It aimed at the self-purification of the community at the mass level.⁴¹⁵

Gandhi did not write any systematic treatise, except for the *Hind Swaraj* written in 1909. Gandhi admits, "I am not built for academic writings. Action is my domain, and

⁴¹⁴ The *Hind Swaraj* was originally written in Gujarati during Gandhi's return journey from London to South Africa on the Kildonal Castle. Gandhi published the pamphlet in the *Indian Opinion*, the first twelve chapters on December 11, 1909 and the rest on December 18, 1909. Gandhi, "*Hind Swaraj*," *CWG*, Vol. 10, 245.

⁴¹⁵ Aditya Nigam, "Gandhi - The Angel of History: Reading *Hind Swaraj* Today," *Economic & Political Weekly*, XLIV, no. 11 (March 14, 2009), 41-42.

what I understand, according to my lights, to be my duty, and what comes my way, I do."⁴¹⁶ He was a *karmayogi*⁴¹⁷ or activist par excellence. Answering to criticisms regarding inconsistency in his writings he remarks, "...there is a consistency running through my seeming inconsistencies, as in nature there is a unity running through seeming diversity."⁴¹⁸ Gandhi shows consistency in his adherence to truth. M.P. Mathai views Gandhi as a synoptic thinker, with a 'world-view' which is "highly systematic and logically well knit," disclosing an integral relation between theory and praxis.⁴¹⁹ Thus the political theory outlined in the *Hind Swaraj* is that of praxis, suggesting a worldview and a moral vision.

Vivek Pinto reviews the *Hind Swaraj* as the context and text for Gandhi's moral vision on *swaraj* and agricultural development.⁴²⁰ Gandhi finds a key to comprehend his booklet on *Hind Swaraj* "is to realize that it is not an attempt to go back to the so-called ignorant, dark ages. But it is an attempt to see beauty in voluntary simplicity, poverty and slowness. I have pictured that as my ideal."⁴²¹ In a revised Gujarati edition of the *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi calls India to turn back from modern civilization and go back to the

⁴¹⁶ Gandhi, "Two Requests," *CWG, Vol. 90, Harijan* (March 3, 1946), 1.

⁴¹⁷ *Karmayoga* means 'path of union through action,' as elucidated in the *Bhagavat Gita* (3.19 and 3.30). Gandhi defines a *karmayogi* as "one who seeks liberation through action," ["Speech at Public Meeting, Vadatal," *CWG, Vol. 22* (January 19, 1921), 238.] or in short, "the active mystic." [*Anasaktiyoga: The Message of the Gita*," *CWG, Vol. 46* (June 27, 1929), 193.

⁴¹⁸ Gandhi, "My Inconsistencies," *CWG, Vol. 48, Young India* (February 13, 1930), 314.

⁴¹⁹ M.P. Mathai, *Mahatama Gandhi's World-view* (New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation, 2000), 17, 25.

⁴²⁰ Vivek Pinto, *Gandhi's Vision and Values: The Moral Quest for Change in Indian Agriculture* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998), 39.

⁴²¹ Gandhi, "The Unbridgeable Gulf," *CWG, Vol. 76, Young India* (February 13, 1930), 396.

ancient way of life, which embodied the right ethical principles. The key to an understanding of *Hind Swaraj* lies in the idea that worldly pursuits should give way to ethical living."⁴²² There is no room for violence in this style of living.

Gandhi affirms, "It is *Swaraj* when we learn to rule ourselves."⁴²³ Gandhi exhorts with a call for each to do one's duty, serving for the good of the others. Gandhi concludes his treatise on the *Hind Swaraj* by repeating his arguments. "Real home-rule is self-rule or self-control." Soul-force is the path towards it, for which use of *Swadeshi* is necessary. It implies measures like the boycott of machine-made goods and sparse use of English language. Gandhi heeds the voice of his conscience and dedicates his life for the achievement of *Hind Swaraj*.⁴²⁴ In an appeal to the British to grant voting rights to the Indian population in South Africa, Gandhi paid tributes to the age-old system of local government in India. *Panchayat* (Council of Five), a traditional representation in India, is an elected body, whose decisions and actions are regulated by the majority of the community which it represents.

Gandhi narrates that "Indians, as a rule, do not actively meddle in politics," or "have never tried to usurp political power anywhere." He attributes this to their religions that teach them "indifference to material pursuits."⁴²⁵ In chapter 8 of the *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi reviews the sad condition of India under the clutches of modern civilization.

⁴²² Gandhi, "*Hind Swaraj*," *CWG, Vol. 14, Indian Opinion* (29-4-1914), 157.

⁴²³ Gandhi, "*Hind Swaraj*," *CWG, Vol. 10*, 282

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, 310-311.

⁴²⁵ Gandhi, "The Indian Franchise," Durban, *CWG, Vol. 1* (December 16, 1895), 287, 294.

Gandhi identifies the root cause of the malady. Gandhi's first complaint is that "India is becoming irreligious." Whereas, all religions teach to set limits to worldly pursuits and become active in godly pursuits, India turns away from God.⁴²⁶ This moral critique forms the fulcrum of discussion in the *Hind Swaraj*, adding moral and religious dimensions to the economic, social, and political questions. Though Gandhian thought and actions definitely had political import, the tone and content of his treatises showed religious overtones. Moreover, his aim was to present an alternative path to modern industrial civilization. Thus, *Hind Swaraj* can best be termed as Gandhi's politico-religious manifesto.

Swaraj: Politics of Counter-Culture

Swaraj (स्वराज) is a comprehensive term Gandhi used to include a wide array of meanings including self-rule, state, freedom, and a nation 'coming to her own.' Gandhi's ambition aimed higher than independence. *Swaraj* is a vital indigenous term intelligible to the Indian masses. *Swaraj* constituted an "all-satisfying goal for all time."⁴²⁷ Gandhi explains the term *Swaraj*:

The root meaning of swaraj is self-rule. 'Swaraj' may, therefore, be rendered as disciplined rule from within and purna means 'complete'. 'Independence' has no such limitation. Independence may mean licence to do as you like. Swaraj is positive. Independence is negative. ... The word swaraj is a sacred word, a Vedic word, meaning self-rule and self-restraint, and not freedom from all restraint which 'independence' often means.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁶ Gandhi, "Hind Swaraj," *CWG, Vol. 10*, 264.

⁴²⁷ Gandhi, "Independence v. *Swaraj*," *CWG Vol. 41, Young India* (January 12, 1928), 104-107. Dadabhai Naoroji first used the term '*Swaraj*' as a synonym for 'self-government' in his presidential address at the Calcutta Congress in 1906.

⁴²⁸ Gandhi, "Interview to Journalists," *CWG, Vol.51, Young India* (March 19, 1931), 220.

Gandhi proposes an outline of village government which ensures perfect democracy based upon individual freedom; the individual is the architect of the local government. An elected Panchayat forms the legislature, judiciary, and executive combined, operating with the law of nonviolence. In each village the primary concern is to grow food crops, and cotton for clothing. With the land that is additionally available, the village can grow useful money crops. The village can maintain a village theatre and school, and ensure a clean water supply with wells and storage tanks. Gandhi narrates; "My idea of village swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants, and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity."⁴²⁹ Gandhi placed the ideal of self-sufficiency in the context of basic human needs especially in food and clothing. In the Gandhian scheme the village formed the nucleus of social life, where self-sufficiency starts from below.

Speaking of independence, Gandhi is certain that it "must begin at the bottom." "Thus, every village will be a republic or *Panchayat* having full powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world."⁴³⁰ *Swaraj* or self-rule asserted both political independence and disciplined rule within an individual self. Gandhi rejected the utilitarian principle of "the greatest good of the greatest number" and the Darwinian Theory of the "survival of the fittest," both of which one cannot defend on the ground of *ahimsa*. Instead, Gandhi favored *Sarvodaya* and *swaraj* aimed at "the

⁴²⁹ Gandhi, "Question Box: Village *Swaraj*," *CWG, Vol. 83, Harijan* (July 26, 1942), 113.

⁴³⁰ Gandhi, "Independence," *CWG Vol. 91, Harijan* (July 28, 1946), 325.

greatest good of all.”⁴³¹ For Gandhi the rule consists of “the good of all, the progress of all and the weak first.”⁴³² For Gandhi, life in the villages "will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom." Instead, based on truth and nonviolence and composed of numerous integral villages, life in society represents an ever-widening oceanic circle with individuals at its center ready to sacrifice for the village.⁴³³ Nehru comments on the leadership of Gandhi which appealed to the masses from below. “And then Gandhi came. ...He did not descend from the top; he seemed to emerge from millions of India, speaking their language....”⁴³⁴ For the successful Mass Movements, the leadership as well as strategies adopted must emerge from below.

Swadeshi: Praxis of Alternative Development

Swadeshi (स्वदेशी) or self-sufficiency meant the use of Indian-made goods.

Swadeshi means the use of local resources, exchange in the local market, and use of *lokavidya* (local traditional knowledge base). Machine takes away the *dharma* and the rhythm of nature and life.⁴³⁵ The village industries movement was not meant to replace all machinery. Answering to a question on how to make use of big inventions like electricity, Gandhi raises no objection if there is provision for locally managed and state-owned electricity in every village.

⁴³¹ Gandhi, “Letter to Satish Chandra Mukherjee,” *CWG*, Vol. 37 (November 20, 1926), 51.

⁴³² Gandhi, "Letter to Premabehn Kantak" (July 6, 1932), *CWG Vol 56*, 111.

⁴³³ Gandhi, "Independence," *CWG Vol. 91, Harijan* (July 28, 1946), 326.

⁴³⁴ Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 358.

⁴³⁵ Sunil Sahasrabudhey, *Gandhi's Challenge to Modern Science* (Goa: Other India Press, 2002)52, 64.

I would prize every invention of science made for the benefit of all. ...The heavy machinery for work of public utility which cannot be undertaken by human labour has its inevitable place, but all that would be owned by the State and used entirely for the benefit of the people. I can have no consideration for machinery which is meant either to enrich the few at the expense of the many, or without cause to displace the useful labour of many.⁴³⁶

Gandhi identifies the spirit of *swadeshi* that runs through all realms of life. In religion, *Swadeshi* accounts for restricting ancestral religion and purging its defects. In politics, it means making use of the indigenous institutions. In the realm of economics, it is the use of the immediate surroundings. "Swadeshi is that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote."⁴³⁷ Applying what the *Gita* says, "It is better to die performing one's duty or *swadharma* (*The Bhagavat Gita*, III.35)" to *swadeshi*, Gandhi affirms: "swadeshi is *swadharma* applied to one's immediate environment."⁴³⁸ Gandhi stipulated the rules of *Swadeshi*. The first, "in serving people we should give priority to those who live near us." The second rule is an opposite one, "that we should serve first those who are distant from us and then those who are near us." In the first case, 'near' denotes those physically near, while the 'distant' means distant mentally. It is good to serve first those who are mentally distanced.⁴³⁹ Gandhi affirms the primacy of social reforms over political work and found both interrelated. Political reforms are possible only with commitment in social reforms

⁴³⁶ Gandhi, "A Discussion," *CWG*, Vol.67, *Harijan* (June 22, 1935), 184-185.

⁴³⁷ Gandhi, "Speech on Swadeshi at Missionary Conference, Madras, *CWG*, Vol., 15, *The Hindu* (February 28, 1916), 159.

⁴³⁸ Gandhi, "The Law of Swadeshi," *CWG*, Vol. 52, *Young India* (June 18, 1931), 210.

⁴³⁹ Gandhi, "Discourses on the 'Gita,'" *CWG*, Vol 37 (June 29, 1926), 212.

or self-purification.⁴⁴⁰ Gandhi believes that it is the minority struggles in opposition to the acts of the majorities that initiate reforms in society when the acts of the majority appear wrong over against the minorities, who turns out to be right.⁴⁴¹ Today in democracy, the government has to represent the will of the majority. It is often the case that the voices of the minority are seldom heard as is the case of environmental refugees who belong to the tribals of the Himalayas or the Narmada River valley.

Gandhi identified food and clothing as the two basic needs of society. Gandhi preferred hand-spinning on charkha over agriculture since khadi production requires skill of the hand more, and it requires less intervention and control from the government. Moreover, it requires cooperation among members of a society that will be self-sufficient and interdependent. Just as members of a family are self-dependent and interdependent, dependence among members of a society, nation, or humankind makes cooperation necessary, in the service of each other.⁴⁴²

Gandhi considers Khadi service, village service and Harijan service as humanitarian services with the goal of serving the *Daridranarayana* meaning ‘god in the form of the poor.’⁴⁴³ For him the “problem of poverty is economic, whereas the problem of abolition of untouchability is religious or spiritual.”⁴⁴⁴ Gandhi describes the India of

⁴⁴⁰ Gandhi, "Speech at Ahmedabad," *CWG, Vol.,53, Young India* (August 6, 1931), 168.

⁴⁴¹ Gandhi, "Hind Swaraj," *CWG Vol. 10*, 294.

⁴⁴² Gandhi, "Answers to Questions," *CWG, Vol. 88, Khadi Jagat* (December 1945), 390-391.

⁴⁴³ Gandhi, "Notes: The Three Services," *CWG, Vol. 67, Harijan* (June 22, 1935), 186.

⁴⁴⁴ Gandhi, "Speech at Gandhi Seva Sangh Meeting, Hudli-IV," *CWG, Vol. 71* (April 20, 1937), 183.

his dreams, "I shall work for an India in which the poorest shall feel that it is their country in whose making they have an effective voice; an India in which there shall be no high class and low class of people; an India in which all communities shall live in perfect harmony."⁴⁴⁵ Making khadi (home-spun cloth) demonstrated India's resolve to use its own goods. As a constructive program, it ensured employment and income to local peasants.

Later, Gandhi shows the "connection between hand-spinning and swaraj obtained through non-violence." Gandhi conceives the spinning-wheel as the "symbol *par excellence* of non-violence" when both the rich and the poor can weave and wear *khadi* for personal use to become, as Nehru called *khadi*, "the livery of our freedom."⁴⁴⁶ Gandhi considers khadi as the central village handicraft industry while other village industries revolve like planets in a solar system. Each of them cannot have an independent existence, but are interdependent.⁴⁴⁷ It was an activity that organized the greatest number of people with a majority of them being women leading to a national movement towards freedom. Thus khadi and village industries provided avenues for self-reliance and counter-culture initiatives.

Charkha: Symbol of Solidarity and Harmony

Charkha, or the spinning wheel, is a tool that Gandhi rediscovered as a symbol of technology that is simple and inexpensive so that each villager can use it, with incredible

⁴⁴⁵ Gandhi, "Statement to Reuter," *CWG, Vol. 53, The Hindustan Times* (September 5, 1931), 312.

⁴⁴⁶ Gandhi, "The Missing Link," *CWG, Vol., 87* (August 8, 1945), 329-330.

⁴⁴⁷ Gandhi, "Why Only Khadi?," *CWG, Vol. 77, Harijan* (January 20, 1940), 216.

potential for generating employment for millions of Indians. The message of the spinning wheel is that it is mass production in people's homes using the smallest machine, but not by forceful means, enabling the millions to convert their labor into cloth or grain.⁴⁴⁸

Gandhi refers to charkha as the “simple wheel which daily hums to me the distress of the masses,” representing the *Daridranarayana*.⁴⁴⁹ Gandhi commented on the enthusiasm women have shown in constructive resistance programs like Salt *satyagraha*, the boycott of foreign cloth, production of khadi, and campaign on prohibition, all of which directly benefited the villages and specially women.⁴⁵⁰ He used the murmur of charkha as the voice to that would lift up the villages of India as they evolved an alternative technology in the setting of village homes, especially by bringing women to the forefront. It became a symbol of alternative technology, spinning and weaving a thread of self-reliance and a fabric of solidarity, changing the mindset of a people of diverse cultures, religions, and languages. Charkha became a mantra of self-reliant development.

Gandhi used Charkha (spinning wheel), too, as an alternative technology that fosters cooperation among village communities. It brought individuals and communities together in the struggle for *Swaraj* and remained a symbol of solidarity and harmony. Charkha was symbolic of self-reliant village industry, generating employment for millions of the unemployed during the freedom struggle. (Similarly, after Gandhi and in his spirit, forests were the point of contact for the Chipko activists and the Narmada River

⁴⁴⁸ Gandhi, "Interview to Callender, *CWG, Vol. 54, Harijan* (November 2, 1934), 24.

⁴⁴⁹ Gandhi, "Action in Inaction," *CWG, Vol. 36, Young India* (September 9, 1926), 271.

⁴⁵⁰ Gandhi, "Special Task Before Women," *CWG, Vol. 49, Navajivan* (April 20, 1930), 118.

became the connecting thread for the people of Narmada in their respective terrains of resistance. Both the forest and the river represented their source of sustenance for an authentic living.)

Trusteeship: Economy of (Economy of Equality) Sustainable Development

Gandhi developed his theory of trusteeship as an alternative to socialist perspectives. A primary difference between Marxian and Gandhian thought is the fundamental distinction between violence and nonviolence as means of social change. Gandhi's concept of economic equality meant that "everybody should have enough for his or her needs."⁴⁵¹ Gandhi's concept on trusteeship is more in tune with the stewardship notion in the Hebrew Bible, where the humans are entrusted with stewardship of creation. Gandhi points out that "it is the fundamental law of Nature...that Nature produces enough for our wants" and suggests that "if only everybody took enough for himself and nothing more," millions of Indians who are hungry would at least be "satisfied with one meal a day, and that meal consisting of a *chapati* containing no fat in it, and a pinch of salt."⁴⁵² Gandhi wants to bring about economic equality through nonviolence, beginning with him, to convert the whole society from below towards that goal. In his plan the State should not impose controls from above, but carry out the will of the people. When the conditions become conducive, people will carry out the implications of trusteeship beginning with Gram panchayats. "Under my plan, the State will be there to carry out the

⁴⁵¹ Gandhi, "Answers to Questions at Constructive Workers' Conference, Madras," *CWG, Vol. 89* (January 24, 1946), 295.

⁴⁵² Gandhi, "Speech on Ashram Vows at YMCA, Madras" *CWG, Vol. 15, The Indian Review* (February, 1916), 171.

will of the people, not to dictate to them or force them to do its will."⁴⁵³ (Today in the case of the Narmada struggles, the State governments use repressive tactics to carry out the official stance by continuing dam construction whereas the rehabilitation of the affected people is not complete.)

There are scholars who argue that the Trusteeship model is not practical. Vinay Lal brands Gandhi as an archivist; he repudiates Gandhi's notion of trusteeship, which calls for a moral obligation from capitalists to the workers as a mere peace-keeping formula between them.⁴⁵⁴ But Gandhi is confident about his method. "Trusteeship is my answer to the issue of class-conflict."⁴⁵⁵ Gandhi's theory of trusteeship is a communitarian principle coined to replace democratic representation by that of trusteeship. In an interview with Louis Fischer, Gandhi drew the difference between his methods and those of Socialists. While the Socialists believe in violence, Gandhi's method is purely nonviolent. Gandhi believed that only a socialism practiced by truthful, nonviolent, and pure-hearted socialists can establish a socialist society, and he regarded that type of socialism as pure.⁴⁵⁶ When Fischer called Gandhi a socialist, Gandhi endorsed the comment and remarked, "I was a socialist before many of them were born. ...My claim will live when their socialism is dead."⁴⁵⁷ Gandhi's view on trusteeship has a

⁴⁵³ Gandhi, "Answers to Questions," *CWG, Vol. 89* (January 24, 1946), 296-97.

⁴⁵⁴ Vinay Lal, "The Gandhi Everyone Loves to Hate," *Economic & Political Weekly* 44, no. 40 (October 4, 2008): 62.

⁴⁵⁵ Gandhi, "Talk with Pyarelal on Marxism," *CWG, Vol 83* (After August 9, 1942), 460.

⁴⁵⁶ Gandhi, "Who is a Socialist?" *CWG, Vol. 95, Harijan* (July 13, 1947), 405-06.

⁴⁵⁷ Gandhi, Interview to Louis Fischer," *CWG, Vol. 91, Harijan* (August 4, 1946), 299.

crucial impact on government decisions often made against the will of people and the needs of the environment. Sustainable development is possible only with informed decisions taken from below, according to the will of people.

Critique of Gandhian Model of Economic and Social Development

The significance of Gandhian economics is that it deals with basic realities of the India situation. Gandhi emphasized social reforms over and above his political endeavors. More than being disciples, Jawaharlal Nehru, J.C. Kumarappa, and Vinoba Bhave emerged as rightful heirs to Gandhi's political, economic, and social pursuits and worldviews in respective order. A discussion of their contributions in post-Independence India will address the efficacy of Gandhian methods.

Gandhi paved the way for Nehru to become the first Prime Minister of India. Nehru had ideological differences with Gandhi. Nehru is renowned as a secular socialist who endorsed industrial growth for a modern India, very much against the views held by Gandhi on those subjects. For instance, Nehru held the view that the dams are the modern temples of India, whereas Gandhi viewed *Daridranarayana* as the living temple.⁴⁵⁸ Gandhi once grieved, "The differences between you and me appear to me to be so vast and radical that there seems to be no meeting-ground between us."⁴⁵⁹ Yet, both complemented each other and tried for a working synthesis of differing positions. Terming Nehru as his successor, Gandhi reiterated, "When I am gone he will do what I

⁴⁵⁸ Gandhi, "Speech at Arni," *CWG, Vol. 40* (September 2, 1927), 2.

⁴⁵⁹ Gandhi, "Letter to Jawaharlal Nehru," *CWG, Vol. 41* (January 17, 1928), 121.

am doing now. Then he will speak my language too.”⁴⁶⁰ Regarding industrial development, Nehru refers to the conflict as a difference in emphasis, because even when the Congress favored the industrialization of India, emphasis was given to the development of cottage industries as well. Acknowledging Gandhi’s view against concentration of power in the hands of the few, Nehru holds that bi-scale industry is inevitable to achieve high standards of living and alleviate poverty. On the question of adjustment of the two forms of production and economy, Nehru states that "One must be dominating and paramount, with the other as complementary to it, fitting in where it can."⁴⁶¹

In his foreword to the *Economy of Permanence*, Gandhi commends Kumarappa, the “doctor of our village industries” for demonstrating “that only through them we shall arrive at the economy of permanence” and lauds the alternative as “Plain living and High thinking.”⁴⁶² Taking on the same adage, Gandhi remarks, “In India, simplicity is not just a virtue, it is part of *dharma*.”⁴⁶³ Kumarappa suggests long-term planning for cottage industries to begin from villages upwards. Since nature functions in cycles of life complimenting each other, nonviolence becomes the norm chosen to lead to a goal of permanence.⁴⁶⁴ Describing how he rediscovered the role of charkha as the symbol of

⁴⁶⁰ Gandhi, "Speech at the AICC Meeting," *CWG, Vol. 81, Harijan* (January 25, 1942), 433.

⁴⁶¹ Nehru, *Discovery of India*, 403-08.

⁴⁶² J.C. Kumarappa, *Economy of Permanence* (Varanasi: Sarva-Seva-Sangh-Prakashan, 1997), iii.

⁴⁶³ Gandhi, "What Should a Brahmin Do?" *CWG, Vol. 61, Harijanbadhu* (September 17, 1933), 409.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 86,157.

alternative economy, Gandhi quips, “God whispered into my ear: ‘If you want to work through non-violence, you have to proceed with small things, not big.’”⁴⁶⁵ (Years later, E.F. Schumacher followed the Gandhian method of production when he wrote *Small Is Beautiful*. In it he explores “a technology with a human face” and “an economics of permanence,” implying a radical reorientation of science and technology.⁴⁶⁶ Appropriate technology is an approach towards technology that helps to meet the local needs of local people through human labor. It is to recognize that different cultural and geographic groups need to evolve "different technologies that are appropriate to their circumstances."⁴⁶⁷)

Recently, pointing to how the free market economy is causing a meltdown of the Western economies, the Indian Opposition Leader L.K. Advani remarked that India needs a creatively reinterpreted and nationally oriented *Swadeshi* model of development. This new rendering of *Swadeshi* incorporates the knowledge base of modern science and technology along with a revival of traditional knowledge using local natural and capital goods. Advani reinterprets *Swadeshi* to reintegrate national priorities with the inclusion of the majority. It shifts the center of gravity of national economy "from 'India' to 'Bharat' -- to agriculture, revitalization of our villages, small and medium enterprises, and

⁴⁶⁵ Gandhi, "Talk to Khudai Khidmatgars," *CWG, Vol. 74* (October 26, 1938), 161.

⁴⁶⁶ E.F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (New York: Perennial Library, 1975), 33,153.

⁴⁶⁷ G. Karthikeyan, "Appropriate Technology: Chemistry-related Application" in Gandhi: Appropriate Technology & Rural Development (New Delhi: Gandhi Smriti & Darshan Samiti, 1995), 20.

unorganized and informal sector of the economy."⁴⁶⁸ It is worthwhile to note that the Indian economy survived the recent global economic crisis mainly because of its strength as an agrarian economy.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh underlined the role of scientific temper to help India to transition from a traditional to a modern society; scientific development is essential "to the advancement of modernism, pluralism and liberalism." He called scientists to develop an ethical framework in applying "scientific knowledge to human and social development."⁴⁶⁹ It was Singh who initiated the economic liberalization program in India from 1992. (What India needs is economics and 'technology with a human face' geared towards value-based human and social development.)

Praxis of Dharma: *Sarvodaya* as a 'Communitarian Ethic'

Gandhi encouraged communitarian living. He began *satyagraha* ashrams which provided space for experimenting community living. In a larger context, Gandhi considered the villages as economically and politically autonomous unit for community living. *Sarvodaya* thus becomes the praxis of *dharma*.

⁴⁶⁸ L.K. Advani, "India Needs a Swadeshi Development Model," *Rediff.com*, February 12, 2009, under "Business," <http://www.rediff.com/money/2009/feb/12bcrisis-india-needs-swadeshi-boom-advani.htm> (accessed March 2, 2009).

⁴⁶⁹ Manmohan Singh, "PM's Address at the 98th Indian Science Congress," *Prime Minister of India*, January 3, 2011, <http://pmindia.nic.in/lspeech.asp?id=1000> (accessed January 12, 2011).

Sarvodaya: Moral Interpretation of Swaraj

The word *Sarvodaya* (सर्वोदय) is a compound Sanskrit word comprising *sarva* (all) and *udaya* (rising), meaning ‘welfare of all.’⁴⁷⁰ Gandhi read Ruskin's book, *Unto this Last*, and he translated it giving the title *Sarvodaya*.⁴⁷¹ Gandhi connects his concept of *Sarvodaya* with *Satyagraha* and nonviolence.

Sarvodaya is impossible without satyagraha. The word satyagraha should be understood here in its etymological sense. There can be no insistence on truth where there is no non-violence. Hence the attainment of sarvodaya depends upon the attainment of nonviolence. The attainment of non-violence in its turn depends upon *tapascharya*.⁴⁷² *Tapascharya*, again, should be pure. Ceaseless effort, discretion, etc., should form part of it. Pure *tapascharya* leads to pure knowledge.⁴⁷³

Gandhi develops the ideal of *sarvodaya* as a comprehensive ordering principle. Gandhi considered an individual not as an abstract entity but a member of a specific community. Gandhi comments, "All society is held together by non-violence, even as the earth is held in her position by gravitation."⁴⁷⁴ Thus Gandhi counted *ahimsa* as the guiding organizing principle of *Sarvodaya* society, ensuring social stability. The life and actions of Vinoba Bhave attest to the ideal of a *sarvodaya* social order.

⁴⁷⁰ Gandhi, "Gurudev," *CWG*, Vol. 81, 37. *Sarvodaya* (September 1941), 37.

⁴⁷¹ Gandhi, Speech at the Gandhi Seva Sangh Meeting - 2, *CWG*, Vol., 68,

⁴⁷² *Tapascharya* means strict ascetic practices.

⁴⁷³ Gandhi, "What is *Sarvodaya*," *CWG*, Vol. 73 (July 21, 1938), 311.

⁴⁷⁴ Gandhi, Working of Non-violence," *CWG*, Vol., 75, *Harijan* (February 11, 1939), 47.

Practitioner of Sarvodaya: Vinoba Bhave

Vinoba Bhave joined the Ashram at its inception and remained a disciple of Gandhi by participating in both the constructive programs and *satyagraha* campaigns. Therefore Gandhi chose Vinoba Bhave to begin the campaign of individual *satyagraha* in 1940.⁴⁷⁵ Reminiscing on Gandhi's translation of Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, Bhave writes what it means for him by reflecting on *Sarvodaya*. "The word *Sarvodaya* means that *all* should rise, should grow, and *all* includes the lowliest and the least."⁴⁷⁶ Bhave began a nation-wide *padayatra* and *Bhoodan* (Land gift Movement) after India gained *Swaraj*. In Gandhi's absence, Bhave pondered the new challenges the free nation had to face. He concludes that, "having obtained our political freedom we must take in hand a more radical and much more difficult task, that of social and economic revolution."⁴⁷⁷ Bhave considers spoken prayer as "meditation in words, "and charkha spinning as "meditation in work."⁴⁷⁸ As a follower and practitioner, Bhave kept the Gandhian legacy of social and moral ideals alive in post Independence India.

Sarvodaya: Constructive Resistance

Gandhi instinctively knew that political activism without individual agency is simply not possible. Gandhi insists on his method of constructive resistance in a booklet

⁴⁷⁵ Gandhi, "Civil Disobedience," *CWG, Vol. 79, Harijan* (October 20, 1940), 306-08.

⁴⁷⁶ Vinoba Bhave, *Moved by Love: The Memoirs of Vinoba Bhave*, tr. Marjorie Sykes from a Hindi text prepared by Kalindi (Devon: Green Books, 1994), 107.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

written in 1941. He called the constructive program "construction of poorna *swaraj* or complete independence by truthful and non-violent means. ...with interdependence within or without." Communal unity, removal of untouchability, prohibition, Khadi and other village industries, village sanitation, women, and new or basic education as well as adult education topped his agenda. He concludes, "For my handling of civil disobedience without the constructive programme will be like a paralysed hand attempting to lift a spoon."⁴⁷⁹ Basic education links the children and keeps the child rooted to the soil with a vision of the future; Gandhi had called his new experiment *Nai Talim* (new education). *Nai Talim* is a lifelong effort with a judicious blending of craft, hygiene, education' and art.⁴⁸⁰ (From the beginning, Narmada Andolan took *Sangharsh aur Navnirman* (Struggle and Reconstruction) as two essential components of its efforts. NBA began schools in tribal villages as part of a reconstruction program.)

The Jeevanshala (School of Life) was begun in 1991 to provide relevant and meaningful education for tribal children. Born amidst the people's environmental struggles, they provide education rooted in tribal culture, language, and knowledge base. According to an estimate in 2000, there were ten Jeevanshalas with 644 boys and 167 girls.⁴⁸¹ Jeevanshalas enable learning in a Freirean manner to evoke a 'conscientization' process, which offers critical consciousness or awareness about the context and text of

⁴⁷⁹ Gandhi, "Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place," *CWG, Vol. 81* (December 13, 1941), 354-374.

⁴⁸⁰ Gandhi, "Village Industries," *CWG, Vol. 92, Harijan* (November 10, 1946), 430.

⁴⁸¹ "Jeevanshalas: Education in the Narmada Valley," <http://www.narmada.org/ALTERNATIVES/jeevanshalas.html> (accessed June 3, 2008).

the Narmada struggle for sustainable and equitable development. Jeevanshalas are situated on the banks of the river Narmada. Boy students live with their activist teachers. The schools begin each day with a *satyagraha* prayer written by Medha Patkar. The curriculum used is that of the Maharashtra State Board so that students, when they leave the 4th grade, may seek admission in schools run by the State. Students are convinced of their motto, “*ladna aur padna sath sath* (struggle and study together).”⁴⁸² My visits to Jeevanshalas at Manibeli and Jalsindhi gave a firsthand experience of the new methods of grassroots learning. Jeevanshalas are cradles of environmentally conscious tribals, an example of learning through community living.

Sarvodaya: ‘Communitarian Ethic’

Gandhi developed the unique principle called *Sarvodaya*, his ideal of community living, for development at the personal and community levels. This model could work well in a spirit of self-reliance which Gandhi began as *swadeshi* movement. This ideology centers around the “idea of service based on love- and individual ethic that is translated into a social ethic, whereby one serves oneself best by serving others.”⁴⁸³ In his letter to Nehru, Gandhi sums up his thought “that the individual person should have control over the things that are necessary for the sustenance of life. If he cannot have such control the individual cannot survive. Ultimately, the world is made up only of

⁴⁸² *Research Journal*, January 26, 2004.

⁴⁸³ Donald Eugene Smith, *Religion and Political Modernization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 231.

individuals. If there were no drops there would be no ocean.”⁴⁸⁴ Gandhi instinctively knew that political activism without individual input is impossible. (Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr., define a dynamic model of *Homo economicus* as “person-in-community.”⁴⁸⁵ The authors are specific about the goal for an economics of community. Against an individualistic model of “unlimited equality,” the principle of “limited equality” offers scope for interdependence and true solidarity.⁴⁸⁶)

Being locally placed, ensuring self-reliance, and allowing room for participatory decision-making, the ideal of *Sarvodaya* enables the village community to engage in social change and sustainable development. *Sarvodaya* or ‘person-in-community’ is a vibrant ethical principle for a viable eco-just community. Thus, in a world fragmented by divisions and conflicts, *Sarvodaya* addresses the need for evolving a new moral vocabulary that maintains *dharma*, an integral world order.

Significance of Sarvodaya as Ethical Category for Sustainable Development

Both Chipko Andolan and Narmada Bachao Andolan have imbibed Gandhian notions and methods in their struggles. Both Movements evolved Gandhian strategies for resistance and constructive social work. Previously, the ways in which both Movements used nonviolence as the ideal and evolved new forms of *Satyagraha* as the strategy towards their goal of sustainable development, were discussed. The Gandhian notion of

⁴⁸⁴ Gandhi, "Letter to Jawaharlal Nehru," *CWG, Vol. 88* (October 5, 1945), 119.

⁴⁸⁵ Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr., *For the Common Good: Redirecting Economy Towards Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 7.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 331.

Sarvodaya fits both Movements, considering the constructive programs they initiated. A brief review of the worldviews of the Movement leaders strongly attests to the significance in their thought of Gandhian notions as an ethical category.

Contemporary Praxis of *Dharma*: Sunderlal Bahuguna and Medha Patkar

Mira Behn moved to the Himalayan region to begin a cattle center called Pashulok catering to the needs of sustainable environment through agriculture. She then started Gopal Ashram to address the issues related to the forest. Mira planted ecologically appropriate trees.⁴⁸⁷ Ramachandra Guha calls Chandi Prasad Bhatt and Sunderlal Bahuguna, the Chipko leaders, Gandhian environmentalists who were trained by Gandhi's disciples Mira Behn and Sarala Behn.⁴⁸⁸ Bahuguna had a chance meeting with Gandhi on January 29, 1948, a day before the latter's death. He remembers Gandhi's motivating influence and how he vowed to take nonviolence to the high ranges of the Himalayas.⁴⁸⁹ In his acceptance speech in the Swedish Parliament, receiving The Right Livelihood Award in December 1987, Bahuguna stated that the ultimate aim of Chipko movement was to materialize Gandhi's dreams that real development is possible only through a harmonious relationship between nature and human beings. He accepted Gandhi's views on development to be sustained and have an ethical basis. Therefore he

⁴⁸⁷ Shiva, *Staying Alive*, 68-69.

⁴⁸⁸ Guha, *Mahatma Gandhi and Environmental Movement*, 2.

⁴⁸⁹ Alkesh Sharma, "Third World War over Water Looming; Green Warrior Bahuguna (Interview), [http://newshopper.sulekha.com/third-world-war-over-water-looming-green-warrior-bahuguna-interview_news_1070782.htm](http://newshopper.sulekha.com/third-world-war-over-water-looming-green-warrior-bahuguna-interview-news_1070782.htm) (accessed June 5, 2008).

defined Chipko as a “revolt against the existing values, which regard Nature as a commodity and the Society only the society of the human beings.”⁴⁹⁰

As a youngster, Baba Amte (Murlidhar Devdas Amte) had early association with Gandhi at the Sevagram Ashram. During the Quit India Movement Amte provided legal assistance to the arrested leaders and he himself received a jail term. Later Amte resorted to leprosy work. Even after being completely bedridden at the age of fifty, Baba continued his association with social concerns. He later moved to Kasaravad on the banks of Narmada to take a lead role in the struggles with the firm resolve of a *satyagrahi*. His only regret in life was not taking heed to Gandhi’s advice to begin a community-based promotion of palm trees, in order to produce jaggery⁴⁹¹ to replace the sugar industry, and simultaneously provide tree cover.⁴⁹² Amte could well impart a dynamic input to the NBA struggle with his moral leadership in Gandhian lines.

The social activist Medha Patkar has been the soul and voice of the Narmada Bachao Andolan from its inception and has led many *satyagraha* struggles along with tribal leaders. She defines the ideological framework of NBA as ‘environmental democratic socialism,’ with a blend of green and red values and ideas.⁴⁹³ Medha has faith in the ideal of *Swadeshi*, since it caters to the needs of the minorities upholding socialism

⁴⁹⁰ Sunderlal Bahuguna, “‘Yes’ to Life, ‘No’ to Death,” *Gandhi Marg* (June 1988): 186-88.

⁴⁹¹ Indigenous sugar manufactured from crude molasses.

⁴⁹² “Baba Amte’s Vanaprastha,” <http://www.narmada.org/AMTE/vanaprastha1.html> (accessed November 1, 2003).

⁴⁹³ “Interview: The Strength of a People’s Movement,” Medha Patkar in conversation with Dunu Roy and Geeti Sen, in Geeti Sen, ed., *Indigenous Vision: Peoples of India, Attributes to the Environment*, (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1992), 281-82.

and secularism. It entails an integral vision of development based on human capital. The politics of khadi suggests self-reliance, with nature providing capital.⁴⁹⁴ Addressing a *dharna* before the Mantralaya, Mumbai, Medha talked about Gandhian strategies adopted by the Andolan. In the post-independence scenario, Gandhi wanted *satyagrahis* to be part of the government and part of the opposition to work against forces of corruption and exploiters as a corrective force.⁴⁹⁵ NBA struggles for survival evolved with a faith in the *Swadeshi* ideal for village reconstruction, and nonviolent strategies for resistance.

Vandana Shiva is a feminist environmentalist who closely associated with the Chipko Movement and later began grassroots initiatives to preserve forests, organize women's networks, and protect biodiversity. She started the 'Seed *Satyagraha*,' saying 'no' to patents on life, modeled after Gandhi's Salt *Satyagraha*. She drew parallels with Gandhi's 'no' to imported textile by putting everybody to work through spinning cloth, as she affirms that "seed is the symbol of our second independence."⁴⁹⁶ Thus, both Chipko and Narmada Movements attest to Gandhian nonviolence as the basis for their the content and methods of constructive resistance.

Today, in India and beyond, a critical analysis of the content and the consequences of the present economic, political, social, and environmental crises is needed. Such critical enquiry will involve reflections that will generate terrains of

⁴⁹⁴ Medha Patkar, *Athijeevanathinte Samarangal: Talks and Conversations* (Malayalam), ed. T.S. Isma (Kozhikode: Pappiyon, 2004), 29,

⁴⁹⁵ Medha Patkar, "Address to the Dharna before Mantralaya, Mumbai," *Research Journal*, January 23, 2004.

⁴⁹⁶ Vandana Shiva, "In the Footsteps of Gandhi," Interview by Scott London, Spring 1998, <http://www.scottlondon.com/insight/scripts/shiva.html> (accessed January 7, 2002).

resistance, and work out solutions rather than making the crises worse. Gandhi's concept of *Swaraj* holds the key for such a holistic discourse.

Critical Study of Chipko and NBA Using Social Analytical Tools

The major questions the Environmental Movements raise integrate two aspects of social and ecological betterment. First is the question of access to and protection of natural goods such as forest, land, water, and seed. Second is the search for relevant alternatives to the current model of development. It is therefore imperative to analyze the context of social realities and social relations in which the Movements are located. Social analysis and ethical reflection provide tools for systematic knowledge and action.

Social Analysis and Ethical Reflection

Houtart Model, "From Below"

Social Movements plays a very significant role in civil society. Gabriele Dietrich and Bas Wielenga argue that in order to understand the causes of social conflicts in society, "we have to make visible what usually remains invisible," the case of those who suffer most such as women, dalits, tribals, and workers. "In order to see the society as a whole we have to look at it from their perspective."⁴⁹⁷ Dietrich and Wielenga introduce the social analytical model of Francois Houtart as used in the Serampore University, developed with a setting in Indian society. Houtart, director of the Tricontinental Center,

⁴⁹⁷ Gabriele Dietrich and Bas Wielenga, *Towards Understanding Indian Society* (Tiruvalla: Christava Sahitya Samithi, 2003), 27.

Louvain-la-Neuve and Professor Emeritus at the Catholic University of Louvain is a Belgian sociologist and Roman Catholic priest. After working in India for several years, Houtart described his framework of analysis during the first Asian Seminar on Religion and Development at Bangalore in 1973.

Houtart's approach makes visible the problems and causes of those who suffer exploitation and oppression. The tool of analysis distinguishes various dimensions of social reality under three basic categories.⁴⁹⁸ The first one is the organization of the material basis in which both the economic and social structures are distinguished. All economic activities are centered on land and the market, structured by human relationships as well as interactions with the environment and natural goods. It is imperative not to disturb the natural equilibrium of the ecosystem. Social structure involves the divisions like urban/rural, clan, caste, or class structure. Next is the organization of collective life, including 'political organizations' such as parties and State. The sub-category 'other organizations' identifies facilities for education, health, transport, mass media, and religious organizations. Under the third category, 'Symbolic representations,' comes 'ideology,' the basic representation. Houtart defines ideology, as "the main explanations and justifications given for the economic, social and political organization of a given society," which could be different for each social group.⁴⁹⁹ Other symbolic representations are belief systems, worship forms, and ethical behaviors.

Houtart suggests that grassroots people make interrelations between these categories to

⁴⁹⁸ Françoise Houtart, *Structural Analysis of Society* (Madurai: Resource Center for People's Education and Development, 1973), 27.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6-16.

become aware of the type of society to which they belong and to gather power through social knowledge. The Houtart model uses social analysis to serve as a basis for social action and a tool of reflection. In addition to classification of society and subsequent identification of their interrelations, the model allows room for more questions on the nature of social changes through a conscientization that happens from below. Houtart suggests a specific pedagogy for social analysis letting the people first express their problems, and seeing their interrelations with other categories of social existence, and finally, deciding on the levels and types of action required.⁵⁰⁰ This will then encourage people to construct a picture of their society that enables them to take informed decisions based on their interpretations.

The narrative of an activist family at Kapar Kheda in Madhya Pradesh can be related to discussion of the Houtart model. Devram Kanera has been an activist of the NBA since 1989. He lives with his wife Sakuntala and two daughters, Sapna Kanera and Sangeetha, both graduate students. The village consists of wealthy Patidars and poor peasants. Kanera grows wheat, soybean and cotton. His land is close to a small river that meets the Narmada River which is one kilometer away. During Monsoon when the Narmada dam is full, the fields get flash floods that submerge the land and destroy the crops. If the dam height reaches 110 meters, the area gets inundated for four months. Devram went to Delhi, Mumbai and Bhopal to participate in dharnas and fasts. Both his daughters took part in the 1990 dharna. Devram is suspicious about the government's claims concerning rehabilitation. He said, "We cannot believe the government. They tell,

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 23-26.

but do not act. We have the right for rehabilitation and compensation. They ask us to move to Gujarat which is 150 kilometers away with different culture, language, and landscape. It is difficult for us to move abandoning our culture, land, and home.”⁵⁰¹

Kanera identified his ideology as Gandhian. He said, “Gandhian methods will be resorted to as far as possible.” Recollecting his arrest at the Gujarat borders during the march in early 1991, Kanera remarked, “I consider that as a win rather than a failure. We are not fighting with individual enemies, but with the government, and *Ahimsa* is the only method. With the help of NBA we could know what our rights are and how to fight with the uncompromising government.” When asked whether the people get tired after long years of struggle, Kanera was quick to remark, “It is an Andolan, with ups and downs.”⁵⁰²

His daughter Sangeetha helps a village to raise the water table. She engineered the situation by placing sand bags to store water. She is confident that if soil is conserved, there will be plenty of jobs for the people. Kanera and his family approach their social reality ‘from below’ with a clear analysis that makes visible the tensions and connections and takes an ideological stance for social action.

Houtart further clarified his thoughts in a paper presented on behalf of the World Forum for Alternatives.⁵⁰³ He distinguishes five main orientations as criteria for analysis of grassroots initiatives. The first aspect calls for “anti-systemic action,” bringing together those who contribute to build another kind of economy, politics, or culture. The

⁵⁰¹ *Research Journal*, January 29, 2004.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*

⁵⁰³ Françoise Houtart, “Toward World Civil Society: From Below or From Above,” (Paper presented at the World Forum for Alternatives, Centre Tricontinental, Louvain-la-Neuve, March 6 2001).

second is to contain utopian visions derived from secular and religious traditions that mobilize people to experience social struggles. Third, the grassroots movements must seek alternatives at all levels from the local to the global. The fourth is the appropriation of public space, leading to construction of power relationships for taking part in a democratic process to gain access to decision making. The final orientation is that of ‘convergences’ of initiatives at the global level. Houtart concludes that “the affirmation of civil society should start with its grassroots definition. It can only be globalized to the extent that it exists locally.”⁵⁰⁴ At the global level it is time to reform the international organizations such as the UN and related agencies to provide better representation. India, the largest democracy in the world, deserves a permanent seat in the Security Council along with nations from the South.

NBA remained reluctant to enter electoral politics. Medha believes that with every new challenge, the framework also gets expanded and each victory becomes a success at the micro level. But for the NBA, “empowering the people” remains the macro level agenda, the focus of the struggle. She affirms, “People politics always remains outside electoral politics and to challenge the latter constantly, is also a must for democracy.”⁵⁰⁵

Environmental Movements: Terrains of ‘Constructive Resistance’

Paul Routledge offers a method for analyzing the social movements in their specific geographic and cultural locations, called "terrains of resistance." Movements use

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Medha Patkar, “Dam(n)ation is Free,” *First City*, March 2002, 45.

multifaceted terrains of resistance defining the character and behavior of movements. "A terrain of resistance refers to the dialectic between domination and resistance and how this is manifested within time and space with reference to the agency of social movements." Routledge contends that social movements are responses to emerging "tension between the interests of local communities and the antithetical policies and agendas of a centralized and bureaucratic state apparatus."⁵⁰⁶

In the present work, three social movements have been discussed: Indian Independence Movement, Chipko Movement, and Narmada Bachao Andolan, the latter two being environmental movements. All three movements used nonviolent methods of resistance, adapted and modified by the leadership and participants. The terrains of resistance included local, national, and trans-national terrains and spaces. Independence Movement was initiated against the British rule of India, because the latter denied self-rule for Indian nationals. The Chipko Movement began in 1972 in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand to oppose State-induced deforestation. The NBA began its organized protest against the State-sponsored construction of dams in the River Narmada and subsequent displacement of people and inundation of forests.

Routledge describes how space-specific movements articulate dissent with government policies and actively implements alternative development initiatives and terms the process "constructive resistance."⁵⁰⁷ There are other space-specific resistances like the Naxalite or Maoist armed struggles in different Indian States, also seeking control

⁵⁰⁶ Paul Routledge, *Terrains of Resistance: Nonviolent Social Movements and the Contestation of Place in India* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1993), xvii.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

of natural goods. The contribution of nonviolent Chipko and Narmada Andolan is evident in that they offer peace and *ahimsa* in the terrains of resistance, never resorting to violence despite severe atrocities leveled against them by State authorities. Though located within different geographic, economic, and cultural spaces, they all represented and articulated alternative patterns for development and social change. The Movements represented terrains of constructive resistance with ideologies of self-reliance for constructive work, strategies of nonviolence for conflict resolution, conscientization leading to increased ecological awareness, and decentralization in the decision making process.

Conclusion

Sarvodaya and Satyagraha: Constructive Resistance:

Towards Sustainable Development

Gandhi based his socio-political thoughts and actions on strong religious traditions and convictions. In his autobiography, Gandhi makes his convictions clear: “[M]y devotion to truth has drawn me into the field of politics; and I can say without the slightest hesitation, and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.”⁵⁰⁸ Indian environmental movements use efforts to resurrect traditional insights from religion, such as *ahimsa*, and adapt them to face the challenges of modernity. The ecological crisis uncovered a growing

⁵⁰⁸ Gandhi, "An Autobiography or the Story of My Experiments with Truth," *CWG, Vol. 44* (November 29, 1925), 467.

estrangement of relationship between the human and nature. The human desire to reconnect with nature will therefore involve a new lifestyle incorporating *Swaraj* and *Sarvodaya* as the ideals, with *Ahimsa* and *Satyagraha* as means to achieve that goal.

Gandhi preferred 'civil resistance' to 'civil disobedience.' It is a synthesis of civility and resistance. On the day before his assassination, Gandhi drafted a constitution for the Indian National Congress since he believed, that after achieving political independence it was time to disband the Congress to form another organization, called Lok Sevak Sangh, in order "to attain social, moral and economic independence."⁵⁰⁹ Gandhian notions of *Sarvodaya* and *Satyagraha* offer methods of constructive resistance geared up towards sustainable development.

Medha Patkar gave me an autograph stating a single word, 'Solidarity.' Solidarity is the key to address the social reality of systemic oppression. Medha feels that people's movements "must have a comprehensive, politico-economic, social ideology, which may not come merely from Gandhi or Marx, but a combination of various analyses, tools that all of them have offered to us."⁵¹⁰ She is prophetic about the future course of action for the environmental movements.

Looking into the reality as it is, and these individual struggles...really bring to us concrete examples of what kind of development we reject, and what kind of development we accept. So these movements have yet to go a long way, but what they're saying is important, and the statement is that we're not against development, but we're for a different kind of development. When it is not merely a statement it needs to be proved. So the movements have to not only struggle

⁵⁰⁹ Gandhi, "Draft Constitution of Congress," *CWG, Vol. 98* (January 29, 1948), 333. This appeared in *Harijan* with the title "His Last Will and Testament."

⁵¹⁰ Medha Patkar, Interview by Venu Govindu, <http://www.narmada.org/events/satyagraha-2000/medha.interview.99.html> August 7, 1999 (accessed June 5, 2001).

against the projects, but also go into reconstruction work, which would show the alternative path in practice. ... It requires special perseverance, and also a good mass base of people who can rise above themselves and their own lives. So both the people in the villages which rise up and fight, such as those in the Narmada Valley, and also the activists, youths and others who are ready to come out of their lives and become a part of the process, take up battle after battle to win the larger war.⁵¹¹

Houtart places a huge responsibility on the shoulders of the emerging social struggles. They have to consider the contradictions of “the physical limits set by the natural environment” and “the limits of human exploitation. It is out of the synergy of these two points that social struggles emerge to construct another system of production and collective organisation of humanity.”⁵¹² It is indeed a long winding road for the environmental movements. The discussions on Gandhian methods for social change now lead us to formulation of an ethic of nature.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

⁵¹² Françoise Houtart and Françoise Polet, *The Other Davos: Globalization of Resistances and Struggles* (Thiruvalla: Christava Sahitya Samithi, 2000), 82.

CHAPTER SEVEN
TOWARDS ECO-DHARMA

Introduction

Expressing the need for establishing a religious ecological consciousness, Aldo Leopold calls for an internal change on the foundations of conduct to replace lethargy on questions of ecological conservation. Leopold laments, “Obligations have no meaning without conscience, and the problem we face is the extension of the social conscience from people to the land. No important change in ethics was ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections, and convictions.”⁵¹¹ Today, acknowledging Lynn White’s assertion that Judeo-Christian traditions are responsible for the current ecological crisis, it becomes imperative to realize, as he also indicated that a corrective for this also must come from religious roots. It is necessary, therefore, to evolve a theological-ethical reflection and action in the context of the ecological crisis. This requires the formation of an integral and relational ecological ethics.⁵¹² The ecological complaint calls Christian Ethics to become contextual and integral. A new Christian worldview needs to be drawn afresh, and include the claims of both tradition and modernity.

⁵¹¹ Leopold, *A Sand Country Almanac*, 246.

⁵¹² In our discussions, ‘ecological ethics’ will remain the preferred term, rather than environmental ethics, since the former represents a comprehensive and integrated worldview.

Construction of a new language for Eco-ethics in India

The past several decades witnessed new trends in theologizing, facilitating a clear shift in theological and ethical reflection. New paradigms are being formed by a selective reclaiming of previous experiences and worldviews. A paradigm change is the key to an integral perception of reality. My ecclesiastical linkage is with the Mar Thoma Syrian Church (India), with a rich heritage of St. Thomas. It is counted in ecumenical circles as a 'link church' between the Oriental Churches and the Protestant Churches. Our Episcopacy and liturgical tradition is Syrian Orthodox in origin with theological foundations in the Reformed Western tradition. In India the majority religion is Hinduism, which has a renowned philosophical history. Thus I am situated in a rich matrix of Eastern Reformed Orthodox tradition and a vibrant Indian spirituality. Each of these traditions offers a methodological apparatus to construct an integral and relational ethics of nature.

Ecological and social realities have a direct bearing on the ecological crisis. The industrial revolution had a direct influence on human interference in the ecosystem. Gandhi addressed the problem in the *Hind Swaraj*. In the West there was a neglect of nature in Protestant thought. Harold Oliver traces the history of the Protestant neglect of nature with its over-arching emphasis on the interpretation of grace at the expense of the Roman Catholic synergism of nature and grace. The twentieth century Protestant theology witnessed a willful neglect of nature in the theological formulations of neo-Orthodoxy. Barth, Bultmann, and Tillich epitomized the Reformers' failure to annex

nature and scientific thinking within the framework of theology.⁵¹⁵ An exploration of three major approaches towards a reconstruction of Christian Ecological Ethics follows: Eastern Orthodox theology, Process thought, and Liberation theology.

Orthodox Theology: *Perichoresis* as Sacramental Spirituality

The Eastern Orthodox tradition has been emphatic in asserting the unity of all creation and the unity of all humanity. The classical cosmology of Gregory of Nissa, the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite, and Maximus the Confessor emphasize the mediatory and participatory role of humanity in relation to God and the world. The Eastern Orthodox theologians express a unique ability in defining apparent dualities as an integrative whole. Paulos Mar Gregorios discusses the doctrine of *perichoresis*, as expressed in the teaching of Maximus the Confessor, to illumine the concept of the “mystical union” of God and the human in Christ. “Man and God enter into an act of love and union which implies *communicatio idiomatum*, the participation in the qualities and mode of existence of the one by the other, and a mutual *perichoresis*, that is a mutual interpenetration which unites God and man without destroying their identity.”⁵¹⁶ Jurgen Moltmann takes the concept of Trinitarian *perichoresis* to inform and define all relationships of mutuality which describe a cosmic community of living between God the Spirit and all God’s created being reflect the primal, reciprocal indwelling and mutual

⁵¹⁵ Harold H. Oliver, “The Neglect and Recovery of Nature in Twentieth Century Protestant Theology,” *JAAR* 60 (1992): 379-383.

⁵¹⁶ Paulos Gregorios, *The Human Presence: An Orthodox View of Nature* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1978), 78.

interpenetration of the Trinitarian *perichoresis*. An ecological doctrine of creation must therefore perceive and teach God's immanence in the world.⁵¹⁷

Oliver is hopeful in deriving an integral theology of nature by using the Orthodox paradigm of *perichoresis* because of its uniqueness in fulfilling the conditions of wholeness, responsivity, mutuality, and mystery. It is the category of "distinct but not separate."⁵¹⁸ Gregorios believes that the initiation into the sacramental nature of Eucharist "implies participation...in which God and the universe embrace and penetrate each other."⁵¹⁹ Gregorios tries to reconcile the two attitudes and difficult rhythm between mastery and mystery, but gives a warning that the mastery of nature must be held within the mystery of worship, lest we lose both mastery and mystery.⁵²⁰ And that is the dilemma of the human presence in close relation to the rest of nature.

Eastern spirituality places the human as an integral part of nature. The notions of *dharma* and *perichoresis* complement each other well. The interpenetrating, sacramental relationship between the cosmos, God, and the human in a matrix of *perichoretic* spirituality gives a vibrant model for an integral relational theology of nature.

⁵¹⁷ Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God: The Gifford Lectures 1984-1985* (San Francisco: Harper&Row, 1985), 14, 17.

⁵¹⁸ Oliver, Article in *JAAR*, 398.

⁵¹⁹ Gregorios, *The Human Presence*, 88.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, 88,89.

Process Thought: Cosmic Sacramental Experience

Process thought is a remarkable synthesis of natural science, romanticism, speculative theology, and Western religion. Oliver contends that Whitehead's metaphysical and cosmological synthesis met the conditions for reviving the themes of nature and natural theology.⁵²¹ Process theology pursues the subject of internal relations by employing categories of contemporary natural sciences in its metaphysical statement. It features an organic model in which the world is understood as organic to God within the matrix of a shared existence of the human with all other creatures. Cobb defines his ecological theology on a Whiteheadian model where humanity is seen within an interconnected nature. Cobb writes, "Ecological theology will not limit its concern for the environment to its role in the sustaining of human societies."⁵²² It means that human beings show respect to the rest of creation while being integrally related to the divine being.

John Hart expands sacramental reality to a wider canvas of creation-centered "*creatiocentric*" spirituality. Hart defines ecojustice as "the act of linking responsibility for the natural world with responsibility for the neighbor. The good of the revelatory commons and the common good of the revelatory poor are inseparable."⁵²³ Hart depicts "stewardship" as an anthropocentric concept and argues for an ethic of relation, "an

⁵²¹ Ibid., 390.

⁵²² John B. Cobb, Jr., *Protestant Thought and Natural Science: A Historical Interpretation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), 125.

⁵²³ John Hart, *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 17, 63.

attitude of reciprocal responsibility for Earth, Earth's goods, Earth's creatures, and Earth's places, in a context of human species' engagement with and interdependence among other Earth beings."⁵²⁴ The category of *creatiocentric* spirituality covers more ground than Raimundo Panikkar's concept of "*cosmotheandric* spirituality" linking the 'distinct, but not separable' cosmos, God, and the human.⁵²⁵ The ontological meaning attributed to the notion of *dharma* encompasses the whole created order being held together. In the Chipko Movement, the strategy hugging (Chipko) the trees was initiated by women as a symbolic gesture as *Gopis* (tribal women) would worshipfully embrace lord Krishna in the epic tradition. The devotees worship the river goddess Narmada by doing *parikrama* (circumambulation of the Narmada River) by journeying by foot. These are instances of a creation-centered spirituality, when all in the web of creation are integrated by an experience of sacramental reality.

Liberation Theologies: Exodus motif for a Counter-culture

Exodus is the central event in the Hebrew Bible; it is the event that formed Israel as a people. Theologies of liberation in Latin America read the Scriptures as emphasizing deliverance from bondage as the basic paradigm of God's liberating action. Gustavo Gutierrez published the book, the *Theology of Liberation* in 1971 which gave the name, tone, and content to the movement known by the same name. He discussed three major

⁵²⁴ Hart, *Sacramental Commons*, 120.

⁵²⁵ Raimundo Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 150.

themes of the Hebrew Scriptures: the exit from Egypt, then the desert wanderings, and, the entry into the Promised Land.

Gustavo Gutiérrez characterizes Exodus as a movement of revolt. The building of a just society is a continuation of God's creative act, as a partial fulfillment and evidence of the advent of the kingdom of God. "To work, to transform this world, is to become a human being and to build the human community; it is also to save. Likewise, to struggle against misery and exploitation and to build a just society is already to be part of the saving action, which is moving towards its complete fulfillment."⁵²⁶ During the lengthy pilgrimage, 'for a spirituality of liberation,' to the Promised Land, discouragement and murmurings punctuate efforts towards building up a people of God.⁵²⁷ Commenting on Gutiérrez' view on the necessary conversion to one's oppressed neighbor, Paulos Mar Paulos clarifies that such a conversion will entail a radical transformation of ourselves, to be committed to an analysis of the situation and develop a strategy for action. Mar Paulos takes this as a "spirituality for struggle," which is both a religious and secular movement.⁵²⁸ Against all forms of cultural hegemony, S. Kappen favors a "counter-culture" which is people-oriented and praxis-centered. Kappen describes the effect of counter-culture praxis, "the prophet brings into existence a new dissenting

⁵²⁶ Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, ed. and trans. C. Ina and J. Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 159.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, 157, 203-05.

⁵²⁸ Paulos Mar Paulos, *Spirituality for Struggle: Selections of Lectures and Sermons* (Thiruvalla: Christhava Sahithya Samithi, 1999), 79, 85.

community.”⁵²⁹ A prophetic praxis draws from the cultural and religious traditions to bring social reconstruction.

In the Indian context, the *Eco-dharma* or Ecological Ethics is spirituality for constructive resistance. Gandhi functioned as a prophet and *karmayogi* (social activist) both in the secular and religious sense. In his spirit, *Eco-dharma* is an Exodus journey away from the exploitation and displacement of indigenous populations due to unjust State-induced development initiatives. The journey passes through the wilderness experience of sustainable alternative patterns of development by the affected people towards the promise of a sustainable community. The environmental movements are uprisings against the waves of oppression, in the midst of wilderness wanderings in which unjust denial of control of life-sustaining natural goods is operative.

Toward a Communitarian Global Ethic

In our post-modern world, there is a growing awareness about the need for an enlargement of moral vision, of our horizons of values and meanings. Samuel P. Huntington’s essay on “The Clash of Civilizations?” is an eye-opener, showing the urgency of forming a new world order. Huntington concludes his essay with a warning: “For a relevant future, there will be no universal civilization, but instead a world of different civilizations, each of which will have to learn to coexist with others.”⁵³⁰

⁵²⁹ S. Kappen, *Jesus and Cultural Revolution: An Asian Perspective* (Bombay: Build, 1983), 13-14.

⁵³⁰ Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” in *Foreign Affairs* (Summer, 1993): 49.

Hans Kung introduces his agenda for global responsibility by stating that there will be “no survival without a world ethic. No world peace without peace between the religions. No peace between religions without dialogue between religions.”⁵³¹ He calls for a planetary responsibility which is different from a call for economic prosperity. He believes that an undivided world needs an undivided ethics. Kung remarks that those in the prophetic tradition with faith in God should “consistently be concerned with human wellbeing.”⁵³² Drawing parallels from dominant traditions, Kung asserts his concern. He finds the twofold Jewish command to love God and one’s neighbor and its radical rendering in Jesus to love one’s enemy, Qur’an’s demand for justice, truth, and good works, the Buddhist concern to alleviate human suffering, the Hindu emphasis on *dharma*, and Confucius’ stress to preserve cosmic order and humanity, equally affirmative about the ideal of wellbeing of all.

In all these instances human wellbeing and dignity as the basic principle and goal of human ethics is brought out with unconditional authority – in a way in which only the religions can and may do it. That means human life, integrity, freedom and solidarity in quite specific instances. Human dignity, human freedom and human rights can thus not only be stated in positivistic terms, but also be given a basis in an ultimate depth, a religious basis.⁵³³

Hans Kung is optimistic that he finds a universal ethic in the affirmation of human well-being and dignity. John Hick joins hands with Kung; he proposes the universality of the Golden Rule, which finds common expressions in almost all religious traditions and

⁵³¹ Hans Kung, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), xv.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, 56.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*

in the Kantian ‘categorical imperative.’ Jesus taught, “Do unto others as you would have them do to you” (Luke 6:31). He finds here the ethical evidence of the transformation of human existence from “self-centeredness” to “Reality-centeredness.”⁵³⁴ Such discoveries of common ground in ethical principles are indicative of the fact that religions are capable of meeting the requirements of the contemporary world.

The above discussion brings a harmony of perspectives reminiscent of the integration of distinct colors in a rainbow. Ecological consciousness is the bond that adds color to myriad theological formulations and ethical considerations. An eco-ethics holds the potential to stimulate a communitarian vision. For example, Leonardo Boff makes an ardent plea to bring liberation theology and ecological discourse together since they share a common ground of opposition to oppression. The ecological movements raise “the cry of the earth” and the liberation movements “the cry of the poor.”⁵³⁵ A communitarian ethic of solidarity will emerge as a result of making these vital connections.

Ethical reflection is a process of interpretation. A synchronic interpretive strategy is a helpful methodological tool in the formation of an inclusive, yet pluralistic world ethic. Every civilization has a formative religious core which is responsible for shaping the various vibrant aspects of its ethos. Edward LeRoy Long suggests a movement, “from personal experience and the behavioral patterns associated with it through reflective generalization, and from reflective generalization to social activity, which results in

⁵³⁴ John Hick, “The Universality of the Golden Rule,” in Joseph Runzo, ed., *Ethics, Religion, and the Good Society: New Directions in a Pluralistic World* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 158-59.

⁵³⁵ Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, trans. Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), xi, 104.

ethical pronouncements.”⁵³⁶ There is need to bring an overview of the varieties and commonality of moral reflections in order to evolve and appropriate the common human experience for developing a global ethic.

Robert C. Neville defines moral responsibility as the interaction between one’s actions and one’s environment, presenting options with moral content. “One’s responsibility is always to the moral content in potential actions.”⁵³⁷ There will be some limiting principles such as division of labor. Neville adds, “When social responsibilities fail to be addressed adequately, the responsibility of everyone is activated.”⁵³⁸ Difficult situations require new paradigms and assimilation of new roles. Here we can relate to the Chipko women assuming courage to counter the coercive tactics of the authorities who sought to remove the trees at a time when men were away from the scene. Women then took the strategy of hugging the trees to save the trees. But in the case of making moral choices in the context of *varna dharma* (original intention being division of labor) leading to the exploitative caste system, what is needed is the abolition of the caste system altogether. The individual persons are responsible within a community.

Walter G. Muelder speaks about his pilgrimage to communitarian personalism. He elaborates a model of “person-in-community,” with the free and responsible person

⁵³⁶ Edward LeRoy Long Jr., *A Survey of Recent Christian Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 190.

⁵³⁷ Robert C. Neville, *The Puritan Smile: A Look Toward Moral Reflection* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 52.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

being placed in the context of the free and responsible society.⁵³⁹ Defining the connection between individual and community, Muelder says, “The true and real community can be defined only in terms of the true and real person. Human beings become persons only when they really become self-determining.” He adds, a person is “morally autonomous, the subject of his own consciousness, truly responsible.”⁵⁴⁰ In his opinion, “community is a sociological and metaphysical fact” and that social ethics “must therefore consider community as an organic pluralism,” as “person-in-community.”⁵⁴¹ As stated earlier, in *Sarvodaya* or ‘person-in-community,’ self-reliance of the individual within a community helps evolve a new moral vocabulary that maintains *dharma*, an integral world order.

In *Earth Community Earth Ethics*, Larry L. Rasmussen charts a new preferred direction towards “sustainable community” to replace the contrasting path of sustainable development. “Earth faith and earth community—this is humanity’s next journey.”⁵⁴² Rasmussen highlights the stance by the World Council of Churches on the question of sustainability. WCC Nairobi Assembly in 1975 adopted a program toward “a just, participatory and sustainable society.” In the previous year, at the WCC conference in Bucharest, the term sustainability was applied to refer to the human and social behavior rather than as a reference to renewable natural goods. The document sets up its goal to have “a robust, sustainable society, where each individual can feel secure that his quality

⁵³⁹ Daly and Cobb, *For the Common Good*, 7

⁵⁴⁰ Walter G. Muelder, *Moral Law in Christian Social Ethics* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1966), 45.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁵⁴² Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth Community Earth Ethics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 19.

of life will be maintained or improved.”⁵⁴³ Rasmussen remarks that “moral discernment and judgment are inescapable tasks of a proper community of moral conviction.”⁵⁴⁴

At the World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago, the religious leaders affirmed that “a common set of core values is found in the teachings of religions, and that these form the basis of a world ethic. We affirm that this truth is already known, but yet to be lived in heart and action.”⁵⁴⁵ Ecumenical and interfaith dialogues are essential for a global vision and ethics. Now we will shift our focus to a Gandhian reading of *dharma* to construct an *Eco-dharma*, ethics of nature.

Towards Eco-dharma: Contributions of a Gandhian reading of *dharma*

Gandhi equates his notion of *dharma* with truth and *ahimsa*. He quotes two great maxims of Hinduism, "*Satyannasti paro dharma*," meaning "there is no religion higher than truth" and "*Ahimsa paramo dharma*," stating "non-violence is the highest virtue."⁵⁴⁶ These mantras formed the foundation for his thought and actions as well as expressing the core of his religion and ethics. Radhakrishnan views religion as not mere abstractions or ceremonies but rather as “insight into the nature of reality (*darsana*), or experience of reality (*anubhava*).” For him “*Dharma* is right action.”⁵⁴⁷ Accordingly, *dharma* can

⁵⁴³ Quoted in Rasmussen, *Earth Community Earth Ethics*, 138-34.

⁵⁴⁴ Larry L. Rasmussen, *Moral Fragments and Moral Community: A Proposal for Church in Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 168.

⁵⁴⁵ Leo D. Lefebure, “Global Encounter,” in *Christian Century* (September 22-29, 1993): 888-89.

⁵⁴⁶ Gandhi, "Speech at Kumbakonam," *The Hindu* (September 15, 1927), *CWG, Vol.10*, 103.

⁵⁴⁷ Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 13, 56.

rightly be termed orthopraxis. *Dharma* is reflective action. The hermeneutical task of *dharma* is liberative contextual praxis. It involves a rereading of scriptural texts in the context of people's lived experience. Gandhi made use of a plurality of religious texts for evolving his take on *dharma*.

Gandhian Hermeneutics of Experiments with the Truth

Gandhi was a seeker of truth: "*Satyagraha* is search for Truth; and God is Truth. *Ahimsa* or non-violence is the light that reveals that Truth to me. *Swaraj* for me is part of that Truth."⁵⁴⁸ Gandhi called his autobiography, "The Story of My Experiments with Truth." Thus for Gandhi, Truth remained both the text and the method of interpretation.

Gandhi viewed the 'Sermon on the Mount' with an ethical lens to derive a principle of nonviolence. A Christian from Manchester once gave Gandhi a copy of the Bible. Gandhi was impressed by the Sermon on the Mount, which he compared with the *Gita* and Jesus' teaching on renunciation appealed to him greatly.⁵⁴⁹

The message of Jesus, as I understand it, is contained in his Sermon on the Mount unadulterated and taken as a whole, and even in connection with the Sermon on the Mount, my own humble interpretation of the message is in many respects different from the orthodox. The message, to my mind, has suffered distortion in the West. It may be presumptuous for me to say so, but as a devotee of truth, I should not hesitate to say what I feel. I know that the world is not waiting to know my opinion on Christianity.⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁸ Gandhi, "Presidential Address at Belgaum Congress," *Young India* (Dec. 26, 1924), *CWG*, Vol. 29, 507.

⁵⁴⁹ Gandhi, "An Autobiography," *CWG*, Vol. 44, 143.

⁵⁵⁰ Gandhi, "Speech at YMCA Colombo," *CWG*, Vol. 40 (November 15, 1927), 372.

Elsewhere, Gandhi reveals his method of reading the scriptures, “I have endeavoured to study the Bible with the eyes of a devout Christian and the Koran with the eyes of a devout Mussalman, and I have not hesitated to assimilate whatever I have found to be good in both these scriptures.”⁵⁵¹ Gandhi's rereading of scriptural texts takes a process similar to the framework of Heidegger's hermeneutical circle with the interpretive event making corrections in the fore-structure of understanding the text.⁵⁵²

Gandhi interpreted *dharma* as eternal. While opposing the wrong sanctions made against the dalit population on the ground of untouchability, Gandhi remarks strongly. “All my life has been and is being spent in protecting *dharma*. *Dharmashastra* undergoes modifications with the passage of time. Therefore I hold that as far as I know your activity harms *dharma*. Untouchability has absolutely no place in Sanatana *Dharma*. If the former persists I see the ruin of *dharma*.”⁵⁵³ In this case, Gandhi applies a hermeneutics of suspicion in his interpretation of *dharma*. Gandhi explains his hermeneutical method; “I exercise my judgment about every scripture, including the *Gita*. I cannot let a scriptural text supersede my reason. Whilst I believe that the principal books are inspired, they suffer from a process of double distillation.” They come through a prophet but then reinterpreted in commentaries. “Nothing in them comes from God

⁵⁵¹ Gandhi, "Speech at Public Meeting, Kottayam," *CWG, Vol. 70* (January 19, 1937), 327.

⁵⁵² Hans-George Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 265.

⁵⁵³ Gandhi, "Letter to Swami Karapatri, *CWG, Vol. 96* (July 24, 1947), 127.

directly.” Gandhi adds that when reason cannot be applied, he will resort to the voice of faith.⁵⁵⁴

Soman Das identifies the fundamental hermeneutical principle applied by Gandhi as truth perceived in terms of “what is conducive to the well-being of the people,” with the human and the historical context of the oppressed defining the locus of his life and action. Das states that Gandhi’s moral decisions are not predetermined, but, moving in a “hermeneutical circle,” “from the text to the context and back to the text.”⁵⁵⁵

Ishopanishad: The Central Tenet of Hindu Dharma

Gandhi’s interpretation of *dharma* takes a radical turn in his exposition of the *Ishopanishad*. The very first verse of the *Ishopanishad* states:

*isavasyam idam sarvam yat kim ca jagatyam jagat
tena tyaktena bhunjitha, ma gradhah kasyavid dhanam*
(Know that) all this, whatever moves in this moving world, is enveloped by God. Therefore find your enjoyment in renunciation; do not covet what belongs to others⁵⁵⁶

Gandhi makes a significant translation with commentary on the first verse. He recommends the mantra, which calls for a universal brotherhood of all living beings.

Gandhi considers the *Gita* as a commentary on this one verse.⁵⁵⁷

God pervades everything that is to be found in this universe down to the tiniest atom. The mantra describes God as the Creator, the Ruler and the Lord. The seer

⁵⁵⁴ Gandhi, "Discussion with Basil Mathews and Others," *CWG, Vol. 70* (November 24, 1936), 117.

⁵⁵⁵ Somen Das, *Christian Ethos and Indian Ethos* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1989), 95.

⁵⁵⁶ “Isa Upanisad, verse 1,” S. Radhakrishnan, ed. *The Principal Upanisads*, With Introduction, text, translation, and notes by the Editor, Paper back ed. (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1994), 567.

⁵⁵⁷ Gandhi, "Much in Little," *CWG, Vol. 91* (June 13, 1946), 154.

to whom this mantra or verse was revealed was not satisfied with the magnificent statement that God was to be found everywhere. But he went further and said: ‘Since God pervades everything nothing belongs to you, not even your own body. ... And to crown all, the seer says: ‘Covet not anybody’s riches.’ I suggest to you that the truth that is embedded in this very short mantra is calculated to satisfy the highest cravings of every human being— whether they have reference to this world or to the next. I have in my search of the scriptures of the world found nothing to add to this mantra.⁵⁵⁸

This mantra asserts the oneness of the cosmic order. A complete surrender to God the Lord and Master will satisfy all the needs of the community. In this pattern of community living there will be no exploitation or oppression. This Upanishadic verse highlights the ethical foundation of Hinduism. Gandhi termed the mantra *Sarvodaya* (welfare of all) which holds the potential for evolving a communitarian ethic towards an eco-just community. In Sanskrit the word *tyaga* means renunciation. Material goods may be used with a sense of renunciation, in a spirit of doing *yaga* (sacrifice), which will lead one and all to a sense of *yoga* to keep mind and body in harmony with the cosmos. In my view, this is the spirit of *Sarvodaya*.

Relevance of Gandhian Notion and Praxis of *Dharma*

Gandhi is well aware of his limitations in being unable to answer all the myriad problems of the world. A master key is a special key which fits the locks on all doors. Gandhi admits that he has "not found one master-key for all the riddles."⁵⁵⁹ About the seeming inconsistency in his writings over a big span of time, Gandhi says, “At the time of writing I never think of what I have said before. My aim is not to be consistent with

⁵⁵⁸ Gandhi, "Speech at Public Meeting, Kottayam," *CWG, Vol. 70* (January 19, 1937), 327-28.

⁵⁵⁹ Gandhi, "Letter to Kishorelal Mashruwala," *CWG, Vol. 17* (July 29, 1918), 163.

my previous statements on a given question, but to be consistent with truth as it may present itself to me at a given moment. The result has been that I have grown from truth to truth...⁵⁶⁰ Towards the end of his career, despite feeling the inadequacy of his *Satyagraha* and nonviolent strategies in combating communal violence, Gandhi wants to prove the criticism wrong: “But that is no reason to believe that non-violence is ineffective. The reason may be my own imperfection. If the faith of the *satyagrahis* is firm as a mountain, the *satyagrahis* should be able to prove that this way alone is true.”⁵⁶¹

Gandhi held the view that “Jesus himself was a confirmed non-co-operator. His whole life as we know it was one of sustained non-co-operation with priesthood because it was identified with evil.”⁵⁶² “Gandhi wants the nation to repeat this mantra of sacrifice after him; *Swaraj* won without sacrifice cannot last long. I would, therefore, like our people to get ready to make the highest sacrifice that they are capable of. In true sacrifice all the suffering is on one side—one is required to master the art of getting killed without killing, of gaining life by losing it. May India live up to this *mantra*.”⁵⁶³

Peter L. Berger and others call Gandhi “the most important traditionalist thinker of the twentieth century,” in terms of his resistance to modernization. Yet, they note that in Gandhian ideology, “...while tradition is defended, it is at the same time greatly modified,” as in the case of Gandhi favoring radical modifications of the caste system in

⁵⁶⁰ Gandhi, "Conundrums," *CWG*, Vol. 76 (September 30, 1939), 356.

⁵⁶¹ Gandhi, "Discussion with Christians," *CWG*, Vol. 97 (October 22, 1947), 135.

⁵⁶² Gandhi, "Letter to Geoffrey Maw," *CWG*, Vol. 49 (April 7, 1930), 42.

⁵⁶³ Gandhi, "Message to the Nation," *CWG*, Vol. 49 (April 9, 1930), 52.

India.⁵⁶⁴ Hart seeks for a synergy of social activism and spiritual asceticism since activism without a spiritual base may discourage committed people from active engagement. Similarly, asceticism without social involvement may distract them from connecting the spiritual and the social.⁵⁶⁵ Rasmussen quotes Dietrich Bonhoeffer's praise for Gandhi using the cosmology of the Upanishadic phrase, *tat tvam asi* (rendered in the quote as "you are the cosmos; the cosmos is you"). "Gandhi channeled the energy of this cosmology into positive protest and community building."⁵⁶⁶ Gandhi was called the Mahatma since he touched the *Atma* (soul) of the masses in India.

We discussed in detail how Gandhi inspired the Ecological Movements in India, especially the Chipko and Narmada Movements. The varieties of *satyagraha* actions used by the Movements proved effective in bringing solidarity among the participants to carry the struggles forward resorting to nonviolent strategies. Slogans and tribal songs are ethical or theological constructs that kept the movement vibrant and dynamic. *Satyagraha* became a strategy for constructive resistance.

⁵⁶⁴ Peter L. Berger, Brigitte Berger, and Hansfried Kellner, *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 164-65.

⁵⁶⁵ Hart, *Sacramental Commons*, xix.

⁵⁶⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Das Recht auf Selbstbehauptung," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, 3:262-63, Quoted in Rasmussen, *Earth Community Earth Ethics*, 313.

Towards *Prakriti Dharma*: Integral Communitarian Eco-Ethics

Dharma as Satya-Ahimsa-Sarvodaya continuum

Hinduism is known as Sanatana *Dharma* (Eternal Religion). *Dharma* has variant meanings such as order, law, religion, and morality. As the ordering principle of the universe, *dharma* has an ontological meaning. Gandhi regarded Truth as the expression of the divine and as such, and Truth is the embodiment of *dharma*. *Ahimsa* or nonviolence is one's duty, and *dharma* has deontological import. *Sarvodaya* forms the ultimate goal in Gandhi's scheme of *dharma* and hence has teleological significance. *Ahimsa* is the dharmic principle that leads a person-in-community to the *Sarvodaya* an ideal expressed through *satyagraha*. While *Satyagraha* remains the method of action, the *Swadeshi* ideal remains the moral basis for communitarian action. While *Satya* forms the ontological basis of *Dharma*, *Ahimsa* remains its deontological expression, whereas *Sarvodaya* forms the teleological dimension of *Dharma*. In other words, *Dharma* is the *samanvaya* (harmony) of *Satya*, *Ahimsa*, and *Sarvodaya* ideals. *Dharma* is orthopraxis par excellence.

Nature as Prakriti

Nature is called *Prakriti* in Hindi. In Hinduism, reality is One in which the feminine aspect of *prakrti* is found in union with the masculine *purusha*, often a term denoting a husband. The sacred rivers are described as female deities; the Narmada and Ganga are venerated as goddesses. Kapila (c. 7 B.C.E.), who founded the non-Vedic tradition of *Samkhya*, "offered a synthetic system that recognized spirit (*purusa*) and matter (*prakrti*) as the two constituent principles of nature. The association of the two

generated the beginning of the world. Matter was personified as the active cosmic female principle by means of which the spirit, the passive cosmic male principle, manifested itself in the evolutionary process.”⁵⁶⁷ In the *Samkhya* school of Indian philosophy, it is the “material nature in its germinal state, eternal and beyond perception.” When the *Purusha* (soul) comes into contact with the *Prakriti*, a process of evolution begins, leading through several stages to the creation of the existing material world.⁵⁶⁸

Prakriti in *Samkhya* Philosophy

Prakriti is a feminine noun in Sanskrit meaning “the original or natural form or condition of anything, original or primary substance” as opposed to *vikriti* meaning “mutation of the original form or state.” In *Samkhya* philosophy, *Prakriti* denotes “the original producer of (or rather passive power of creating) the material world (consisting of 3 constituent essences or *gunas* called *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*).” It also refers to Nature (distinguished from *purusha*, meaning Spirit or soul) or a female deity. *Prakriti* is distinguished from *prakrita*, the latter meaning “natural” as derived from *prakriti*.⁵⁶⁹

Alfred C. Woolner differentiates the Sanskrit meanings of *prakrita* and *prakrti*. *Prakrita* as derived from *prakrti* has two layers of meaning, one, of something belonging to or derived from a *prakrti* (In *Samkhya* philosophy 'the original element'), as opposed to a *vikrti*, its modification. The second meaning constitutes the 'natural.' *Prakriti* is considered a native term whose meaning in vernacular languages is distinct from Sanskrit. It means

⁵⁶⁷ Bettina L. Knapp, *Women in Myth* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1997), 206.

⁵⁶⁸ *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2008, s.v. “Prakriti.”

⁵⁶⁹ Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, s.v. *Prakriti*,” <http://www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/scans/MWScan/index.php?sfx=pdf> (accessed March 14, 2011). The variant spellings include *prakriti* and *prakrti*.

the original or natural state of anything. Sanskrit grammarians and linguists explained *prakrtam* as derived from the *prakrti (samskrtam)* to mean ordinary common speech differentiated from the more perfect and polished language of *Samskrtam*.⁵⁷⁰

In *Samkhya* philosophy, there exists a dualism between *mulaprakrti*, the material nature that is *achetana* (non-conscious) and *anitya* (temporal), whereas, *purusha* represents the soul or consciousness, that is *chetana* (conscious) and *nitya* (eternal).⁵⁷¹ Classical *Samkhya* as a religious system seeks a liberation from the universal condition of suffering. "It consistently refuses to reduce consciousness to the world or the world to consciousness. It rejects the Buddhist notion of No-self and the Vedanta notion of Self. It maintains, rather, a fundamental dualism between individual consciousness, on the one hand, and a real world, on the other. The two sides of this dualism are perpetually interacting with one another, and it is this dialectic or interaction which brings about both the manifest world and the ultimate salvation of *purusa*."⁵⁷²

Gerald James Larson further elucidates the meaning of dualism, as implied in the texts of *Kariaka*. *Karika III* summarizes the *Samkhya tattvas*. Primordial nature (*mulaprakrti*), the first of the eight *prakrtis* is uncreated, whereas the other seven are both created and creative (*vikrti* and *prakrti*). *Karika XII-XIV* describes the three *gunas* that make up the nature of *mula prakrti* as *sattva* characterized by pleasure and illumination,

⁵⁷⁰ Alfred C. Woolner, *Introduction to Prakrit* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986), 3.

⁵⁷¹ Gerald James Larson and Ram Shankar Bhattacharya, eds., *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies: Samkhya a Dualist Tradition in Indian Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 78-79.

⁵⁷² Gerald James Larson, *Classical Samkhya: An Interpretation of its History and Meaning* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1979). 156.

rajas characterized by pain and actuation, and *tamas* by indifference and restraint. *Karika LIV* shows the predominance of *sattva* in a world of the gods, *tamas* in the sub-human realm, and *rajas* in the human order. And these *gunas* interact with each other and the various conditions of the manifest world experience the domination of one or another of these *gunas* or factors. In *Karika III*, *purusa* is said to be neither *prakriti* (creative) nor *vikriti* (created). *Purusa* as consciousness is in the world but not of the world, in proximity with *prakriti* in a dialectic relationship in which each benefits from mutual relations.⁵⁷³ Ignacio L. Gotz draws an interesting parallel. “In Christianity, the eucharist is an example of the presence of spirit in matter... A material substance is changed into a spiritual substance.”⁵⁷⁴ The entire world is thus a sacrament. Gotz links the word *samskara*, often translated as sacrament, and quotes Heinrich Zimmer; “*prakriti* means matter that has not been acted on, while *samskrita* (from which *samskara* derives), means matter that has been transformed by action.”⁵⁷⁵ Thus, in *prakriti*, there exist mutually benefiting relations similar to the interconnected communitarian *perichoretic* notion of Orthodox theology. It relates very well to the *dharmic* order in nature.

Gita and Gandhi’s interpretation of *Prakriti*

Gandhi describes two aspects of God: *prakriti* and *purusha*. In regard to *karya* (anything done under compulsion of desires) and *karan* (the desires)—*prakriti* is the

⁵⁷³ Ibid., 160-174.

⁵⁷⁴ Ignacio L. Gotz, *Technology and Spirit*, Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), 81.

⁵⁷⁵ Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India* (New York: Meridian, 1951), 324-25 quoted in Gotz, *Technology and Spirit*, 82.

cause of their creation. *Purusha* is the cause of the experience of happiness and misery.⁵⁷⁶

In his letter to Moolchand Agrawal, Gandhi states; “*Prakriti* and *purusha* are one and the same thing because nothing exists but God. The apparent plurality is only due to the qualities attributed.”⁵⁷⁷ Gandhi equates *prakriti* with nature. “Dharma is the only companion, so do the bidding of dharma. Parameshwar and *prakriti* are not different, therefore *prakriti* too has no beginning. What is not Parameshwar is only an attribute.”⁵⁷⁸

In his discourse on *Gita* chapter VII, Gandhi translates thus:

Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intellect and egoism— this is the eightfold composition of My *prakriti* (nature). This is the lower nature; the other is higher nature, that is, life. This world is born of these two natures, that is to say, from the coming together of body and soul. Therefore I am the cause of the origin and destruction of all things. As pearls are strung on a thread, even so is the world held together by Me. Thus I am the taste in the waters, the light in the sun and the moon, the syllable ‘Om’ in the Vedas, the sound in ether, the spirit of enterprise in men, the sweet smell in the earth the brightness in fire, the life in all that lives, the austerity of ascetics, the intelligence of the intelligent, the pure strength of the strong, and the craving of all beings which does not run counter to righteousness.⁵⁷⁹

Prakriti is non-violent and strong. In its interconnectedness, *prakriti* is sacramental and communitarian. As *Prakriti* represents nature, I propose the term *Prakriti Dharma* to denote the emerging eco-just moral framework as a paradigm for global communitarian Eco-ethics.

⁵⁷⁶ Gandhi, “*The Bhagavat Gita*, XIII, 18-20,” *CWG*, Vol., 37 (September 21, 1926), 288.

⁵⁷⁷ Gandhi, “Letter to Moolchand Agrawal,” *CWG*, Vol. 58 (November 30, 1932), 31.

⁵⁷⁸ Gandhi, “Letter to Moolchand Agrawal,” *CWG*, Vol. 58 (December 11, 1932), 180.

⁵⁷⁹ Gandhi, *CWG*, Vol. 55 (December 23, 1930), 48-49).

Conclusion

Economic development and ecological sustainability must go hand in hand. More than sharing a common root word *oikos*, economy and ecology are integrally related to each other. It is a paradox that all that bears the name of development is not truly sustainable. Our helplessness to combat ecological crises is alarming. We foster an ecological awareness in the context of confronting a disturbing reality. All scientific and technological progress asserts human creative ability. But the manipulative nature of humanity has turned even scientific progress destructive. Relatively latecomers in evolution, the *Homo sapiens* must take responsibility to keep the ecosystem intact. Simpler ways of life and a vision for the future can bring cosmic harmony and goodwill.

From Sustainable Development towards Sustainable Community

India's mixed economy feels good in the neoliberal political economy with its economic liberalization program. But 'India Shining'⁵⁸⁰ holds true only for the urban elite. The current models of development depend heavily on the depleting natural goods, a scenario which Gandhi presciently predicted in his treatise on the *Hind Swaraj*: "India lives in her seven hundred thousand villages."⁵⁸¹ But today, it is alarming to note that 'India dies in her tribal villages.' This is especially true when we evaluate the lives of those who are displaced from their natural habitat to pave way for development projects.

⁵⁸⁰ India Shining was a political slogan used the BJP used during national elections of 2004. It referred to the economic optimism that prevailed in 2003 after good rains and harvests and the IT boom, which only short-lived.

⁵⁸¹ Gandhi, "Notes," *CWG, Vol. 30*, Young India (March 12, 1925), 396.

Gandhi's associate Kumarappa's proposal for an Economy of Permanence can be equated with the current vocabulary of sustainable development which gathered much debate after the 1972 Stockholm Conference on Human Environment. Kumarappa developed his economic theory based on the ideals of *swaraj*, trusteeship, and sarvodya with Gandhi's nod of approval. India has a big capital of human resources with over one billion people. Gandhi's vision can rejuvenate the village India with a judicious mixture of technologies that are indigenous and appropriate, along with small and medium scale industries. As alternatives are sought in the case of Narmada River, the ecological choice will be to set up small and medium dams which will submerge a significantly smaller area of valleys and hills. The proposal by Rasmussen to move from sustainable development to "sustainable community," is a valid option.

Contributions and Actions of Chipko and Narmada Movements

Most of the residents at the submergence zone of the Narmada valley face internal displacement and hence are homeless in their own home. The river itself forms the physical and emotional connecting link or coordinating thread that combines the network of partners in solidarity for resistance. The *parikrama* tradition connected with the Narmada River and the hugging of trees, which together prevent destruction of the Himalayan forests, are symbolic links that form webs of solidarity. At the dharna staged before the Mumbai Mantralaya, the participants cried out, *ham sab ek hai*, meaning "we are all one."⁵⁸² This mantra of solidarity includes members of the police force assembled

⁵⁸² During a *dharna* before the Maharashtra state HQ, *Research Journal*, January 21, 2008.

there to arrest them. It is an act of greeting each other in the movement. The logo of NBA needs special mention here. The logo points to the Andolan as a solidarity network. As the river is connected, so the people are bonded hand to hand in solidarity to protect the river and the lives of people. In nature what are linked are not just the rivers, but water itself through the hydrological cycle. A sustainable community is one that lives connected to the web of life.

Silent Valley, a pristine tropical rainforest in Kerala, "the speaking symbol of people's successful campaign for ecological and social justice...remained silent for many a millennium."⁵⁸³ It has a rich heritage of flora and fauna, some of which are listed as endangered species. Former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi proved herself more ecologically conscious than her father and predecessor Nehru, when she ordered a stop to the Silent Valley Hydroelectric Project. Her son and PM Rajiv Gandhi inaugurated the Silent Valley National Park in 1985.

Social Analysis of the Ecological Movements

Solidarity is the key towards *Sarvodaya*. Conscientization is an essential requisite for informed decisions leading to ethical formulations. Under the present conditions of globalization and fragmented communities, the mass-based ecological movements continue to act from local contexts ('from below') to evolve constructive resistance through nonviolent means. Houtart's approach makes visible the problems and causes of

⁵⁸³ K. Sasidharan Nair, K. Balachandran Thampy, and N.V. Trivedi Babu, "Silent Valley National Park - A Historical Perspective," in *Silent Valley: Whispers of Reason*, T.M. Mahoharan, S.D. Biju, T.S. Nayar and P.S. Easa (Thiruvananthapuram, India: Kerala Forest Department, 1999), 79.

those who suffer exploitation and oppression. Grassroots people are encouraged to look at the social situations of conflict so as to allow room for reflective action.

Relevance of Gandhian *Dharma* Notion

Gandhi's *Satyagraha* strategy for active resistance was based on the method of *ahimsa* or nonviolence. Both the Indian Freedom Movement and the later environmental movements absorbed Gandhian ideologies and strategies effectively, and emerged as people's movements. We could demonstrate that the Gandhian notion of *dharma*, as illustrated by his method of nonviolent *Satyagraha*, could give directives for sustainable development of the biotic community. Gandhi popularized the use of the charkha or spinning wheel, and it provided opportunity for the greatest number of people to participate in production and development of a village economy. More than merely providing sustainable development initiatives, the Gandhian *Sarvodaya* ideal proved the potential to build sustainable communities within a sustained Earth.

Both Chipko and Narmada Movements took the Gandhian *Satyagraha* strategies and evolved them for staging constructive resistance against the State and transnational monetary agencies. Sunderlal Bahuguna and Chadi Prasad Bhatt of the Chipko Andolan are renowned Gandhians. Baba Amte and Medha Patkar of the NBA adopted Gandhian methods and strategies for the Movement. Dharna, fasts, *Satyagraha*, demonstrations, and chanting of slogans form modes of resistance as well as collective action for constructive work as well. Such mass actions centered in Mumbai, the financial capital and Delhi, the political capital of India, proved to be successful strategic initiatives at the

national scale. They helped Andolan to receive a wider audience for the voices of their struggles. Human rights activists and leaders modeled nonviolent struggles after Gandhi's legacy.

Gandhian ideology is the invisible thread that unites these contested terrains and sustains the collective and collective action. Gandhi offers us one alternative, yet significant method of *dharma* to tackle modern ecological and economic dilemmas. He drew his strength from the age-old wisdom of religious traditions and reinterpreted the sacred texts of different religions to arrive at his convictions and actions. We may not find all the answers from Gandhi for the myriad problems that the world faces today. But Gandhi was a bird that flew before succeeding generations, calling them to join the challenging and rewarding flight towards the welfare of all, *Sarvodaya*. Gandhi gives us a new awakening directed towards a new worldview of harmony within the cosmos. That is what *dharma* stands for.

Prakriti Dharma: Towards a Communitarian Integral Eco-ethics

Prakriti Dharma is an exodus journey from development-induced displacement of indigenous populations, through a wilderness wandering which is punctuated by denying livelihood. The environmental movements are in search of viable, eco-just alternative ways of sustainable development. The basic assumption of the *Sarvodaya* ideal is that each in the created order has a right to live.

Orthodox theology uses the notion of *perichoresis* to reveal the unity among all creation through a sacramental spirituality. Process theology represents an organic model

of relationship within the created order as the celebration of a cosmic sacramental experience. Liberation theologies present exodus experience as a paradigm of counter-culture and God's liberating action. Hans Kung reminds us to cater a planetary responsibility to evolve a communitarian global ethic. Rasmussen charts a new direction from sustainable development to a sustainable community. All of these approaches relate to Gandhian perspectives.

Gandhi interpreted *dharma* as eternal. He considered the first verse of the *Ishopanishadic* mantra as the central plank of Hinduism, asserting the oneness of the cosmic order. Gandhi's *sarvodaya* ideal forms the platform for an integral and communitarian ethics, which I prefer to call *Prakriti Dharma* or Eco-ethics.

Let us have an ethical and ecological vision for tomorrow and some eco-sensitive actions today. I will conclude with two Sanskrit slokas which are tuned to the eternal mantra of *Prakriti Dharma* or Eco-ethics.

asato ma sadgamaya
tamaso ma jyotirgamaya
mrtyorma amrtam gamaya
 Lead me from the asat to the sat.
 Lead me from darkness to light.
 Lead me from death to immortality.
 (Bṛhadaranyaka Upanishad — I.iii.28)

“*Om Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu,*”⁵⁸⁴ is an ancient Sanskrit sloka meaning, “May all the beings in all the worlds become happy.” This mantra is an apt invocation for our time, evoking harmony and blessings for all of creation.

⁵⁸⁴ Source unknown.

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