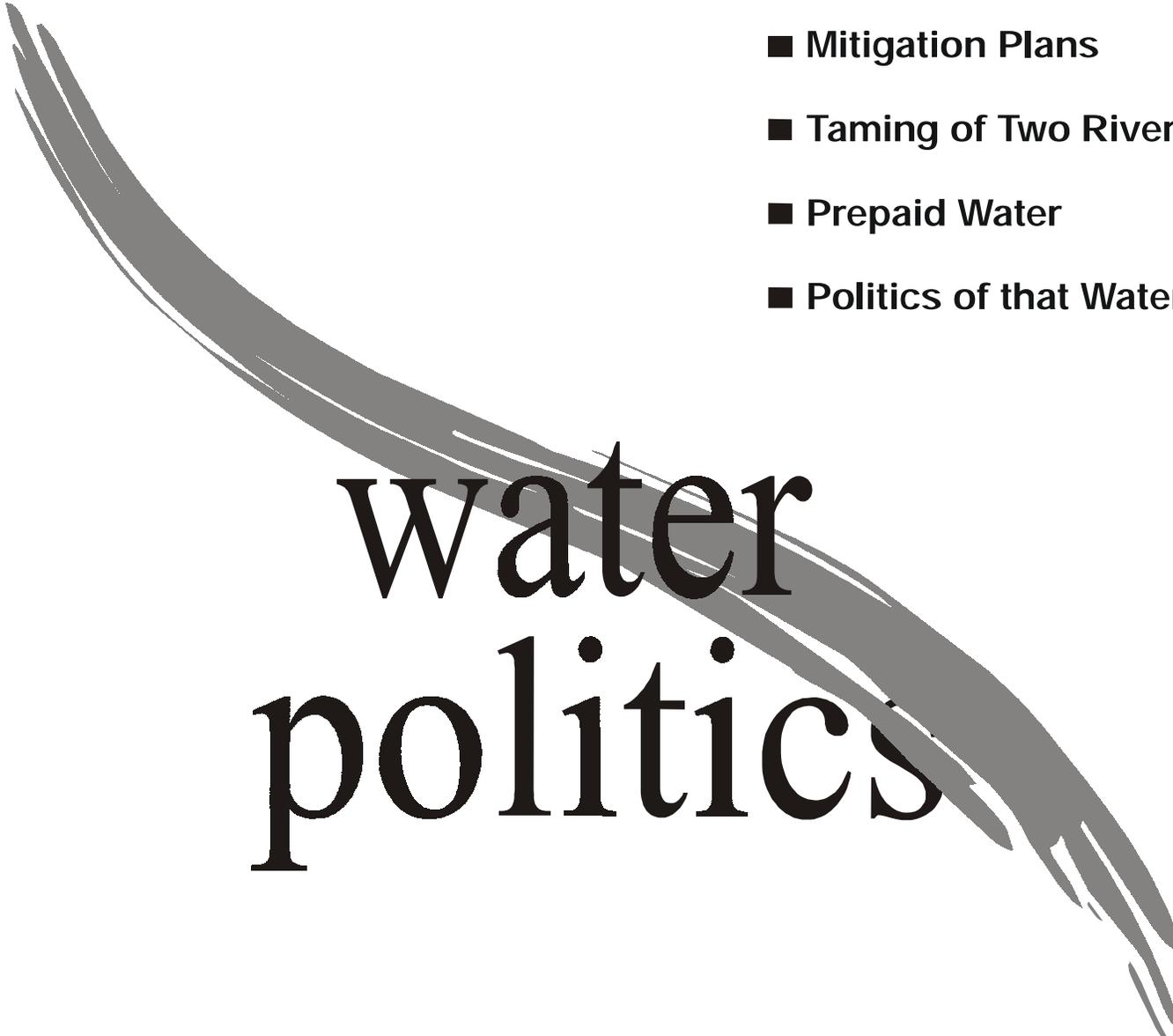


The People's **Movement**

Vol.1 No.5
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News Magazine of the National Alliance of People's Movements

- Paradigm Shift
- A National Policy
- Erosion of Ganga
- River Linking
- Mitigation Plans
- Taming of Two Rivers
- Prepaid Water
- Politics of that Water



water
politics

A Brief Report

A two-day meeting of People's Political Front (PPF) was held at Wardha in Maharashtra on 24-25 of July 2004. About 125 representatives from 13 states participated in the discussions. Veterans Sidharaj Dhadha, Amarnathbhai, Shanti Swarup Data, Kuldeep Nayyar, Rajendra Sachar, Surendra Mohan, Prof. Vinod Prasad Singh and Bhai Vaidya participated in the meeting.

Resolution of NAPM about PPF

- We resolve to organize and carry forward the People's Political Front (PPF) to evolve as an "*Alternative Political Force*" which may lead to the formation of a political party.
- The immediate task ahead is to evolve, on the basis of common understanding, the ideology, policy, alternative plan, organizational structure and programmes. The present national manifesto (published at the time of Lok-Sabha elections 2004) will be the starting point for the same.
- All the movements, platforms, alliances and individuals who are prepared to work towards creating people's alternative political force based on organized people's strength, will be involved in this process at every step. Decisions would be taken by consensus and not merely on majority.
- National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) will continue as an autonomous entity.

Relationship between NAPM and PPF

- NAPM and PPF should be independent and autonomous from one another, with their respective constituencies and identity.
- Both should share a fraternal relationship among each other based on mutual cooperation, complementarily respecting autonomy of each other.
- Membership, leadership, office bearers and coordination bodies of both should be independent and separate as far as possible. However, under exceptional circumstances this norm can be relaxed with a consultation and assessment among both.

Ad hoc National Organizing Committee of PPF

Based on the above, PPF committee members and NAPM convener's team discussed about the structure of PPF. It was decided that the present two committees of PPF be dissolved and an ad hoc National Organizing Committee of PPF be formed. After a detailed deliberation it was decided that Aruna Roy and Thomas Kocherry would presently take up the PPF responsibility.

Meeting of NAPM Conveners and Permanent Invitees

Meeting of NAPM conveners and permanent invitees took place on July 26-27, 2004 at Sewagram, Wardha. A total of 27 members from 12 states were present in the meeting. The main decisions taken were:

- Process of collecting written NAPM membership forms from all the allies of NAPM has been initiated by the national office of NAPM. All the concerned are appealed to cooperate. All the states should send list of organizations affiliated with NAPM to the national office by August end.
- Though on the one hand PPF has emerged from NAPM, it was felt necessary that NAPM subsequently should lead to a National People's Movement having a nation-wide action on wider issues.
- A note on how to strengthen NAPM process will be circulated by Medha Patkar. A detail discussion on the same may be carried out in all the states followed by discussion in the next NAPM conveners meeting in October 2004.
- Youth camp will be organized this year at as many places as possible. The following committee was given the responsibility to propose the plans: Subhash Ware (convener) Ulka Mahajan, Surekha Dalvi and Mukta Srivastava.
- Women's committee appointed in Timbaktu has a preliminary discussion about holding national women's convention. It will be held in Feb 2005. A detailed plan will be presented for discussion in the next meeting.
- A national convention on Inter Linking of Rivers will be held this year in Delhi. Sudhir Vombatkere and Medha Patkar are working on this.



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❑ Farmers

The magazine is very interesting and meaningful. It gives actual facts and events in the country. Is it not because the policies of the government have totally failed that our farmers commit suicide, is very poor and lead a life in slavery? Our central government must act to improve the condition of the farmers.

Ghathishyam Bharucha
Mumbai

❑ Privatisation

I am a regular reader of your magazine. The article by Subhodh Wagle on the new electricity act made me understand the privatisation plans, which the government is undertaking in the energy sector. I hope your magazine will deal with such issues, which we seldom see in mainstream magazines.

George Jacob
Munnar, Kerala

❑ Attack on Dalits in Chattisgarh

Gumka village is around 60 kms from the district headquarters Durg, in Chattisgarh. On the morning of 16th August around 7 am, the whole village of Ghumka encircled and attacked the two Satnami bastis. The attackers belonged to different communities viz. Kalar, Teli, Yadav, Thetwar, Kewat, and Muslim.

While the mob neared the houses, the people entered their houses

and closed the doors for safety. Most of the doors and thresholds were smashed off and they entered the houses and dragged people out of the house. The unruly mob also demolished one house completely in the basti.

Women were dragged out and their cloths were either torn or disrobed off. They did not leave out even old women. "The woman Sarpanch was one the victims of this deplorable act. Her cloths were torn and she was stripped before everyone. She then ran here and there to hide her body searching for some resort," informed one of the villagers during a meeting.

According to people's estimation there are around 300 households in the whole of Gumka village, out of which 41 belongs to Satnamis. However the attack was on 27 families since 14 of the Satnami families had yielded to the pressure of the caste masters.

Tension between dalits and non-dalits has a longish history of conspiring against the dalits under the aegis of caste oppression and its strings and flaws. In recent years the aggression against the dalits began with the Panchayat election of 2000, when a dalit woman was elected as the Sarpanch. On the day of independence it was the dalit woman who hosted the flag, which was not really a pleasant sight for the non-dalits.

The first and the foremost concern out of this whole incident is that the monster of caste is back with

its dreadful venom. Though its venom of bitterness and hatred was never dead but it was out of action in Chhattisgarh. This time it has convinced its dreadful resurgence.

People of Gumka are living in terror. The fear psychology designed by the upper caste had properly worked in this case of proving that anyone who would try to break the shackles of caste will be defeated without any response.

Under the above mentioned circumstances we demand for an impartial investigation into the whole incident of Gumka. We demand to immediately arrest all the culprits in this case who had committed the heinous crime not only against dalits but also against womanhood and motherhood.

We appeal to all progressive and democratic forces to understand the gravity of this issue and support the cause of dalits in Chhattisgarh. Or otherwise the Brahministic casteism will once again surface in new forms and manifestations with its fangs and teeth. Unless this campaign is strengthened one cannot challenge the social system from its edifice, which de facto is the real challenge to the political, economic and cultural systems.

Adv. Tamaskar Tandon
Goldy M. George,
*On behalf of Dalit Study Circle,
Raipur*

Naked Non-Violence

Women of Manipur have done it again. Notoriously unwilling to put up with colonial powers, drunkards and violence, they have carried forward the courageous struggle of the night patrollers of Manipur to awaken the nation to the outrages of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, in force in Manipur since September 1980 and invocable in other parts of the North East whenever “needed.” It is sufficient to declare an area as “disturbed” in order to unleash the powers over life and death, including house searches without warrants, arrests without warrants and use of force even leading to death, without accountability.

The struggle against AFSPA is not at all new. It has been going on for decades. One of the most heart-rending struggles has been the hunger fast of Irom Sharmila, a young woman, who has refused food since three and a half years and has been force-fed with liquids through a tube in a hospital under judicial custody. Her ordeal started after security agencies killed ten civilians in the airport area in Imphal in November 2000. Her’s is a protest against the excessive militarisation of the region and the promulgation of black laws like AFSPA.

The present uprising of vast masses of people has been triggered by the “alleged” rape and murder of Thangjam Manorama Devi in the night from July 10th to 11th by the 17th Assam Rifles personnel.

Despite many injured and hundreds of arrests, the struggle did not ebb. The Apunba Lup, a coordination committee of 32 organisations, is strongly catalysed by the Meira Peibi, the women vigilance groups of Manipur and the Nupi Marup (Women’s Association). Women’s struggles have an extra-ordinary history in Manipur. There is a monument in the centre of Imphal in the memory of the Nupi Lan (the women’s war) launched against an autocratic Raja and his British agent in 1939. Manipur had come under British administration since 1891, and women had protested against forced labour and increased water taxes early on. Due to their agitation, forced labour had to be stopped in 1904.

The agitation of 1939 is of special significance in today’s context, characterized by the crisis of agriculture

and destruction of food security. The women at that time protested against the export of rice from the kingdom, as people’s access to food was in danger. The women not only played a key role in agricultural production, but also controlled the Khwairamband Bazaar, the biggest women’s market in Southeast Asia, boycotted the marketing operations and faced, even then, the Assam Rifles in front of the State Durbar Office. In 1975/76, Manipur saw a spectacular women night patrollers campaign against alcoholism and violence.

Manipur is a state in extreme turmoil, where Metei, Naga, Kuki and other ethnic groups run a wide variety of insurgent outfits known to be extortionist and operating underground with arms. They keep links with politicians and people’s organisations and the present situation forcefully expresses a popular outcry for withdrawal of draconian laws and establishment of democratic spaces. The argument that AFSPA is needed to keep the underground in check clearly does not hold water, because the insurgents have gained ground and try to ride the crest of democratic upsurge. It is good to remember that such “normalisation” has taken place elsewhere, e.g. in Mizoram, where today’s ministers are yesterday’s underground fighters. The NDA government tried to derive a lot of mileage from negotiations with the NSCN (I-M) to extend the ceasefire in Nagaland. Peace talks have been continuously attempted with the LTTE in Sri Lanka, as military solutions to ethnic conflicts and neo-colonial subjugation are obviously not viable. Feminist groups have been part of these peace talks.

The valiant struggle of Manipuri women has drawn the attention of the whole nation to the chronic state of blatant human rights violations all over the North East. This may be a historic hour in which the “seven sisters” can turn away from armed struggle, extortion and corruption and pursue a new, spectacular struggle for dignity, freedom, non-violence, food security and democratic self rule, in the tradition of the Manipuri “women’s war.” This, clearly, requires enormous courage and resourcefulness. Armed forces of any kind have to be made accountable to people’s right to life and livelihood.

G. D.



Lessons from Nagpur

It was like a film-like situation - rather a real life situation which the films mimic poorly and crudely. The women and men in Kasturbanagar, a shantytown in the backwaters in Nagpur, killed the notorious gangster Akku Yadav in the court room, when he was brought there for the hearing on his bail application. The people - who mostly belonged to backward caste and working class - feared that once again this murderous rapist will be set free by the court on bail, and will be allowed to stalk the streets arrogantly, threatening revenge. For long the common and poor people of the Kasturbanagar tolerated the reign of terror by Akku Yadav and his henchmen. The people dared not utter a word against him; police ventured not to touch him; and whenever the police apprehended him, there was our famous and independent judiciary, to let him off the hook. While the people feared Akku Yadav, they were apprehensive about the police, the judiciary and the political establishment. No one could come to their help, when they needed most. Thus the women carried stones in their pallus, men took sticks, lethal weapons and they decided to end the ordeal, by brutally smashing down the terror. Even after the criminal was dead, the women kept on crushing and thrashing the dead body - so much was the pent-up rage.

However, though there was initial empathy, support for the victimized women and relief at the end of the gangster, as usual the questions regarding the 'rule of law' and 'taking law into their hands' started emerging. And next came the real 'response.' The middle, upper middle class colonies, where Kasturbanagar women have been working as domestic workers, packed them off, as the latter were accused of being 'murderous' or anti social. The agitated women are asking as who was murderous and anti-social Akku Yadav or the women who took initiative to finish him? Now they have decided to reason with the employers and if that is not possible, the Kasturbanagar

dwellers would boycott the colonies - they will not allow others to work for the colonies. A new kind of class war seems to be on the anvil.

Kasturbanagar women have also questioned the principles, practices and the corruption in the judiciary, particularly at the lower level. Like every other institution in India, judiciary is susceptible to corruption, class and caste biases and there are instances of rampant corruption and politics in lower and higher judiciary. Let there be no kidding, no illusion. Judges are no angels or supermen. Behind the black robes, they have their own frailties, ideologies and politics, which are reflected in their day-to-day working. The Kasturbanagar women accused the lower court judges of indulging in outright monetary wheeling-dealing with criminals, they can recount the names of judges and all the circumstantial evidences.

Similar are the experiences about the higher judiciary in some of the cases like Narmada or Enron. Though there are occasional bouts of fairplay, by and large, the judiciary has been playing politics of the establishment in the issues like labour, dalits, displaced people and the victims of development. It is chicanery to suppress this reality under the cloak of independence, sanctity and immunity of judiciary. The judges also should be ready to face the flak, if they indulge in outright politics and corruption. The Nagpur incidence is one more signal for the judiciary to be accountable to law and people. If the Indian Constitution makes the people sovereign, why the judiciary - the watchdog of the Constitution - should not be, at least, accountable to the supreme sovereign? It will make the judiciary more transparent, clean, relevant and useful for common people.

S.S.



We invite your opinion and comments on the articles appeared in this issue. Please email them to <themovement@riseup.net> or post it to: The People's Movement, c/o National Alliance of People's Movements, Haji Habib Bldg , A Wing, Dadar (E), Mumbai - 400 014

For a New Water Culture and Politics

For years together Indian subcontinent is beset with the scourge of severe drought in some regions, and floods in other parts. Both are increasing in their intensity, magnitude and extent, while the responses by the state and society has been far from adequate. Everyone concerned feels the need to address the root causes of such continued calamity and a paradigmatic shift in our basic approach to the problem and analysis, which will determine the policy and the processes. The people's movements, organic intellectuals and planners have been thinking, planning and acting on these lines for years. We will have to collate such experiences and analyses to help evolve a proper, efficient and environmentally sustainable response to the issues in the context of the management, use and ownership of natural resources. We have requested some comrades working in this field to write about their specific or general analysis, as a part of the continued discourse on the issue.

Paradigm Shift

The present water projects, policy and paradigm behind them have failed to keep the promises - they actually deteriorated the situation. It is necessary to review these experiences for a sustainable and democratic water culture.

Medha Patkar & Sanjay Sangvai

The severe droughts and devastating floods have wrought havoc with the lives of common people, communities and nation as a whole. In the vast Indian subcontinent, there was desolation and destitution in regions like Vidarbha in Maharashtra and Rayalseema in Andhra Pradesh which compelled hundreds of farmers to commit suicide due to the repeated failure of monsoon, compounded further by the politics of pesticide-fertilizers mafia, the anti-farmer policies and unsustainable farming. At about the same time there have been ruinous floods in Bihar and Northeast India. However, instead of an honest, long-term, sustainable policy and plans to overcome these aberrations, the water problem is often treated as an opportunity for politics and money-making business.

While water has been the major source of livelihood, there have been attempts to control the access, ownership and use of water from the time immemorial, in almost all the civilizations. The modern development saw the concentration of natural resources which the communities have been trying to conserve, store and carefully use, as commodities to use and make profit for decades to come. For instance, in Maharashtra, over 60% of irrigation water is siphoned off to the

sugar-cane crop, which is grown on barely 3% of the land. The generations old ground water aquifers are targeted by the miners for the same, for industry or bottling for sale without regulation or control.

Ironically, both drought and flood are the inevitable results of the same paradigm of water and natural resource management. What counts is not the catchments or small and large watersheds and people in a river basin, but rather the commanding elite and consumerist lifestyles that dictate the choice of technology, and not just the scale or the systemic priorities. A majority, left deprived and disadvantaged, continue to survive with judicious use of the scarce resource, while in the name of modernization and development, there are attempts to not just control the water resource, but also divert its ownership and management to state and corporate powers. What is most worrisome is that such an anti-democratic and pro-market approach is justified in the name of the very crisis that it causes and deepens.

Failure of Conventional

Conventionally, in our country and almost all over the world, the water problem is being tackled through the top down, centralized and unsustainable ways. The large dams have been projected as the centrepiece of

such planning. We have about 4500 large dams in India and our policy makers are still dreaming of grandiose projects like river linking project. Rivers, being the living ecosystems and not dead roads, cannot be linked without huge barring structures and enormous social, environmental impacts. The “high risk - high reward approach,” now avowedly and explicitly propagated by the World Bank, is at the root of such a project, involving not one, but many dams, barrages, diversions, and investment of Rs. 5,60,000 crores (US\$ 112 billion).

On the other hand, the floods are purported to be ‘controlled’ by erecting embankments. Over 3500 kms. long embankments were constructed in Bihar alone, yet the occurrence of drought or floods has not been prevented. It in fact became the source of large-scale corruption and mismanagement, same as the large dams and has aggravated this situation by causing water-logging and floods due to siltation, seepage and disruption of drainage.

There has been no official comprehensive post-facto analysis of any of the large dams in India. The India Country Study of large dams, conducted by a multi-disciplinary team for the World Commission on Dams concluded that, even with benefits of irrigation and hydropower, the large projects have widened inequity and exhibited inefficiency in water utilisation. It is also estimated that about 40 million people were displaced due to the large dams in India - with barely 25% of them resettled, and it has increased food-grains production hardly by 10-12%. Other comments by the lenders, the planners and the auditors are more valuable. In its Irrigation Sector Analysis, the World Bank has brought out that, hardly 34% of the water in the large reservoirs is utilized, when thousands of crores of rupees are spent on those. The Water Resource Division of the Planning Commission, in 2003 concluded that more than 380 large and medium dams (156 major, 225 medium) have a spill-over since pre-Fourth Five Year Plan, and the spill-over cost is about Rs. 90,000 crores, with a balance irrigation potential of about 1,30,00,000 hectares remaining unachieved.

The Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Program (AIBP) started with much fanfare in 1996-97, with modifications till 2002, including fast-track project funding, led to an investment of Rs. 13,823 crores.

However, only 28% of the envisaged irrigation potential could be created, of which just 11% could be utilised. The poor program performance, as analysed by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India (report dated August 15, 2004), was clearly reflected in high development cost per hectare (higher than the prescribed limit of Rs. 1 lakh per hectare) and low benefit-cost ratio (lower than the prescribed limit of 1.5:1. It also is due to violation of program guidelines, injudicious selection of projects, inclusion of ineligible projects without fulfilment of pre-requisites, diversion of funds, irregular expenditure on establishment, undue benefit to contractors and other authorities, mis-utilization of funds, extra avoidable expenditures, amongst other causes. All this is an eye-opener and clearly indicates the urgent need to review the projects and the paradigm.

As against this, in the recent budget, the Union Finance Minister has again allocated a hefty sum for completing irrigation projects that are “nearing completion.” This “nearing completion” status is misleading. Sardar Sarovar project is considered to be one such project. The dam has already been built up to 110 metres (while the full height is 138.68 metres) but only violating all the laws, rules and judicial pronouncements regarding displacement and rehabilitation. Though the Gujarat government may raise money to complete the dam wall up to 139 meters, the ‘world’s largest canal network’ is nowhere near completion, as there is no money to complete the distributaries, catchments area treatment, drainage system, and other aspects of the dam. With 40,000 families yet to be rehabilitated, it is obvious that the social justifiability and financial viability of this and other projects, need to be re-examined. Similar is the fate of Narmada (Indira) Sagar, Hasdeo Bango, Bargi, Upper Kolab, Upper Indravati, Tehri, Madduvalasa, Tillari and many others across the country.

Appropriation?

The World Bank has been supporting the government’s efforts, rather aggressively, for the large dams also as a source of hydropower, the so-called clean power. Scarcely do they acknowledge that this ‘clean power’ is not without serious environmental impact & in conflict with other objectives of irrigation and drinking water, as the Minimum Draw Down Level of

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A National Policy

There are some things that the new government can do and some other things that it should desist from doing.

Himanshu Thakkar

The new government at the centre, led by the UPA, has started a number of initiatives, some of which are welcome, while many are clearly a continuation of the past legacy. However, the new government needs to review the national water policy, 2002 and frame a new policy through a nation wide consultation process.

National Water Policy 2002

The outgoing government led by Atal Behari Vajpayee had declared a new National Water Policy 2002. That document and the way it was formulated left a lot to be desired. That the previous government was not serious about that document was evident when at the function to make the policy public, the then Prime Minister, Vajpayee, in his typical poetic flavour, quoting Meghdootam, talked about the virtues of rainwater harvesting while the policy he was releasing did not even acknowledge rainwater as a source. Mr Vajpayee went on to declare a new scheme for rainwater harvesting, for which he said the government would allocate several hundred crores, but that scheme is yet to be implemented. There is a need to set up a participatory process of formulating a new National Water Policy that among other things will include: clearly defined policy about transparency, accountability and participation in planning, decision making and implementation; minimum water flows in rivers; declare certain biodiversity rich stretches of rivers as sanctuaries; set up conditions for decommissioning of those dams after a review if and when the review finds that they are doing more harm than good; and should clearly define the process of Environment Impact Assessment (EIAs) and Public Hearings.

Rivers

Rivers are and can be a very important resource for the society and the state. However, the manner in

which the rivers are treated by everyone, particularly by the states who treat water resource development, management and related information as a state monopoly, the rivers are rapidly becoming endangered species. We need a policy on rivers that will allow the rivers to exist in a healthy way. This will have to be kept in mind while formulating a National Water Policy, but it may be a good idea to have a National Rivers Policy. That policy should define to what extent should the society tinker with rivers, which actions won't be allowed, which stretches of rivers will be preserved for the well being of the society and how these objectives will be achieved. The policy will have to include how to control the pollution of rivers (as all water bodies) and what role the communities will have in this.

Transparency

Even after the passage of Freedom of Information Bill, there is little by way of transparency in governance. The rules to implement the act are yet to be formed. The secrecy remains the central mantra of culture of governance. To make the FOI effective, there needs to be credible grievance redressal and regulatory system in place at several levels so that those who do not follow the norms are punished and citizens know where to go. In water resources sector transparency is even more urgently required as almost all information, including siltation rates and river flow data, water release data are top state secrets.

Deepen the Democracy

57 years after independence and 13 years after the passage of 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment to give powers to local bodies on local issues and resources, the local bodies have little effective powers. If the present Union government wants to improve the lot of the Bharat that voted out the previous Union government, it must give effective control over local resources and powers to take decisions on local issues.

The former Prime Minister had made large dams, river linking programme and such large projects central to the government's agenda of development. He paid the price. The new government, to avoid a similar fate, should give top priority to local systems like rain water harvesting, groundwater recharge, watershed management, allowing minimum flows in rivers, effective control of pollution and management of existing infrastructure to get optimum outputs and demand side management.

Agriculture

India has about two thirds of people living in rural areas, mostly dependent on agriculture and related areas. Over 80% poor stay in rural areas. Agriculture, at 84%, is by far the largest consumer of water and rain is the primary source of water for all the farmers. However, when formulating water resource policies, plans and strategies, this crucial fact is forgotten. Rainwater will have to be brought to the centre of our water policies and programmes. The manner of use of rainwater in agriculture will differ in different agro climatic situations. Protection of existing local systems of water harvesting and creation of more such systems will have to be the focus of the water sector agenda, policies, programmes and financial allocation. The local communities will have the right of taking decisions about development, management and use of such systems. Local water systems would also help generate much more employment for rural population, a crying need today, as also acknowledged in the Common Minimum Programme of the Government.

Overemphasis on mega projects in our water resources development is well known. There are of course many fallouts for this. One that is less discussed is that the interstate water disputes (including the current raging issue between Punjab and Haryana) are almost always due to big projects and long distance water transfers. By making the planning and decision making processes bottom up, most of the interstate water disputes would have been taken care of.

Another significant step would be to see that cropping patterns adopted in any region are appropriate to the hydro-climatic conditions in the region and this should be an important feature of agricultural planning. Also the issue of virtual export of water from the country and from the specific areas should be brought into the

policy and programmes. India, according to one estimate, exported 161 billion cubic mts of water each year in late 1990s. Can we afford to do that and continue to cry for more water?

Good Signals?

The Finance Minister, while presenting the budget of 2004-5 did recognise the importance of such systems when he said, "Through the ages, Indian agriculture has been sustained by natural and man-made water bodies such as lakes, tanks, ponds and similar structures. It has been estimated that there are more than a million such structures and about 500,000 are used for irrigation. Many of them have fallen into disuse. Many of them have accumulated silt. Many require urgent repairs. I therefore propose to launch a massive scheme to repair, renovate and restore all the water bodies that are directly linked to agriculture." That sounds quite wise. He also announced allocation of Rs 1 billion during the current financial year to take up this task on pilot scale in a district each in five zones of the country. However, finance has not been the only constraint in the way of restoration of water bodies. Most important constraint has been the total absence of role of local communities in planning, decision-making, development and management of water related systems and issues.

More significantly, in that same budget, the minister went on to announce allocation of Rs 28 billion for the schemes under the Accelerated Irrigation Benefits Project (AIBP), almost all the money from that scheme goes for large projects. That does not show clear priorities in favour of decentralised systems.

Abandon River Linking

The new government at the centre has so far said all the right things about Interlinking of Rivers (ILR) and expressed its scepticism on the issue. That is a good sign. However it should rather declare unequivocally that the ILR Scheme is abandoned. In absence of that, the forces that want to push that most unscientific of proposals would continue to push the project. There are elements from Tamil Nadu in the Union Cabinet that have so far fortunately kept quiet on this issue, how long they will remain quiet is not sure. The

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Erosion of Ganga

The Constitution of India has ensured the right to life for every citizen. But erosion-victims of Malda are denied of this right. They are compelled to live in a subhuman condition.

Bidisha Mallick & Kalyan Rudra

Narayanpur Gram Panchayat in western Malda district used to be renowned for its prosperity, literacy and rich cultural life. Severe and relentless riverbank erosion has changed all that. The mighty Ganga had continually whittled away its shoreline to the east and is doing so at the rate of 600 - 700 metres a year.

Since the erosion claimed their land and property as early as in 1962-63, Erfan Ali and his family had shifted to the western bank of the Ganga, living a life of penury, uncertainty and deprivation. The West Bengal Government had not taken due notice of their abject living conditions on the charlands and had thoughtlessly removed their names from the electoral role and the ration-card holder's list by 1970. Since then, they have been living at the mercy of the Bihar and of recent, the Jharkhand Government. But even after more than 40 long years, they have not been assigned permanent resident status.

There are countless such Erfan Alis in all 59 of the forgotten erosion-hit Mouzas of Malda, who are mostly illiterate marginal farmers sunk in penury, struggling to rebuild their lives and livelihoods right from scratch in the insecure and unpredictable environment of the Ganga's charlands. The most painful part of their meagre existence is the dire deprivation they have to face everyday. Classified as 'unsurveyed land' they are deprived of permanent resident status due to which they are unable to seek permanent service or migrate to other cities for long-term work assignment. Education is piecemeal since teachers are not present in most of the schools and colleges and the medium of instruction is either in Hindi, Urdu or Santhali - languages difficult to comprehend by the local Bengali-speaking charlanders. The hospitals lie decrepit, as doctors play truant and police help is a thing long forgotten in these unsafe, mugger-inflicted charlands. Meagre and derisory flood relief comes from the Jharkhand government only at

times to the charlands. Plight of the farmers know no bounds either. Frequency of periodic floods has decreased, as floods do not occur every year and this has affected the natural fertility of the soil, since the construction of marginal embankments was taken up. Livelihoods of the farmers are now subject to the sudden visitations by devastating floods that take them by surprise and bring immense suffering, especially at times when embankments breach. Heavy deposition of coarse sand is forcing them to change their age-old cropping patterns once and for all. Cultivation of the traditional pulse crop 'mashkalai' now requires ample doses of artificial fertilizers. Coarse varieties of boro rice viz. 'jaya' are cultivated which can grow on the present sandy silt soil. Farmers are also forced to revert to sand-loving crops like melon, cucumber and groundnut, which are grown on sandy soil. All these have jeopardised the lives of the poor farmers, as farming has become a more costly affair requiring chemical fertilizers and pesticides - a thing unknown to farmers of yesteryears.

The relentless problem of erosion along the left bank of the Ganga in Malda district has been of much concern since the early 1960's. However, the problem has manifested itself to formidable magnitudes in particular after the construction of a major river intervention, that of the Farakka Barrage. The intervention has kicked up a storm of controversy since its inception in the mid seventies as construction and implementation went in tandem with pure engineering efficiency, with scant or little regard for environmental, ecological and social values. As the dynamic equilibrium of the river flow got disrupted affecting its inflow-outflow pattern, inconceivable adverse impacts on the health and natural regenerative capacity of the basin hydro-ecology had been the grim consequence ever since. Precisely put, it is the cumulative human and ecological costs or effects of such large river projects, which have been ignoring all relevant scientific contradiction for upholding the dubious assertions of big benefit and "national interest." Whether it is the issue of resettling

and rehabilitating upland inhabitants affected by large dams or meeting the demands of uprooted peasants of the deltaic lowlands affected by river erosion, the human-factor in water resources planning in our country has been systematically affronted.

Rapid and sustained loss in depth of the river owing to the deposition of huge volumes of sediment in the upstream of the barrage has led to a significant rise in the bed levels, as a result of which several charlands, which previously remained flooded only during monsoons, now remain submerged for a major part of the year. As water level has gone up, prolonged water logging has aggravated the economic and social miseries of the people. This chronic water logging of productive lands also turn the soils alkaline, rendering the once fertile areas unfit for cultivation. The annual floods, only adds to the litany of unending woes of the local population since this is a time people lose their agricultural and habitable land to the eternal menace of erosion. Albeit people cope the best as they can during normal inundations, the abnormally high flood levels of recent periods have devastating implications to the community.

A very inadequate response to the task of rehabilitating the people displaced by erosion has given rise to protests and agitations. These have been led by organisations like the Ganga Bhangon Pratirodh Action Committee (Ganga Anti-Erosion Action Committee) and the Paschimbanga Khara-Bhangon Pratirodh Committee (West Bengal Drought Prevention Committee). The movement has now reached a stage where the people have become desperate and are expressing deep anger at both the governmental machinery and the local vested interests.

In this part of the basin, the river forms the border between states of West Bengal and erstwhile Bihar (now Jharkhand). In other parts, the river is the border between India and Bangladesh. With the rapid changes in the course of the river, tension between the states of West Bengal and Jharkhand, as well as between India and Bangladesh, has become entrenched. More than one lakh people living on the Charlands suffer from an identity crisis, as neither West Bengal Government nor that of Jharkhand recognises the newly emerged

settlement as revenue villages. So the people living thereon are virtually state-less. During the colonial era the river was chosen as the boundary between West Bengal and erstwhile Bihar. This boundary used to oscillate according to the natural migration of the river channel, as noted by Map No. 72 P/13 published in 1946 by Survey of India (SOI), which read as - "*The province and the district boundaries in the Ganga river follows the main deepwater channel and will vary as the course of deep water channel changes.*"

Confusions over the boundary between West Bengal and erstwhile Bihar were also discussed in the meeting of the Ganga Erosion Committee (1980) and the matter was referred to the SOI. The then director of the Eastern Circle of SOI, had clarified that the boundary would be varying quite in accord to the natural migration of the main deep water channel in the erstwhile Bihar and Malda-Murshidabad adjoining areas.

The West Bengal Government however, disagreed to the above statement and maintained that the boundary between the two states (Bihar and West Bengal) as under dispute. The latest map of the Malda District (1994) published by SOI also does not authenticate the boundary. All these are in direct contravention with the Constitution of India, which confers a fixed border irrespective of the shifting of the course of the river. Clause 11/2 of West Bengal Land Revenue Law (1955), also states that, if eroded land emerges along the opposite bank within 20 years, the right of owner shall remain intact. However, the Government of West Bengal has not acknowledged the newly emerged settlements as revenue villages.

The constitution of India has ensured the right to life for every citizen. But erosion-victims of Malda are denied of this right. They are compelled to live in a subhuman condition. The two committees formed earlier; one in 1980 another in 1996, to explore the possible remedial measures of erosion paid no heed to the question of rehabilitation. It is not surprising therefore, to expect that in the recently formed 21-member task force on flood and erosion control, the social tenets involving resettlement and rehabilitation issues would remain underplayed as ever. Let us see what the newly formed task force do.

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River Linking

River linking, though technically feasible, can only marginally relieve flood and drought. Linking rivers on a grand scale is not economically feasible and definitely undesirable for social, environmental and political reasons.

Sudhir Vombatkere

Today, floods and droughts are being discussed rather simplistically with concepts such as river basins in flood being in a state of “water-surplus,” drought being a state of “water-deficit,” and “surplus river water flowing waste” to the sea. The National Task Force (TF) for interlinking rivers (ILR) is using these concepts to justify a slew of proposed projects costing at least Rs.5,60,000 crores, to connect river basins of the Himalayan and Peninsular regions and divert floodwater from “water-surplus” areas to “water-deficit” areas, to simultaneously relieve flood and drought.

In view of the current devastating floods in Assam and Bihar that has prompted President Kalam to reiterate his advice of linking national rivers, the question, “Is linking rivers an answer to floods and droughts?” assumes importance. It needs to be answered separately for floods and droughts.

Floods

Ganga is among the world’s major rivers, carrying average flood discharge of 50,000 cumecs, ordinary discharge of 5,800 cumecs and a minimum monthly average flow of 1,500 cumecs. The unusually high July 2004 flood discharge is sure to exceed 50,000 cumecs. If floods are to be relieved, a significant portion of the flood flow needs to be diverted by means of a dam or barrage that feeds a canal leading away from the flood-prone region. The link canals proposed by ILR TF, “will be 50 to 100 m wide and more than 6 m deep.” A 10 m deep 100 m wide canal for the Ganga-Subarnarekha link can carry about 1,000 cumecs. It is obvious that flood can therefore be relieved only at the rate of 1,000 cumecs while the flood rages at 50,000 cumecs or more. Thus the link canal will provide only 2% relief downstream of its

starting point and none at all upstream. Engineers can of course construct bigger canals, but the questions that arise are: how much bigger, to what extent can they relieve floods, and what will be the social, environmental, financial and political cost.

A subsidiary question is whether the canal will be closed during the dry season. If the answer is “Yes,” then there is little justification for huge capital expenditure to relieve 2% of the flood. If the answer is “No,” 1,000 cumecs will be a significant portion of the 5,800 cumecs ordinary discharge of Ganga, with which the people of Bihar will be unwilling to part. Therefore by linking Ganga with Subarnarekha, Bihar will not only not benefit from flood relief, but will also suffer from shortage of water in the lean flow season, while Subarnarekha valley will receive an undesirable 1,000 cumecs during their monsoon season and perhaps none in the dry season when they may want it. In effect, water that is flowing “waste” into the sea down Ganga will flow to the sea via Subarnarekha.

The arguments also apply to Brahmaputra in Assam, which has flood discharge not less than Ganga. Furthermore, just as the floods in Brahmaputra and Ganga together cause extreme havoc in Bangladesh, removal of water from both these donor basins in the lean flow season will cause severe distress to Bangladesh. In sum, relieving floods by linking rivers appears to be based on flawed economic and technical logic.

A further problem arises regarding transferring water into the neighbouring river basin, because between any two drainage basins there is always intervening high ground. According to ILR TF, if Ganga water is to reach peninsular India, the Ganga-Subarnarekha link requires a 60 m pumped lift, the Subarnarekha-Mahanadi link 48 m, and the Godavari-Krishna link 116 m, and these lifts require 3,700 MW of yet-to-be-created dedicated power generation. Means to obviate

pumping may be found, but the fact that water can only flow down a slope makes the delivery end of a canal always lower than the supply end and if the water is to ultimately reach a higher location, lifting it will become a necessity, calling for electric power in any case. Though it is not the main issue in the present discussion, how ILR TF claims that canals will “facilitate inland navigation from the north to south” when water is pumped over the hills is not clear.

Droughts

The answer to the second question must begin with distinguishing between “drought” and “water-deficit.” Drought is continued absence of rain or prolonged dry weather, while “water-deficit” implies shortage of water that depends on water-use. Any region in which water demand exceeds supply becomes water-deficit - deficiency can vary at different times of the year depending upon purpose and intensity of water use. Water needed for agriculture depends upon the type of crop. For example, paddy and sugarcane are water-intensive and if these are cultivated in a region that has low rainfall, the demand for water will obviously increase, making the region “water-deficit.” Water deficiency for agriculture can be seasonal or year-round depending upon agricultural policy and cropping pattern. The lower river basin areas of most rivers have been extensively irrigated for decades (e.g., Godavari, Krishna, Cauvery), but as cropping patterns change and water-intensive crops replace traditional ones, or one annual crop increases to three, even these areas become water-deficit though they are not drought areas.

Water demand for urban domestic and industrial use is steady round the year and in regions that have growing urban populations and industries water demand is increasing, making these regions water-deficit. Water supply for such regions is largely dependent upon ground water and this resource is rapidly drying up, resulting in drying up of streams and rivers in the region. Mass transfer of water through canals can of course relieve water-deficiency for urban-industrial regions, and many cities are even today supplied with water from distant rivers. But the claim that mass transfer of water can relieve drought in low rainfall regions needs to be examined more carefully.

Drought-prone regions are usually those that have low annual rainfall for geographic or topographic reasons,

and in peninsular India, they are the highlands of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka that lie at altitudes ranging from 400 to 800 m above mean sea level (MSL). In the western region, Rajasthan and parts of Gujarat are drought-prone. All these areas receive from 250 mm to 800 mm annual rainfall, most of it during the monsoon. The flood-prone region of Bihar at about 30 m above MSL (Ganga-Subarnarekha link) is substantially lower than the drought-prone highlands of peninsular India and water cannot be supplied to the highlands unless it is pumped for heads of about 500 m, calling for more electric power than India can hope to generate exclusively for water supply. Besides this, the cost of water will spiral upward with rising power costs, taking it beyond the economic reach of farmers. The arguments of the Ganga-Subarnarekha link (water @ 1,000 cumecs) also hold good for “drought-relief” - benefit can only be very marginal and certainly uneconomic.

Perhaps the only way in which agricultural water availability can be improved in these highland regions is organized rainwater harvesting by check dams, tanks, etc. to recharge surface and ground water reservoirs, and grow crops that are not water intensive - good water management and agriculture policy.

Conclusion

River linking, though technically feasible, can only marginally relieve flood and drought. Honest studies will show that linking rivers on a grand scale is not economically feasible and definitely undesirable for social, environmental and political reasons.

Supplying water from rivers to urban-industrial areas and metros by canals or pumping is not new. The economic feasibility of fresh projects needs to be studied on a case-to-case basis, taking into account the social, environmental and political factors.

The main point is whether ILR is meant to serve rural-agricultural needs (about 80% of total water use) or urban-industrial needs. The ILR TF says, “The water so diverted will be used for drinking and industrial purposes, irrigation and other uses, such as for developing navigational and recreational facilities and mitigating environmental hazards.” That statement

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Mitigation Plans

Monsoon management and community-based rainwater harvesting is the major thrust of a strategy for floods and droughts. The need of the hour is to come out of the trap of the cult of gigantism and techno-engineering growth mania.

H. M. Desarda

Immediate Task

Instead of indulging in the usual rhetoric of truant rains and doling out funds in adhoc and arbitrary manner for drought-relief, the union government should urgently launch a nationwide Watershed Development Program through the statutory employment guarantee, with the active involvement of state governments, panchayats and the people, to eradicate the scourge of man-made famine and floods.

The perspective as a first step, we should make a clear distinction between the meteorological, agricultural and hydrological drought. A comprehensive crash programme for turning the drought adversity into an opportunity, to utilise the available food and labour force for effectively drought-proofing the nation and eradicating the mass poverty and hunger permanently, is presented here. Undeniably, this is the national challenge before India today. Water and employment is the key to build India.

Agreeably, the scientist and societal approach to achieve this objective is: micro-watershed development. Monsoon management and community-based rainwater harvesting is the major thrust of this strategy. Quintessentially, we should follow a socio-ecological-ethical pathway to equitable and sustainable development. The need of the hour is to come out of the trap of the cult of gigantism and techno-engineering growth mania.

The plan

A master plan for initiating and streamlining the watershed works through out the country is outlined below. The conceptual framework and the operational strategy of the point plan are:

1. Bid Good bye to the Gigantism: Moving beyond the present large dam-centric irrigation project planning and policy of water resource development, as well as drought-prone and flood-prone areas programme and scattered projects of watershed treatment, it should become a broad-based national movement for rainwater harvesting and integrated development of land, water, and biomasses resources by adopting a holistic approach. We have to clear the confusion and conceptual cob-web: "storage" of rainwater in large surface storages is the only pathway. Protective irrigation for drought proofing is different from the perennial irrigation required for the water-guzzling crops like the sugarcane and the crop varieties of the Green Revolution oriented agricultural development. Hence, we have to overhaul the present water policy and planning paradigm.

2. Resource Literacy & Empowerment: In the framework of long-term perspective plan the watershed works should be dovetailed with the employment program, which is statutorily guaranteed and linked to 'food for watershed works programme.' The edifice of this should be community empowerment through employment and entitlement. For this systematic public awareness campaign should be launched, the major plank of which will be resource-literacy, care and conservation of prime natural resources - land, water, flora, fauna and bio-diversity. Besides a training of the Panchayat members and those who wish to participate as barefoot planners should be initiated at the village and watershed level.

3. Utilising the Labour Force: The major favourable factor in the wake of drought is labour availability, which must be seen as an opportunity for creating durable social assets. Moreover, we should remember that the currency notes are meaningless sans labour resource and social capital in terms of community participation. This means a paradigm shift in the

prevalent drought-mitigation and also macro economic policies of the growth and globalisation.

4. *The Dimension:* This scheme should aim at an employment of 20 million people for 200 days at a wage of rupees 50 in cash and two and half kilogram of grains per day. This would entail an expenditure of Rs.20,000 crore in cash plus 10 million tonnes of food worth Rs 5,000 crore at the minimum procurement price. Thus, sum total of Rs.25,000 crore investment would generate a work of 4000 million person days in a year. Meticulously and meaningfully it should be used for creation of durable social assets. Broadly this includes the works of soil conservation, moisture retention, afforestation, groundwater recharge, water-harvesting structures etc. Retarding the runoff and enhancing the recharge is the only option to augment the water availability.

5. *Ridge to Valley:* Going by the current state of (degradation) watersheds it would require on average around 100 person days of physical work per hectare to carry out the watershed works. That means around 20 million hectares (mh) can be treated in a year. True, as per the local or watershed-wise availability of number of labourers it would have to be phased out over 2 years. In any case, once initiated the entire watershed must be completed in a period of 3 years. The work should be carried out strictly sequentially from 'ridge to valley' in each and every micro-watershed within the area of sub-watershed in that river-basin, so that size, scale, and sequence of impounding water is appropriate. Regrettably, at present it is the chief cause of water-scarcity and imbalance in water availability in the country.

6. *Need to Stop Degradation:* The task of conserving the resource is most challenging and well-being of the present generation and posterity very much depends on addressing this number one national problem of India - soil erosion, denudation of vegetation, water scarcity and loss of bio-diversity. Undeniably, life and livelihood of people directly depends on health of the soil and natural resources. In short, the overriding national objective should be to minimise soil loss - ideally we should plan a zero soil loss - that would maximise the moisture and ward-off water-scarcity and crop failure. Unequivocally, this is the paramount task before the nation today.

7. *Alternative Approach:* Whether it is the watershed works or any other programme of economic and social development it cannot succeed just by pumping-in more and more money. Obviously "more of the same" is no answer at all. To avoid the past mistakes the need of the hour is social motivation, transparency and accountability. That alone can break the crooked chain of the corruption, which has tuned development projects and programmes as kickback industry! This chronic disease cannot be countered without decentralisation of the political power and devolution of the economic resources.

8. *Bhoomi, Jal Aur Jangal Vikas Sena:* In addition to the availability of funds the most crucial factor is effective organisation of the labour force to do the actual work. For this an institutional framework on the pattern of the National Literacy Mission is necessary. As such, there should be a National Watershed Development Authority under the chairmanship of Prime Minister and full time executive vice chairman, who is committed to the cause. At a state level, Chief Minister should head the State Watershed Development Authority, with much more functional and field oriented interdisciplinary team to guide, supervise and strengthen primary watershed works and follow up production and maintenance activities. Further, we suggest a creation of special task force named: "Bhoomi, Jal Aur Jangal Vikas Sena" - an army to carry out the watershed works in a planned and effective way. Infact, it would give the labour force particularly the landless labour and poor peasants a sense of security and also provide a steady supply of labour to complete to work in orderly and scientific manner, keeping in view the location specificity.

9. *Administrative Apparatus:* Besides, the political priority, an appropriate administrative mechanism has to be evolved. We suggest an appointment of a senior (secretary rank) IAS officer as "Watershed Development Commissioner" in each district. Given the vital importance of the program in solving the problem of mass poverty, chronic unemployment and pervasive under-nutrition, it would be quite appropriate to accord it the highest place in the administrative hierarchy; and policies in respect of the growth and governance of the nation. Moreover, s/he should be actively involved in the work of resource mapping and location specific adoptions in land-use planning and watershed plus activities like diversification of farm

production and value addition through processing, crafts of wide variety.

10. Towards meaningful education: Given the present trend of “jobless growth” large majority of youths do not have any interest in so called ‘higher education.’ Sadly the universities and colleges have become dens of ignorance, nuisance and parasitism of the worst kind. Hence it would be worthwhile to declare ‘examination holiday’ for a year or two and involve the students and teachers along with the drop out youths who have a tendency to shun the physical work and are ashamed to soil their hands, in the national watershed development movement. Indisputably, it would be a unique opportunity to engage them physically and intellectually in the task of nation building on the land. Indeed that it would make them really educated and not just literate. Pervasive parasitism, which has become the hallmark of the elite, urbane and so-called educated members of the civil society. By actively participating in this unique venture they would learn true meaning of life, natural and productive work - a much-needed watershed in ‘education-for-life’!

11. We have the Resources: Not withstanding many disturbing and diversionary trends and tendencies in

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indicates the priority of industrial over agricultural purposes and further that they are concerned with “water-deficit” (urban-industrial progress) aspects rather than drought (rural-agricultural progress). The ILR TF says that interlinking rivers would “greatly reduce the regional imbalance in the availability of water in different river basins.” That is a gross over statement since as shown above, mass water transfers can only marginally affect regional availability.

Regarding “water-surplus,” some areas in Bihar’s Ganga basin suffer from flood while adjacent areas suffer from drought, while nine districts of Orissa are declared as both flood and drought-affected. However

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the county’s economy, society and polity at this juncture in our development journey, we have the financial, technical, administrative and human skills and natural resources to fund such strategic nation-building programme. Notably the outlay of Rs 25,000 crore it requires is just one percent of the national income today. Well, if we cannot muster and mobilise bare one percent of the nation’s GDP for such a vital task of removal of poverty permanently by mitigating recurrent famine and floods which is the root-cause of perpetuation of mass poverty, then all tall talk of planning and policy is utterly futile.

Freedom Struggle for National Reconstruction

Finally, a district level advisory committee of social visionaries, artists, literary figures and social analysts and activists should be created to guide, supervise, monitor and evaluate the programme. Social commitment coupled with political will, administrative skill and social mobilisation in the spirit of the freedom movement is necessary to ensure the success of this most pivotal programme on which depends the progress, prosperity and well-being of the Indian nation. In short, we have to launch a national movement for watershed development through the statutory employment guarantee.

ILR TF says, “The Donor States have reservations about the surpluses that have been worked out in various river basins even though all the future water requirements of these Donor States have been taken care of.” Future water requirements are a matter for States’ planning and ILR TF cannot be an arbiter. The concept of “water-surplus” is thus questionable for more than one reason. That is precisely why donor states like Bihar, and very recently and much more vehemently Punjab, have objections.

If the facts of possible flood and drought relief by linking rivers are discussed transparently, the negative answer to the title question becomes obvious.

Taming of Two Rivers

The floods of 2004 in the Brahmaputra and Barak Valleys of Assam have been as severe as it can get in living memory. Conventional engineering solutions of large dams and embankments have proved counterproductive. What can be an environmentally sensible alternative?

D. Roy Laifungbam

*“Borokhonde, borokhonde, Bhojai chaul khao;
Baaho aage paani jaok, Shorai rong chao!”*

Along the mighty, benevolent and terrible Brahmaputra in Assam, mothers sing their children to sleep in a lullaby that invokes the rising waters of floods and the hardships all have to endure. This is life in Assam; a life, as elsewhere, caught up in a cycle of prosperity and deprivation, joy and sorrow, celebrating and cursing nature all in the same breath.

Come the rains in the North Eastern region each year, and as the flowing silt-laden waters rise and familiar images of the half-immersed people, villages and livestock begin to flood the media pages and screens, it's time to also hear the shrill cries for solutions that never materialise and hasty promises never kept. Strangely too, it is time for the many native communities to exult at the anticipation of more fish, more food, more relief materials and more of everything. There are lakhs of people in Assam alive today with living memories of these experiences, hopes, images and promises spanning generation after generation.

This year, the floods in the Brahmaputra and Barak Valleys have been as severe as it can get in living memory. Floods have affected all but one of the 27 districts. Over 13 million people in Assam alone suffered terrible direct hardships due to the floods. Officially, the floodwaters have submerged 8,238 villages and forced 16.44 lakh people to take shelter in 1,681 relief camps across the State. Altogether 109 major breaches of embankments have occurred during this period, 77 of them occurred in just 12 days from July 6 to July 18 causing massive damage to houses, public buildings, bridges, roads and railway tracks.

Road links between Assam and the rest of the country were snapped as the national highways on the north and south banks of the river in Lower Assam were inundated. A 20-metre stretch of the highway between Nalbari and Barpeta was breached and the movement of trucks carrying essential commodities from outside the state and other vehicles continues to remain suspended.

All trains to Guwahati had to be diverted through an alternative route along the southern bank because the railway track on the northern bank was submerged at several locations. Railway communication from Rangia in Kamrup district to Dhemaji district (340 km) remained cut off for more than 15 days.

For hapless lower riparian Bangladesh, where the flood waters of the Brahmaputra and Barak River eventually reach within hours, the effect of the floods have never been properly assessed together as an integral affect. If we begin to count the impact of these annual floods on the entire North Eastern region and Bangladesh, and that of this year's, we would be not far from the truth to say that the water issue and annual floods has always been an connected part of the culture and daily lives of at least 100 million people.

The now defunct Brahmaputra Board of Assam, which was set up in the early 80s as part of an ambitious national plan to “tame the Brahmaputra, Barak and their tributaries,” epitomises how the rivers this year have succeeded to thoroughly tame all human efforts to manage their raging waters. And this harsh lesson has been meted out annually; that's the irony.

The Board enjoys an annual largesse of Rs. 1100 crores, of which Rs 1000 crores are for salaries. Today, fuelled by exhortations from politicians, they dream again of the ambitious towering mega-dams of over 250 meters and more that they designed and

proposed since 1982. Never mind that none have been built yet though. The Board, an autonomous statutory body, was set up under Brahmaputra Board Act, (46 of 1980), with a jurisdiction covering the Brahmaputra and Barak Valley, encompassing the States of the North Eastern Region either in full or in part. During its existence of more than 17 years it has generated voluminous database in the form of Master Plans of Brahmaputra and its Tributaries and eight rivers of Tripura. This information could be taken as of immense utility for the selection of various multipurpose projects, drainage development schemes and anti-erosion schemes. These Master plans are periodically updated. But to what ends?

Each and every scheme that the ambitious Board devised for flood control has been hijacked over the recent past by the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation, Ltd. and the North Eastern Electric Power Corporation, Ltd. Every scheme has been turned into a hydropower project while the flood control objective became mere lip service. The multi-giga-watt sized Subansiri and Siang basin schemes have been wrested by NHPC while the over 30-year-old Barak Dam (Tipaimukh High Dam) scheme has been handed over to NEEPCO. The mantra is power potential these days; no one is mentioning basin level water management.

But, the evidence is quite clearly accumulating now. The flood in Nalbari and adjoining districts of Assam was very severe this year. In Bhutan, the Tsatichhu lake, about 35 Km. from the Kurichhu Hydropower Project, burst (breached) at about 4.20 pm on Saturday, July 10, cutting off power supply from the project and causing other damages downstream. The first waves of the flood reached the Kurichhu dam at about 6.30 pm but, by then, advance warning from a flood warning unit in Ladrong village, opposite Tsatichhu lake, had enabled the Kurichhu project officials to lower the reservoir level to withstand the onslaught of the flood. The furious flood with tonnes of logs and debris, had passed through the dam by 8.00 pm. But the story only begins there. The fury of the hastily released reservoir water, logs and debris reached Nalbari in the dead of the night, while people were asleep. No one told them, there was no time.

The Assam Government squarely blamed NEEPCO for the unprecedented floods of Nagaon and Morigaon

districts making it clear that uncontrolled release of water from the dam of NEEPCO's Kopili power project was the main reason for the devastation in these two districts. Actually, the dam topped at Kopili. The reasons became even more chillingly clear after a district administration team visited the dam. The team found that on July 18, the water level of the reservoir rose to 727.70 meters against the crest level of 719.30 meters. As per the report, the contribution from the reservoir was initially 5000 cubic meters and subsequently another 3000 cubic metres of water from Mynteng river joined the confluence. The combined discharge rolled down to the Brahmaputra, which was already in high spate.

The Kopili dam is 40 meters and the reservoir area is about 15 sq. Km. But surprisingly, there is no control system in regard to operation of gates in the dam to regulate the release of water during the floods. Gate control operation is a must in such dams for saving the life and property of the people in the downstream, the government lamented rather belatedly. No one cared to look at the DPR or the design when the dam project sought clearance. The government is now recommending a flood forecasting system and a re-designing of the reservoir control mechanism, obviously the dam itself. The floodwater refused to subside as the areas inundated are ringed with embankments, trapping the water. Assam is thinking now of dismantling it's over 4,800 Km. of embankments!

The issue needs to be looked at proactively and with a level of sanity that seems to be absent. The intensity of flood is greater when the volume of water is greater and when the time during which it arrives is shorter. It has beneficial effects when it is natural. Assam's very large volume of water arriving in a short time is mostly caused due to deforestation of upstream areas, dam topping, dam bursts and dam saving discharges, the bursting/breaching of natural lakes created by glacial retreats and rockslides in the Himalayas, while prolonging of the ill effects of flooding is due to "flood control" engineering structures like linear or ring embankments. Forest is the basic bulwark against devastating flood but extensive deforestation over decades in the upstream areas of the Brahmaputra is removing that bulwark. More and more forests are being eaten away by hydropower projects.

Continued on page 18

Prepaid Water

The genesis and reasons about the water privatisation, which represented through bottled water, the privatisation of hydropower and dams and privatisation of industrial, urban and even rural water supply.

Shripad Dharmadhikary

Picture a slum. There is a crowd (mostly of women) around the community stand-post. Unlike other such scenes, there is something unusual here. In everyone's hand, along with the balti or can, is a bright and shining card, somewhat like a credit card. And fitted to the tap is an example of the latest technology - a new type of meter. As her turn comes, a woman puts her vessel under the tap, inserts the card into the meter, and the water starts. When her vessel is full, she pulls out the card and leaves. It is the turn of the next one. Welcome the wonderful world of private and commercial water.

But make sure your card has been properly "charged," for these are pre-paid cards. If your payment has run out, no water. This is not a hypothetical case - the people in the townships of South Africa are today battling this very scenario with a ongoing agitation whose apt slogan is "Break the Meter, Take the Water."

Before long, this could be the scene in India too, as the winds of privatisation and globalisation sweep into the water sector.

Continued from page 17

We are entering an insane spiral of plundering our heritage and assets, destroying people and their livelihoods for generations. All for some ephemeral short term gains of lucre, industry and unsustainable economic growth without real substance. If protesting this insanity is anti-national and terrorism, then our nation needs more anti-nationals and more terrorists!

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Privatisation is not new

Water as a private commodity is not a new concept in India. Ground water is practically private property. The person who owns the land, virtually owns the water below the land. This unlimited access has also given rise to well developed water markets - for e.g. in North Gujarat. Similarly, water supply through private tankers too has been a part and parcel of Indian life since long.

Looking from a slightly different angle, the prevention of dalits from using certain water facilities in the villages like wells, ponds and so on is also a form of privatisation - the "owners" in this case being the so called "higher" castes.

Over the last decade or so, another form of water privatisation has emerged in the country. The rapidly growing sale of bottled water is an example of this, as well as the demonstration of the power of the market forces. The opening up of the power sector to privatisation led to the privatisation of hydropower and dams. This is another form of privatisation of water. Last, but not the least, there have been a number of projects involving privatisation of industrial, urban and even rural water supply.

The new developments represent a fundamental shift in the nature of the water privatisation. In the earlier scheme of things, the private operators were mostly individuals - individual farmers in the case of tube well based water markets, or contractors in case of tanker water supply. Indeed, many of the tankers operated under contracts from civic or government authorities and were in a sense a part of the public sector domain.

In the new scheme of things, the players are mostly corporations - national and multinational corporations. And supporting them, by forcing countries like India to change their laws and policies are powerful multilateral financing agencies like the World Bank.

One of the most important role played by these agencies is that of creating the ideological and intellectual conditions for such privatisation. Indeed, in its draft Country Assistance Strategy, which will define the lending framework for the next three years, the World Bank presents its three strategic priorities. One of these is for the Bank to function in India as a “knowledge provider” - supporting and carrying out research, and creating knowledge. As a part of this exercise, over the past decade or so, these agencies have built up the picture of deteriorating public service and the necessity of bringing in the private sector. What are these arguments?

Rationale for Private Sector

The rationale for privatisation of the water sector is much the same as for the rest of Liberalisation, Privatisation, Globalisation. The logic goes like this - governments no longer have the funds required for the huge investments necessary in sectors like power, water, roads etc. There is little internal generation of resources due to below-cost supply of water. It is only the private sector that can bring in the finances required. Further, governments have proved to be inefficient, corrupt and must make way for the more efficient private sector. Private sector, especially the global players will bring in superior technology, better management and accountancy practises thus leading to a dramatic improvement in these sectors.

Undoubtedly, much of the criticism against the public sector is valid. In India, we have seen the dismal functioning of the public utilities - the inefficiencies, the corruption, the political interference, the negligence, diversion of resources, favouritism and nepotism - all at the cost of the performance. Public agencies are among some of the most unaccountable in the country. Those affected worst are the poor. To believe that all these will be absent in the private sector requires a huge leap of imagination and faith.

Meeting the Promises

The primary, and normally sole motive of a private company is profits. Hence, while the company may bring in new investments, it is sure to take away the same and more. That is the basic, irrefutable logic of private sector involvement.

A private company will want to recover its investment, the interest and principal of debts incurred by it, “reasonable (!)” profits, and also other things like the fluctuations in the dollar exchange rate. We must also bear in mind that the water charges will have to pay for the lavish lifestyles of senior official and executives of the company.

Thus, the first consequence of privatisation is almost inevitably the hiking of water tariffs. This has been the experience all over the world, with privatisation leading to water becoming too expensive for not just the poor, but even the middle class. The collapse of private project after private project, all over the world, including showcase projects like Buenos Aries and Metro Manila are due to this very reason.

Even on the grounds of efficiency, the private sector has not delivered. We have already discussed earlier the kind of new technology that the private sector is likely to bring in. To rub salt on the wounds, it has been seen that even in the so-called private project, majority of the finance has come from or has been guaranteed by public sources.

World over experience has shown that privatisation has been a failure. In his “Report of the Secretary General to the Twelfth Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development,” dated 11 Feb 2004, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan had this to say:

“Nonetheless, a more general review of the impact of infrastructure privatisation on the poor in Latin America concludes that privatisation generally failed to take the interests of the poor into account with regard to affordability of service and access to connections....

“Problems that have arisen with private water companies include collusive bidding on water-supply contracts, regulators who are too readily influenced by regulated companies, inflexible contractual guarantees of returns, monopolization of essential infrastructure, and lack of transparency. More generally, doubts have been raised about the realism of the expectation that large-scale private sector participation in the water sector will make more than a minor contribution towards meeting the water-related Millennium Development Goal.”

Privatisation - The Back Door Entry

Indeed, in the last few years, privatisation of water has lost much of its sheen, as there has been huge political backlash, and project after project has crumbled or performed miserably. This of course has not deterred its promoters. Rather, they have now chosen different ways to extract profits from water.

The initial attempts at classic, direct privatisation resulted in huge political backlash. Many companies also found making profits not so easy. Both these resulted in the shift in the rhetoric to “pro-poor” privatisation and also the Public Private Partnership (public takes the risks, private takes the profits).

There is also a push for “sector reforms.” In this, the private players are not immediately on the scene. The whole responsibility of taking and implementing unpopular and harsh decisions falls on the Government and public bodies. These include the rise in tariffs, elimination of subsidies, full cost recovery principles, tariff setting by “independent regulatory commissions” (de-politicisation of tariff setting) and cutting off supplies for non-payment. In short, the sector is pushed towards commercial and market operations, away from being a social responsibility. The blame and the political backlash for this to be taken by the Government, and then comes in the private sector.

Madhya Pradesh - The Testing Ground

The State of Madhya Pradesh is emerging as the testing ground for this. The World Bank has a huge loan of about 330 m \$ in pipeline for Madhya Pradesh - the MP Water Sector Restructuring Loan. What the World Bank loan to Orissa did in terms of setting a model of “reforms” in the power sector, this loan will do for the water sector. This loan explicitly sets out to convert the sector into a market, running on fully commercial basis - with “unbundling,” setting up of the regulatory commission, full cost recovery and so on. In tandem is a ADB loan for Urban water supply that has not only laid down how the tariffs will increase, but has also ordered that a disconnection policy be put in place for non-payment. Both loans talk about the eventual participation of the private sector.

Thus, privatisation has come in India both, from the front door and more insidiously from the back door.

The impacts of both are likely to be devastating. It is critical that everyone working in the sector with a perspective that puts the poor and the deprived sections in the centre of the developmental agenda understands this phenomenon very carefully and exposes and fights it.

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Appeal to Comrades

There are nearly 10,000 bonded labourers in rice mills of Redhills, Thiruvallur dist, Tamilnadu. They are illiterate and live at the work premises for generations and are indebted to the employers. Thus even children are made to work to return the debt incurred by parents.

They work from 11pm till 6pm on the next day, and get hardly any sleep. Wages given every four days, works out to be Rs.15 for 15 hours of hard labour, which is in violation of the minimum wages fixed by the State government of Rs. 84 for 8 hours of work.

Physical beating, locking them up, sexual harassment of women workers have been taking place in these rice mills for decades. Even when the bonded labourers have come forward demanding justice, the district authorities have shown nothing but apathy.

Hence, we urge all the authorities and movements to support the cause of liberation of bonded labourers (release and rehabilitation through provision of housing, agricultural land and milch animals as well as arrears under minimum wages and education of children).

Please write letters to the following addresses:

1. Chief Minister of Tamilnadu, Fax: 044 - 25671441, Email: cmcell@tn.gov.in
2. Secretary for Adidraavidar Welfare, Fax: 044 - 25671848, Email: adisec@tn.gov.in
3. Secretary for Labour, Fax: 044 - 25679739, Email: labsec@tn.gov.in

Geetha, Chennai (nmeps@eth.net)

Politics of that Water

Water issues have always been and will always be addressed through politics. The challenge, then, is to use politics for the good of all.

Dilip D'Souza

I began thinking about this article during a weekend spent on the shores of the lake that balloons behind the Pawana dam, near Kamshet and off the Bombay-Pune highway. Raju, a young man from the village there, told me that his family had been displaced by the dam; their fertile farmland now lay at the bottom of the lake.

Certainly to readers of this journal, this is not an unfamiliar tale. And Raju also had the other familiar, and sorry, tale: about the lack of adequate compensation or R&R. These are stories I have now heard so often that they are routine, and that routine quality is itself a commentary on the way we have approached the building of dams.

But then Raju went on to say something more. Apparently the Sahara group, which is building opulent townships in the hills on the other side of the lake from where we stood, have proposed raising the height of the Pawna dam. This idea, because they need large supplies of water for the opulent clients who will invest in their properties.

And if they raise the height of the dam, Raju and his village will be displaced once more.

Why is it, I thought as we talked, that this sort of story has become so routine? That we think it's OK for some people to have their lives turned inside out, sometimes twice or thrice over, so that some other and always much fancier people can live well? What is it about water, specifically - after all, dams are essentially a way to use water - that leads to these situations?

The thing to remember about water is this: that it is a political tool, simple. What does this mean? That actually addressing the thirst of people, or the needs of the displaced, is a low priority for those who deal with water. Am I alleging that they are callous, heartless

beasts? No, what I'm saying is that they understand the political power in water today, and they don't shrink from using it. (And in fact, by itself there's nothing wrong there: politics is fundamental to the way we deal with each other).

This is why, for example, the Narmada dams have become such an article of faith in Gujarat, the one issue on which every party agrees. Criticising the dams in Gujarat is rather like talking of Kashmir seceding from India: not something to do lightly, not something that will be taken kindly. Every political leader has understood well the benefit of conflating Narmada with Gujarat's sense of itself - a sort of Gujarati patriotism, if you will.

Yet such conflation only drowns out - excuse the watery pun - any debate. Which, of course, it is intended to do. But is this drowning acceptable?

I don't mean this as a tirade against Gujarat. Really. The view of water as political football is widespread, and in other countries too. (Read Marc Reisner's excellent "Cadillac Desert" to get a sense of water policy and politics in the USA). But it is telling, nevertheless, and it forces us to face a simple truth: water issues, water policy, have always been and will always be addressed through politics.

The challenge, then, is to use politics for the good of all: Sahara's clients, but Raju as well. This is not such a fanciful idea, once you give it some thought. Keeping it in mind, I'd like to suggest here three lines along which the use of water must be decided.

First, there is a balloon to be pricked. That's the one that says, some people must sacrifice so that some others can benefit. For too long, this has been proffered as a justification for the shabby treatment of people displaced by dams, among others. Proffered, it has an uncanny ability to shut off questions - perhaps because it just sounds so reasonable, so logical. No

gain without pain, everything has a price, the benefits outweigh the costs - familiar mantras like those reinforce the seeming sense in this call for “some people” to sacrifice.

Yet after all these years, you wonder: who are these “some people”? Why are they always off in some nearly forgotten spot? Why are they invariably weak, politically? Why do some of them end up sacrificing not once, but twice or more? Why does it never happen that people in cities, so often the beneficiaries of water projects, are asked to sacrifice?

What if we altered that shibboleth to say this: you want benefits, you’ve got to sacrifice. Or, if you’re being asked to sacrifice, you will be the first to get benefits. Think of what it would be like if Sahara’s clients were told: you will get water, sure, but first give up your home to someone losing his, like Raju. Or what if someone being uprooted is told: sacrifice your home for this dam, and you will be resettled right away in its command area. You will benefit from the water from the dam before anyone else.

Why is water distribution never considered this way? Yet, as water gets scarcer and its use more negotiated, it seems to me it will have to be looked at like this. The politics of water will have to start from this point: Those who use, pay. Those who pay, use. (And by “pay” I mean every sense of the word: sacrifices made by displaced people as well as a fair price charged to farmers).

Second, which may be related, water is a resource that belongs to all. Again for too long, it has been supplied freely to two groups of people in particular: the urban upper and middle classes, who can pay for it; and farmers who need irrigation, who - we are told - are

too poor to pay for it. This has led to perversities that are visible all over this country. Slum families must queue up for water, often at a single tap. In villages, families throng at the lone hand pump for the stuff: this is a sight that is so invariant in India that you might be forgiven for thinking hand pumps go back to Vedic times. Yet high-rise buildings always have water, flowing out of multiple taps in each flat. So, I have no doubt, will the gorgeous homes in Sahara’s Amby Valley.

I’d like to suggest this: that water must be considered to be like air. Common to all. Certainly it exists in less abundance than air does, which means its use must be negotiated and regulated. But with that constraint, everyone on this planet must have equal access to it. This is not an easy concept to get widely accepted, but that’s what skilled politicians exist for. Unequal access to water will lead us to disputes and war, and heading off that spectre is also what skilled politicians exist for.

Which brings me to ...

Third, politics and politicians. Much as we have learned to be distrustful of our politicians, there’s really no need to shy away from politics. There are indeed skilful, sincere politicians too, and they have been known to negotiate hard for things they believe in.

In fact, to me this much is clear: the only way people like Raju will ever be treated fairly is if their rights are negotiated for politically, though always sincerely.

And that’s why it is important for those who want the use of water to be fairer than it is today to take, with enthusiasm and adrenalin, to politics. No need, let me repeat, to shy away.

(Dilip D’Souza is a columnist. Email: dilipd@iqara.net)



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Editor

Enough is Enough

Bullet whether it comes out from the gun of security man or militant has always one and the only one target - Kashmiri.

Bashir Manzar

The violence has eaten up more people in Kashmir - the militants, common people and military personnel than anywhere else in the independent India. As far as military strength and organisational set-up goes, Hizbul Mujahideen is the only indigenous militant group though it is based across the line of divide. Since past few months security forces have succeeded in eliminating several top leaders of the outfit. For security forces the killings are 'big successes' and for Hizb leadership 'the martyrdom of its leadership strengthens its resolve to fight against India.' But amid all these claims and counter claims, Kashmir is losing its children. The killing is on from last fourteen years. Bullet whether it comes out from the gun of security man or militant has always one and only one target - Kashmiri.

A street vendor, a student, a shopkeeper, a pedestrian, a militant - all of them are children of this erstwhile Paradise on the Earth. How long will this land be coloured in human blood? How long people have to wail, cry and sob for their dear ones? How long death will continue to have its *Tandav* in the lanes and by-lanes of Kashmir? These and many more questions are to be pondered upon. Ordinary Kashmiris have no say in the whole affair. People's lips have been sealed. They are not allowed to say anything that even smells of criticism. How ironic is the situation that those who talk of peace and non-violence are being branded as enemy agents. In such a scenario how can one expect people to raise their voice against every day killings? They have been reduced to nothingness. Leadership doesn't survive in the vacuum. It needs to have its roots in the ground. Those who fail to feel the pulse of the people can never claim to be the leaders and unfortunately, like mainstream politicians, the separatist leadership too has no connection with the ground.

Abdul Rashid Shardar, who was killed couple of months back was Hizb operational chief. But before

that he was son of a mother, who always wishes her son to shoulder her coffin and not the otherwise. He was husband of a wife, who would have always prayed to remain 'Sada Suhagan.' He was father of some cute children, who would have never dreamt of becoming orphans.

He was a human being and therefore, whether one would have agreed with his political philosophy or not, his death has pained everyone in Kashmir, the way deaths of other Kashmiris pain people everyday. But with every death the only question that haunts everyone is 'how long?' Why the leadership is not trying to read people's mood. A strike was called by Hizbul Mujahideen and it was supported by Geelani group of Hurriyat conference. The strike-call failed to generate public response. Why? Not because people were not pained at Rashid's death but because people are fed up with violence. They have seen enough of it and now want an end to it. Every Kashmiri wants permanent resolution of Kashmir issue because in that lies the future of all Kashmiris. But is the violent means only way to fight for one's rights? This is the question that people have started raising. The people have started questioning the separatist leaders like Muhammad Yasin Malik and Shabir Ahmad Shah. These leaders talk of non-violence but never miss an opportunity to glamorise violence when it suits furthering their own respective agendas. If these young leaders are convinced that militancy is the best option to get Azadi from India, why have they abandoned it?

Rashid was 38 and the young crop of the separatist leadership too is almost in the same age group and some are even younger than Rashid. Then why don't they leave over ground politicking to aged leaders like Geelani, Prof Bhat, Fazal Haq Qureshi, Azam Inqilabi etc and themselves join the militancy and fight Indian forces? These leaders owe an explanation to Kashmiris on what they actually stand for. If they really believe in non-violence and peaceful means of struggle, why don't they take the same message to those Kashmiri

boys who use violent means? Aren't their lives precious? Aren't those young people pride sons of this soil? Trading in blood is easy but saving human lives is something that makes leaders out of ordinary citizens.

(Bashir Manzar is editor of Kashmir Images, a Srinagar based English daily)



Continued from page 8

Supreme Court continues to monitor the petition on the issue. In a sign of things to come, another PIL has been filed to ask the Union Government to extend the tenure of the ILR task force that ended on June 30, 2004. The water resources bureaucracy is not going to allow the proposal to be buried quietly as they see huge opportunities in ILR. In fact, in Volume II of the Union Budget there is a provision of Rs 35 crores for the National Water Development Agency to cover its work, including the preparation of DPRs and the expenditure on the Task Force. That waste of precious national resource that is going on for 22 years needs to be stopped immediately by closing down NWDA.

Floods

Here the new government seems to have started on the wrong foot. While it is good to see the PM take prompt action on July 20, 04 in setting up a Task Force on Flood related issues after a visit to flood ravaged Assam, his announcement that Lower Subansiri and Pagaladiya projects in the North East and Sapta Koshi project on Bihar Nepal border will be expedited as these projects would help control floods shows that he is unable to go beyond what the wrong brief his bureaucrats give him. The fact is that not only these projects won't help in flood control, but in fact could lead to greater damages during floods. The new government needs to:

- Review the efficacy of embankments and take a decision to abandon those that are doing more harm than good;
- Review the operating instructions of dams to see that they do not lead to increasing the flood damages, make the operating instructions and information about operation of the dams public right;
- Ask the proposed task force to look into the issue of better catchment management of flood prone areas through creation and maintenance of local water

systems, creating and managing the hill areas with proper forest and vegetation cover, flood warning systems, flood preparedness systems and so on.

■ Review drainage congestion in the basins and remove those congestions that can be immediately removed and prepare a long term plan for removal of those that cannot be immediately removed. The drainage congestion happens due to a number of factors including by improperly designed canal systems, railway lines, roads, buildings and so on.

■ Review the reports of the Flood Commission of 1980 and others and assess what has been done about the recommendations of the same and why.

National R&R law

The previous Union Government in its feel good era nearer to the elections had suddenly declared a National Rehabilitation & Resettlement (R&R) policy without any public consultation process and in fact ignoring the experience of displacement and resettlement over the past 57 years. The policy also ignored the earlier draft acts and processes. It seemed to have been a hurriedly put together policy to satisfy some conditionality of the multilateral agencies. Even the most ardent supporter of the big dams and such displacement generating projects agrees that there has been no success stories in resettling the displaced communities in a just way, even as the number of those displaced by large dam related projects alone has gone above 35 million. What the new government can do at the minimum is to set up a time bound process of formulating a National R&R law (as different from policy that is not mandatory and cannot be used in court of law by the affected) through participatory process.

As a confidence building measure to gain some credibility for such a process, the government should set up a Task Force to assess the outstanding social and environmental issues of the large dam projects already completed, with a view to addressing these issues.

These are just some of the aspects that should be kept in mind while formulating the proposed new National Water Policy and Programme.

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Making Nude

The recent demonstrations in Imphal which cannot be assumed as mere resentments but a pure show of the inner feelings of the people who are compelled to take extreme forms of protest by sacrificing even one's modesty to demand justice.

Nava Thakuria

Renowned Meitei performer Sabitri Devi, in a Manipuri play 'Droupadi,' while facing a group of rapists dared to protest in an astonishing way. Not surrendering to the criminals unlike the Mahabharata age Droupadi, who was finally rescued by Sri Krishna, the actress made herself nude on stage to baffle the rapists. Sabitri drew the attention of the criminals and compared herself to their mothers, who had given birth to them. The climax went on high, when Sabitri stripped of her dresses and started shouting to the miscreants, "See your mother in me. Come rape me! Rape your mother!!"

The highpoint situation of the Padmabhusan S. Kanhailal directed play had turned into reality on the streets of Manipur capital Imphal on July 15. A group of Manipuri women, shedding their clothes, marched towards the 'Assam Rifle' camps in Imphal on that day and shouted loud and clear "Come rape us all," "Indian army rape us," "Indian army take our flesh" etc. in the broad daylight, which shocked not only the security officers but also the entire nation.

While rape and molestation of women by security personnel have become the order of the day in the trouble torn North East India, Manipuri ladies have shown the courage to protest against the misdeed in a shocking way.

"They (security personnel) use molestation and rape as a weapon against the innocent women always. Today we have come to attack the 'very theory' of them making ourselves naked. They are also born to some mothers. We are also the same women. Now let them look at their 'naked mothers' with their own eyes," asserted Ramani Devi, a local women activist, who virtually led the protest.

The women protested against custody killing of a 30-crossed lady, Th. Manorama by the 17th Assam Rifles personnel. Ms Manorama was picked up by the Assam Rifles from her residence on July 11, suspecting link with the armed outfit People's Liberation Army (PLA). An arrest memo was also issued on her arrest. But her bullet-ridden body was recovered the same morning at Yairipok area in Imphal East. The Assam Rifles authorities claimed that Ms Manorama was cadre of People's Liberation Army, an insurgent group and a wireless set, a grenade and some incriminating documents were seized from her. She was shot as Manorama tried to escape the Assam Rifles custody.

The killing sparked off a public outcry immediately. The protestors claimed that Ms Manorama was raped and then killed by Assam Rifles personnel. A two-day general strike was called on July 13 and July 14. The next day witnessed the protest by the women, demanding stern action against the AR personnel involved in the incident. The agitated lady activists shouted against the on-going extra-judicial killings and molestation of women in Manipur taking the advantage of Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act. The Congress government in Manipur led by O. Ibobi Singh ordered a judicial inquiry to the incident headed by retired Sessions Judge C. Upendra. After calling an emergency cabinet meeting Mr Singh had written to the Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil and suggested 'affirmative action' to restore public confidence in the state. He has reportedly advocated for issuing appropriate directions to central forces to prevent instances of human rights violations. At the same time, the local administration clamped curfew in both Imphal East and West districts for an indefinite period. Para military forces were deployed in the Manipur Assembly, State Secretariat buildings and also the residential complex for the ministers and MLAs.

And finally the entire state was taken under a war-like situation. But the agitating women never bowed down

to the pressure of the administration or security personnel. They organized under 32 women and civil bodies and went on displaying various agitational activities against the black laws imposed in Manipur. The women shouted, “Are the security personnel on a genocide mission in Manipur?”

Meanwhile, Assam Rifles authorities ordered a court of inquiry to thoroughly investigate the circumstances that led to the killing of Manorama. But they continued arguing that Manorama was a hardcore armed cadre. The Assam Rifles Central Directorate spokesman Major. Rajkumar reiterated their stand that ‘PLA activist Manorama was shot dead while trying to flee’ from the security custody. “Manorama, being an active member of ‘101 mobile battalion of PLA, was in-charge of recruiting woman cadres to the armed outfit. We can provide all the evidence about the circumstances of her death, besides her antecedents and credentials to the inquiry commission. No brutality, except firing at a hard core militant who tried to escape the forces dragnet, was done,” he asserted. However a release issued by the defence wing of the Press Information Bureau, stated that the personnel of the 17th Assam Rifles who were involved in the controversial case have been kept ‘off duty’ by the paramilitary force to facilitate its own court of inquiry. The placing of the personnel in ‘off duty’ is similar to suspension of the civil officials.

As Manorama’s body was not received by her family, it was kept in the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences, Imphal and later cremated by the administration as an unclaimed body. Her preliminary post mortem report, which did not indicate any kinds of molestation to Manorama created furore among the agitating women. Later the sample was sent for ‘re-testing’ in the laboratories outside Manipur.

“How can they show the real picture of Manorama’s post mortem report. They not only raped Manorama, but also shoot at her private organ to erase the proof of rape,” told an agitating woman, who claimed to have seen on the bullet-ridden body of Manorama.

“The Northeast had been stripped of all human dignity and the clothes ‘we cover ourselves’ become superfluous to ‘our reality.’ That in utter frustration, desperation, rage, as also deep-seated agony, some Manipuri women protested against not just the 17

Assam Rifles but also against this very draconian law, is a message to those in power that the people here now have nothing more to lose,” told Monalisa Changkija, a senior journalist and the editor of Nagaland Page, an English daily from Nagaland. Ms Changkija also argued that random killing of innocent people was not a new development in Manipur, as also in various other areas of the North East where the Armed Forces (Special) Powers Act was imposed. “That the entire North East region is unanimous that this law should be repealed is not without reason, especially because this law protects the Armed Forces here to get away with blue murder while there is nothing to make the Armed forces provide solid evidence for their imputations, as also punishment, for their murderous ways,” added Ms Changkija.

Law sweeps human rights

The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), which was passed on 22 May 1958, provides the security personnel wide range of powers including shooting, arresting and searching. The security forces are almost given unrestricted and unaccounted power under this law to carry out their operations in a declared disturbed area. It was first applied to Assam and Manipur and later amended in 1972 to extend to all NE states including Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram. Passed as the Armed Forces (Assam-Manipur) Special Powers Ordinance just after 12 days of the Budget Session of Parliament, it is termed as one of the draconian law ever resolved in the history of independent India. The 1972 amendments to the AFSPA extended the power to declare an area as disturbed to the union Government of India, though till 1958 version (of AFSPA), the power was rested to the respective state governments. The Lok Sabha debates it in 1972 and resolved to extend the power to the central Government. Since then the government in New Delhi started enjoying the power to overrule the opinion of even a state governor and declare an area disturbed. It happened in Tripura, when the central Government declared Tripura a disturbed area, though the state government opposed the move.

One of the insurgency torn state Manipur is entirely placed under AFSPA since September 1980. The jewelled land, as it is literally means, Manipur has since then witnessed the killing of thousands of security

personnel, armed outfit cadres and innocent people. The Manipur chief minister O. Ibobi Singh himself admits, “Over 12,000 members of security agency and armed outfits and 8000 innocent people have lost their lives till date.”

Enriched with over 30 ethnic groups, Manipur has largest number of around 25 armed outfits demanding sovereignty to self-determination. The list includes, the United National Liberation Front, People’s Liberation Army, People’s Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK), Kangleipak Communist Party, Kanglei Yaol Kanba Lup, Manipur People’s Liberation Front, People’s United Liberation Front (PULF), North East Minority Peoples Front (NEMPF), Islamic National Front, Islamic Revolutionary Front (IRF), United Islamic Liberation Army (UILA) etc.

Respect the Rights

“The sentiments and rights of the NE people must be given due respect, particularly as far as the protests and demonstrations of the people are concerned. The recent demonstration in Imphal which can not be assumed as mere resentments but a pure show of the inner feeling of the people who are compelled to take extreme forms of demonstration by sacrificing even one’s modesty to demand for justice” asserted the

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North East People’s Federation (NEPF) general secretary Ronnie Raneer and North East Students Organisation (NESO) chairman Dr. Samujjal Bhattacharjee. Condemning the 17th battalion of the Assam Rifles for torture and killing of Manorama, the two influential bodies had cautioned that if steps were not taken now, a time would come, where every day, month and year would witness the monsters victimizing the people.

“The incident of Manipur must be looked from the point of view of human right. One must realize, how a group of conservative Vashnavite Manipuri women can come to the streets in nude and shouted to take their flesh to the state force. It is nothing but the reflection of unlimited agony of the deprived people of NE, created by the so-called people’s government,” told a Guwahati based human right activist turned journalist, Prakash Mahanta. He also added, “ The section 4(a) of AFSPA, which permits the armed forces personnel to shoot and kill, simply violates the constitutional right to life of the citizen. If we look at the Article 21 of Indian Constitution, it guarantees the right to life to all Indian people, reading ‘No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.’ But the AFSPA has denied the people of NE India the right to life.”

Continued from page 6

hydropower projects must be kept high. There has never been a genuine options assessment to compare the alternatives, including biomass energy, solar energy, as also labour-intensive technology to save energy, undertaken by the world’s largest lender, or our own government. Moreover, as the World Bank enters in the developmental arena, there is invariably an inducement to privatise water, power, and almost every sector. It is clear that the multinational corporate powers that use the Bank and its lending to make inroads into development planning towards globalisation and liberalisation, are bent upon exploiting the natural resources, especially water, for their profit-making agenda, not for people.

In sector after sector, and especially water, the political agenda seems to be especially fraught with the danger of alienation of communities from the resources. The latest announcement by Mr. Ahluwaliah, the Vice-Chair of the Planning Commission, pertaining to incorporating the World Bank and MNC representatives as members of sectoral planning committees, spells out the primacy. The new technologies and ways of utilisation of water, like growing aqua-culture farms (rather industry), proliferation of chemical industries near the water bodies, unregulated depletion of aquifer water, and even the large dams, all have further degraded the quality of available water.

The privatisation of water is another area of concern for all the people's movements. During last two-three years, there have been many such instances, viz: privatisation of Shivnath river, selling of 6 crores 50 lakh litres of Ganga water per day to Suez-Dregmont company, and the extraction of groundwater by the Pepsi, Coca-Cola and all other bottling companies. It is not only the multinational companies and beverages but also all the mineral bottling plants that indulge in this outright crime, in the name of thirst and satiation. The story of floods is not different. The conventional method of erecting embankments is proving to be counterproductive. In Bihar, embankments collapsed, breached and had created the situation of waterlogging. The Kosi embankment in Bihar is breached at about 1500 places and the embankments of the single river has caused severe waterlogging in 188,000 hectares in the state.

New Approach

It is obvious that we need to discard the conventional approach - which has become archaic and obsolete - about water storage, utilisation and distribution. We need to undertake a review of water sector and strategy, treating water as a life-resource of everyone, not as a tradable/marketable commodity and should reject the retrograde concept of water markets, as envisioned by the World Bank inspired World Water Vision. We will have to assert that the communities own the water. Other issues like who uses it, how, with what vision and on what terms, at whose and what cost must be raised and be answered unequivocally.

Liberating ourselves from the shackles of 'large-dam centric' water vision, we have to harvest and utilize water at every point, starting from retaining the moisture in the air and land - as our intelligent ancestors in Rajasthan have been doing for centuries together. We will have to conserve water through the groundwater recharging in situ, the small, decentralized structures, reviving the old structures - like lakes, wells, anicuts, farm ponds, tankis and tankas. The small, and possibly medium structures will have to be undertaken leaving out the major structures on major rivers. The scale matters, socially, politically & economically. There is an urgent need to stop the unbridled pollution of water bodies

from organic and inorganic toxic waste that necessitates a choice of the right option in industrial & agricultural production technology. Ensuring the 'local community first' approach with equity principle & practical strategies within a community that will include the landless, dalits, women as the disadvantaged but rightful participants, will go a long way. Even in the small scale harvesting, any displacement or environmental impact that cannot be ruled out needs to be taken care of. To exemplify, the downstream flows need to be protected. Such a planning is to inevitably based on 'the principle of subsidiarity' i.e. from micro to macro unit. The new approach will have inbuilt values of environmental sustainability, equal and just distribution and judicious utilisation. It presupposes or leads to the alternative ways of agriculture, cropping pattern, markets and development pattern. Power sector too needs an overhaul, if water management is to be anyway different.

There should be appropriate and topical adaptation of the work and vision of the pioneers such as 'Pani Panchayat' in Maharashtra by late Vilasrao Salunkhe, the kind of water distribution and crop pattern envisaged therein, the stellar initiatives by the young political leadership like Popatrao Pawar in Hivre Bazar in Maharashtra and Hardeo Singh Jadeja in Rajsamandhiala, the campaign of well recharging by Saurashtra Lok Manch, the efforts of self reliant and organic farming by Bhaskarrao Save, Dharendra Somji in Gujarat, , the consistent and path-breaking work by the Tarun Bharat Sangh in Rajasthan, solar power generation at Tilonia and others. Such a 'desi' approach will no doubt relieve the huge debt - internal and external- but will also create enormous magnitude of employment generation. The new water vision thus is not to be just a techno-economic alternative, but also based on a different political and social engineering. Ideologically, it will draw more from Gandhi but also from Ambedkar, Phule, Schumaker & Marx.

This cannot happen without posing a challenge to the elite lifestyle of a minority that guides the present development paradigm. The shift, therefore, begins from us, here & now.



Time of War

The violence of the everyday defies comprehension. Brutality infiltrates into the imagination of the acceptable, as oppression lives through the state's mistreatment of the poor, arbitrated via intense hierarchies powered by caste, tribe, religion and gender.

Angana Chatterji

"They stood there, the guards, and ordered me to tear down my home. It felt like my bones were breaking."
(Sunder Bai, Harsud Town, August 03, 2004.)

Long ago, in a time of hope, on September 28, 1989, I was in Harsud at the rally of 30,000. "Kohi nahin hate ga, bandh nahin banega" (no one will move, the dam will not be built) had reverberated across the Narmada Valley as village upon village committed to resistance against destructive development promulgated by large dams. Almost fifteen years later, I travelled to Harsud to witness the rape of cultures and histories, memories and futures, as its people are forced into destitution. On August 3 and 4, hundreds from ten villages, a town and seven resettlement colonies registered their grievances at public hearings. Chenera, Harsud, Bhavarali, Chikli, Jhinghad, Ambakhal, Barud, Kala Patha, Balladi, Khudia Mal, Purni, Bangarda, Jhabgaon, Jalwa, Dabri, Borkhedakala, Bedani, Borkheda. And, those from Gulas, Abhera, Jabgaon, Nagpur, places that are no more, chronicled in the register of dead settlements from which the Narmada Sagar dam draws its life force.

The Narmada Sagar (formally called the Indira Sagar Pariyojana), a multipurpose project, has been in construction for decades. It is one of the 30 large dams on the Narmada River as it passes through the states of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat. The Narmada watershed is home to about 20 million peasants and adivasi people whose subsistence is critically linked to their land, forests and water. At 262.19 meters, the Narmada Sagar is located in east Nimar in Madhya Pradesh. It will submerge 249 villages, displace 30,739 families, 91,348 hectares of land, 41,444 hectares of which are forests, to yield 1000 MW of electricity and irrigate 1,23,000 hectares

of land in Khandwa district in Madhya Pradesh, a third of which is already irrigated. This year, only 500 million units of electricity, from the total of 30,000 required by Madhya Pradesh, have been generated. The resettlement and rehabilitation policy has been shaped by various stakeholders, especially the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal Award and the Madhya Pradesh Government Rehabilitation Policy, and includes a land for land clause. In 1998, a special rehabilitation package provided an increase in compensation. Even in its present and inadequate form, the resettlement and rehabilitation provisions are being violated systematically.

Over the last few months, bulldozers razed homes across Khandwa as belongings were dragged out and mangled. State apparatuses have been diligent in their coordinated and precise execution of forcible displacement. Adivasi and peasant lives are under siege in the Narmada Valley, their annexation into maldevelopment justified as a necessary cost of national advancement. "We are like waste to the government. You do not rehabilitate waste, you bury it. Our town and souls are being buried. We have appealed to the government, to the courts, to the country. Our pleas are thrown away. We are left to decay," says Atma Ram. Police camps in resettlement sites seek to frighten citizens into submission. "If we protest, the police beat us. They threaten us, our families," states a young activist. Is this development?

Harsud, the 700-year-old town, was broken on July 1 2004. Yet all its citizens refuse to leave. Some believe that the town will not submerge for another year or two. The people are getting in the way of their rehabilitation, the authorities warn. "Where will we go?" asks Laloo Bhai. "We have lived here for generations. Here I am somebody. When something happens, people come and stand by us. Elsewhere, we are nothing." Homes stand in sullen rows, some derelict, some whole. The town is partly vacated, partly living. Despite the

press coverage and the visibility of Harsud, its residents have been treated with utter contempt. What hope for the numerous villages not in the spotlight?

In the 'new Harsud' there is no employment. Many wealthy citizens have moved to distant places - Indore, Gwalior, Bhopal, Udaipur. The resettlement camp is being populated primarily by the economically disenfranchised, making it easy for the authorities to dismiss their concerns. "What shall I do? I received 25,000 rupees and no land. I was forced out of Harsud. My adult sons were listed as minors. They are 23 and 25. They did not receive land or money. I showed authorities ration cards, voter identification. They ignored us. I am alone. My husband left a long time ago. How will I survive? I was a mazdoor (wage labourer). In Harsud I paid 300 rupees rent. Here I have to pay 700. I have been using the compensation money to live. It will run out very soon. After that?" asks a mother of three.

A Hindutva organization has posted a sign, promising relief. Such assistance will come at a price. The Sangh Parivar seeks to repeat their performance in Gujarat (after the earthquake in 2001) and Orissa (post cyclone in 1999). There, relief work undertaken in a sectarian manner by RSS and other Parivar organisations provided the soldiers of Hindutva with a foothold through which to exploit disaster to foster a politics of hate.

The violence of the everyday experienced by people defies comprehension. Brutality infiltrates into the imagination of the acceptable, as oppression lives through the state's mistreatment of the poor, arbitrated via intense hierarchies powered by boundaries of caste, tribe, religion and gender. There is no time to acknowledge the enormity of the decimation. Beyond Harsud, surrounding villages are likewise devastated. In Barud, where people from various places have resettled, half the village is waiting to sink during these monsoons, with the rest dismantled by a relocating railway line that shifted due to the submergence. Residents have been told that they are not entitled to land compensation. In Jhinghad, people were informed that the village would partially submerge. Half its residents were ordered out. "Adivasis and Harijans, they left. They are afraid," says a villager. In the other half, hand pumps were wrecked, even as residents were told that they are not

going to drown. Why then were public services destroyed and disrupted? We stop at Bangarda. We visited a man whose house collapsed, injuring and leaving him bedridden, unable to provide for his family. "I am landless, so they said they are not responsible," says a Gond adivasi elder, his body taut with despair. "My sons are far away, I am old and very poor. My wife passed away. They have given me nothing." Faces etched with anger and sadness. Who bears responsibility for the multitudes a nation renders invisible?

Some of the project affected have received more compensation, some none, the majority have not been informed on time. Citizens hold political parties culpable, the Congress, the BJP. In the absence of a movement that unifies resistance, people are wary of each other. Chittarooma Palit and Alok Agarwal of the Narmada Bachao Andolan travel from village through devastated village, day after long day, seeking to collectivise the struggle, reflecting their unyielding and sustained commitment to justice. "Hum sabh ek hein" (we are all one) echoes as we leave Kala Patha. "Jete raho, sangharsh karo" (keep living, continue struggling), a woman elder offers in blessing. "The struggle for justice is about the right to life," Chittarooma says. The right to life here is linked intimately to the right to land. To the survival of cropping patterns, to water rights, to food and shelter. Relations to land shape knowledge, dignity, income, dreams, ways of being. Land is critical to the capacity of these cultures to endure.

Authorities celebrate that the Narmada Sagar will be completed ahead of schedule in 2004 rather than as originally expected, in 2005, even as the conditions prescribed in the Land Acquisition Act and the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal Award have been violated, along with the prerequisite that the state provide a minimum of 2 hectares of irrigated land to all those landed and adequate cash compensation to others. Cash compensation - 40,000 rupees for non-irrigated, 60,000 rupees for irrigated land - is inadequate to purchase new land. People have often not been provided the authorised sum. Many have received indiscriminate amounts - 28,000, 37,000, 55,000. In the absence of livelihood opportunities, the money withers away fast, leaving people destitute. Amidst the organized disarray, people resort to middlemen and loan sharks, to alcohol.

The landless are not being provided agricultural land as displacement leaves them impoverished without access to livelihood resources. Labourers are not provided livelihood opportunities. Seasonal migrants are often not included in compensatory schemes. In so many instances people are waiting for compensation cheques, as others are not being allowed access to their money even when it has reached the bank. Women have not been listed as co-title holders to new land. Submerged land owned by the government has not been assessed for the livelihood resources that these lands provided the disenfranchised, nor have the poor been compensated for such losses. In spite of petitions and court cases, the state has refused to take retroactive measures that allow for restorative justice, failing to address the terror inflicted through deracination. The state has deliberately used force against the displaced to erase dissent and silence discontent across the Narmada Valley. How is the nation constituting itself through its response?

“There is no future here, we are living out our days, focused on survival. The Narmada gave us life. They have turned her against us,” grieves Parbati Bai. Rehabilitation for the 85 villages partially and fully submerged between 2002-2003, and the 32 scheduled for submergence in 2004, the people charge, must ensure that the displaced are provided land and cash compensation in accordance with the Land Acquisition Act and the Narmada Award. The 132 villages yet to be submerged must be rehabilitated prior to the completion of the dam, even if it requires halting construction of the 16 of 20 gates yet to be built that will flood these villages, until such processes are undertaken in ways that are transparent, principled and lawful.

Beyond Purni as the land is engulfed by the reservoir, an infinite stretch of gloomy water beneath which lies the Atlantis of the Narmada Valley, its yesterdays lost to the dubious promise of tomorrow. Daunting questions of cultural survival and self-determination of adivasi and peasant peoples persist. India’s record of irresponsible development has placed its marginalized most at risk. The Land Acquisition Act contradicts constitutional provisions that allow for partial tribal governance in Schedule V areas, and, tribal governance, through autonomous tribal councils, as stipulated in areas under Schedule VI. Narmada Sagar exemplifies the violence of nation

making in India today. What loss accompanies this demonic, calculated rush for homogenized, unsustainable futures? What unnecessary social suffering, dispensed by national dreams and global capital, is distributed among peoples, cultures, flora, fauna, birds, trees, animals? Forgotten are the forty-two plus million citizens of India displaced by 4,300 dams since 1947. One thousand more dams are promised us as freedom, security and self-determination remain distant for 350 million of India’s poorest citizens. Shall we ask them what this means to their lives?

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Spain’s River Linking Project Dropped

In his first week in office, Spain’s new Prime Minister dropped a controversial plan by the previous administration to link the nation’s rivers and divert water to the dry southern part of the country. The US\$4.5 billion scheme, approved three years ago included plans for more than 100 dams and hundreds of miles of irrigation channels to transfer water from the Ebro River, Spain’s longest.

The amount of water that would have been diverted from the Ebro was equivalent to one-third of Spain’s domestic water consumption. The scheme would have destroyed habitat on which at least 55 bird species depend.

The new government said the scheme was being stopped for environmental and financial reasons. But politically, the project was highly unpopular, and prompted hundreds of thousands of Spanish citizens to take to the street in protests.

Courtesy: World Rivers Review

Ideological Integration

The contemporary activist is searching for a deeper inspiration - a common dream to connect his/her struggle with rest of the struggles in India.

K.P. Sasi

A change of political governance in India called for a relief for many activists after elections this year. Many activists, especially within the streams of anti-communal and anti-globalisation movements saw the expression of Indian electorate as their own victory. While not many had great expectations about the present ruling Congress alliance, the common view held that the transformation of the ruling body was a political necessity. The relief was short-lived with a realisation that almost all issues that activists fought for, remain as they were before.

At this point of historical reality, it may be necessary for many within forums like NAPM to ask certain questions related to stronger integration of people's movements. Among the vast number of social and political issues, the problem of communalism and globalisation have the potential to unite a number of groups and movements. The communal forces may not have an official recognition today as they used to, but their virus is spreading wild underneath. The political implications of the spreading communal ideology today, may mean a disaster not just to the religious minorities in this country, but also women, dalits, adivasis, fishing communities, nationalities and sexuality minorities. The colonisation of upper caste religious beliefs and culture over indigenous communities and the imposition of a crude Victorian sexual morality under communal ideology are suppressing the spaces of a vast majority of people in India. The invasion of globalisation on the other hand has already affected land, water, forests and all other social, economic, political and cultural aspects. Its increasing impact on dalits, adivasis, workers, fisherpeople, farmers and women is continuing without any major difference. Since alliances can sustain only on the basis of a common agenda, the issues of communalism and globalisation today can integrate a large number of issue-based people's movements with common programmes.

Interlinking social movements

For a long time, I have heard complaints from urban middle class friends about the lack of unity among different social movements. They feel that dalits are only bothered about dalit issues, feminists are only bothered about women's issues, and anti-dam activists are only bothered about dams and so on and so forth. While there is an element of truth in this allegation, I am more and more inspired by a number of issue-based movements who cross their own immediate issues to support other issues and ally with other movements of the marginalised. The fight against communalism and globalisation in this country has already brought a number of single-issue based struggles together on many platforms across the country. A number of instances can be cited to establish this tendency in India. NAPM itself, I presume, is an effort in this direction. The question however at this point is, what challenges do the movements face in an ongoing journey towards stronger alliances?

It maybe a reality that there exists even today a large space of lack of communication by different social movements. For example, I was surprised that not too many people fighting for water rights knew about the fact that a local activist woman called Satyabhama died during a hunger fast in a struggle against privatisation of Kelo river in Chattisgarh. How is it that we knew about Cochabamba or other struggles abroad but not the reality surrounding Satyabhama in Kelo river? The communication linkages of the forces of communalism and globalisation may be far superior to the linkages of the people's movements in this respect. However, it is also true that there is an active realisation by most of the people's movements today that no issue can be fought as a single-issue movement alone. A process is already on in different parts of the country where human energy is getting linked from movement to movement. The challenge before the issue-based struggles is to retain their motivation and identities

related to their immediate struggle and yet are part of an overall social and political identity.

Beyond the immediate communication linkages of people's movements, what is not sufficiently addressed is the question of unity of social and political understanding between various people's movements. A lack of framework to interlink the thought processes, concerns and perspectives of different movements is still very severe. The inadequately expressed ideological linkages between the movements of gender, class, caste, adivasis, fisher people, sexuality minorities and victims of ecological and developmental disasters have generated a space for a shift from 'ideology' to 'no ideology' among the present generation of activists. Sadly, 'no ideology' activists can be easy targets of globalisation and those who cling to their ideologies may miss the complexities of social issues today.

Given the problem of existing vacuum of a coherent political philosophy connecting different groups and movements, and given the status of a potentially easy penetration of destructive ideologies, the contemporary activist is searching for a deeper inspiration - a common dream to connect his/her struggle with rest of the struggles in India. A proper articulation of ideological linkages requires an expression of common dreams and a wider as well as common worldview. It is only through such an articulation that the present resistance can take roots on the imagination of the vast majority of people in India. Are the people's movements today travelling towards such an articulation of common political dreams or a common worldview?

Spreading Ideology

What is the advantage that the forces of communalism and globalisation have in making people accept their worldviews, an advantage that people's movements may not sufficiently have today or that is inadequately equipped within the people's movements? What is it that force people accept something which is in reality against their own interests?

A glimpse at the forces of communalism and globalisation will tell us about their strength to capture the minds of people. A worldview based on hatred and consumerism is well defined. Freedom of people is

defined as freedom of certain sections of religious and economic power. Their strength lies in their capacity to manufacture dreams based on this ideology and filter it even to the diverse marginalised sections of our society. At this point, the people's movements are forced to look into their own machinery to kindle the imagination and dreams of the vast sections of our society. Can Marx, Gandhi or Ambedkar play the same role as in the earlier stages of history to inspire the newer band of activists within the people's movements confronting all new contradictions and struggles? What ideological machinery do we have today to deal with the vast effort of 'capturing of minds' by the forces of communalism and globalisation? Are the existing ideologies sufficient to answer the political problems faced by modern activists involving with a diverse set of issues related to adivasis, fisher people, women, communalism, sexuality minorities, workers, farmers, large dams, nuclear power, war, bio-diversity, genetic engineering, deteriorating physical and mental health of our society, degradation of land, water or forests, nationalities, vanishing cultures, pollution, survivors of disasters and a number of other issues related to environment and culture? Since during the context of lives of Marx, Gandhi or Ambedkar, many of these issues were unarticulated like today, it is not essential that their vision encompass an ideological thread to provide directions to all these movements. Though class, caste or gender analysis can explain most of the existing issues in their own ways, the analysis may appear to be similar to that of looking at a room from one angle only. Having stated such a premise, it is important at the moment to look into the existing possibilities of theoretical threads to analyse, connect and provide a vision for a large variety of people's movements, who express their politics often with conflicting interests with one another. This, I believe, is the responsibility of a radical intelligentsia in India today, who I fear, are not doing their homework properly.

If political ideologies are not attracting the newer generations of activists, is it the problem of limitations of existing ideologies or limitations of the activists of post-globalisation era? Or is it the problem of lack of proper articulations and interpretation skills of the intelligentsia? Whichever way we look at this problem, all activists who swear by any shade of ideology or no ideology have to accept the presence of a large vacuum of a deeper mental space, which facilitate an

easy penetration of the ideas and dreams offered by the forces of communalism and globalisation.

Changing discourse

During the last three decades, we have witnessed a rapid increase in the magnitude of social issues. The women's movement and the environmental movement, which had very small spaces in the seventies, have large spaces of acceptance today. Spaces have opened up (though small in its overall space) in the mainstream media, bureaucracy, education system and other institutions of state. Many such movements are yet to grapple with the impact of appropriation of issues and jargons by the state machinery. In any case, the issues of the seventies are much more deeper, diverse and complex today - a challenge faced by all activists and intellectuals.

People's Caravan For Food Sovereignty Sweeps Through Asia

Hundreds of peasant organizations and support NGOs, representing millions of poor Asian farmers, are currently participating in the Peoples Caravan 2004 for Peoples Food Sovereignty that is sweeping through 15 countries across Asia and Europe. After a first caravan in 2000, this year's caravan bears the theme "Asserting Our Rights to Land and Food" and will culminate in Nepal with a public rally and the Conference on Alternatives to Globalisation on September 30.

The People's Caravan 2004 kicked off in Malaysia. While two legs are heading through Sri Lanka and India, the third is covering several South East and Central Asian countries and is now in the Philippines. In addition, a small group travels through Europe where they will attend the protests against the Agricultural Biotechnology International Conference in Cologne (12-13 Sept) among others.

PC2004 aims to raise awareness on the issues involved in food sovereignty, including the World Trade Organization (WTO), genetic engineering (GE), pesticides, agrochemical transnational corporations (TNCs), workers' rights, and the promotion of sustainable agriculture.

For details: <http://www.panap.net/caravan>

Along with the changes in issues, there was also a change in the character of the activist and intellectual. The compartmentalisation of the intellectual, activist and artist is more or less diminishing in social action. Earlier, a radical intellectual could pretend that his/her role was thinking and not action. A non-participatory intellectual today has very little role in social movements. On the other hand, an activist is forced to assume the role of an intellectual in many occasions due to the multiplying need to articulate diverse layers of information related to many issues. Cultural activism has also undergone these changes. An artist connected with social movements can no longer maintain that his/her role is just art to be supplied to social movements. The emerging tendency within different people's movements is that, only participatory artist and participatory intellectuals are accepted. Social movements have a challenge to bring together all these three concerns of art, intellect and action and no longer bog down only with the responsibilities of sheer organisation alone. While doing so, they can loudly claim that a people's movement itself, is a culmination of art, intellect and action.

Perhaps the responsibilities of the need to articulate common dreams and common perspectives to bridge the gaps of evaporating ideological spaces also rest with the people's movements. Since ideologies of yesteryears have also been products of social movements, professional intellectuals caught up with outdated texts and outdated jargons of a different history may not be equipped to do this task. The existing ideologies available to activists today, may have a limitation of being anthropocentric (human centred) and that also focusing on the oppression and perspectives of a certain section of humanity. At the same time, non-anthropocentric political philosophy has failed to penetrate to the diversities of human oppression, even if the share of humanity in nature is theoretically recognised to be similar to that of all other species. This, I believe, is a central problem social movements may have to address, on their journey towards stronger ideological linkages. Perhaps the movements can expect an emergence of a new participatory intelligentsia to come out of their compartmentalised minds to undertake this responsibility. The need today however, is to initiate the dialogue.

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A Fighter

This is the story of Malati Choudhuri, born in 1904 in a Bengali family of class-one civil servants, educated at Shanti Niketan founded by the famous poet-humanist Tagore and married to fellow student Naba Krushna Choudhuri of Orissa in 1927. Her daring in the Salt satyagraha launched by the Congress under Gandhiji's leadership earned her the title "Toofani" given by the Mahatma himself. Since the British rulers imposed a tax on a thing of daily use by the common man, the Congress Party decided to defy the tax by asking every citizen to produce common salt by drying water from the sea, the rives or digging it out from below the soil. Along with Naba Babu's elder brother's wife Rama Devi, another dedicated woman, she campaigned vigorously for violating the law and the two indefatigable workers infused hundreds of women by their example.

The two worked quietly and planned a mass defiance of the law so that on a particular day, a couple of thousand women arrived at the seashore for making salt. This was a unique instance of women leading a powerful and momentous struggle. As salt making was not possible in the rainy season, they launched the boycott of foreign goods and liquor. They, together with young boys and girls, braved police atrocities. However, the agitation resulted in the closure of liquor shops in Cuttack for several years.

Influenced by the stark poverty in Orissa and their study of Marxist literature, Naba Krushna Choudhuri, Malati Devi, founded the Congress Samyawadi Sangh in which their co-workers were Surendra Nath Dwivedi and Bagabati Prosad Panigrahi. This group merged into the Congress Socialist Party, established by Acharya Narendra Dev, Jai Prakash Narayan, Yusuf Meharally and Dr. Lohia, in 1934. Along with other colleagues, Malati started to organise the kisans who lived in semi-serfdom and fear. They got the kisans to submit petitions for rent remission in cases where crops had failed. It was very difficult to get their signatures; such was the terror of the feudal lords and their musclemen. Nevertheless, the limitless patience and untiring efforts of workers succeeded. The

conditions of the kisans living under the British rule improved.

This development stirred the imagination of the people in the princely states, and some persons from Dhenkanal approached the leaders. The latter set up the Praja Mandal. The king's terror was highly intimidating, but Malati Devi and Bhagwati Prasad Panigrahi went into Dhenkanal State under cover and started to organise the kisans quietly. Thus, the fear was removed a little, so that when some workers of the Praja Mandal were arrested on the orders of the king, hundreds gathered and gheraoed his palace and made him to flea from it. He returned with the British armed

forces, the people in general were subjected to severe repression, and they fled from Dhenkanal in hundreds. Malati Devi, along with her and of workers, sheltered them in camps outside the State, fed them and gave them courage. Nevertheless, a new awakening had spread in the people of the princely States and the urge for democratic rule had become insistent.

In the Quit India movement launched by the Congress on 9 August 1942 to force the imperialists to get out, Malati Devi and Surendra Nath Dwivedi eluded the police, returned from Bombay to Orissa, and led the underground struggle. They had to work under severe handicaps, and the police was always after them. Malati was arrested and underwent imprisonment for over three years.

During the big communal flare up in the country, Malati Devi joined Gandhiji in Noakhali and displayed exemplary imagination in working for the peace. After independence, she was appointed a member of the Union Planning Commission, but she left it after some time to work among the tribals. In early 1970's, the Orissa Government let loose a reign of terror in the name of curbing Naxalite violence. Malati Devi and her husband Naba Krushna Choudhuri exposed it and created a nation-wide awareness of its terror. When Indira Gandhi's Government promulgated internal Emergency in 1975, Malati avoided arrest, went into villages, and despite old age and police surveillance,

PAST FOR FUTURE

Surendra Mohan

distributed literature among the people to exhort them to fight for their civil and democratic rights, which the imposition of the Emergency had denied them. She was arrested when she returned to nurse her husband who had been struck by paralysis. She was released only after a year in 1977 when the Government announced the holding of the parliamentary general elections.

Thereafter, although quite old, she continued to evince keen interest in all people-oriented activities, and helped

the needy in various ways. The Naxalite leader Nag Bhushan Patnaik's release in 1981 was a consequence of her sustained efforts. She breathed her last on 15th March 1998. Thus ended the career of a freedom fighter and a socialist, a servant of the tribals and the kisans, a crusader against oppression, a zealous supporter of the civil liberties movement, and a person endowed with love for all human beings who always insisted on justice for every one.



Democracy Wins

The Venezuelan government's victory on August 15th is not only a victory for the people of Venezuela, but for working people worldwide. The Venezuelan voters decisive rejection of the right-wing bid to recall President Hugo Chavez has demonstrated what is possible when interests of working people are put before those big business. President Chavez was elected 2000 and faced a recall referendum after his political opponents secured 2 million valid signatures to force a vote. Mr. Chavez had said, "We all have to focus on the referendum. The real rivals we are facing are the imperialist forces of the USA. The US forces want to take over our oil. We will not allow this to happen." Through a stage-managed coup by CIA, Mr. Chavez was removed on 10th April 2002 but the people brought him back on 13th April 2002.

Comments: What is going on is really a democratic struggle. In the name of democracy the USA and its allies were trying to kill democracy. But referendum reflected people's will. We must be ready for anything to protect the rights of the people at large. People have the right to recall the elected government and member. But people also should learn to resist imperialist machinations.

GLOBAL WATCH
Presented by
Thomas Kocherry

Failed Intelligence

US Senators have severely criticized the country's intelligence agencies, in particular the CIA, for the quality of the pre-war information on Iraq. In a scathing report, the Senate Intelligence Committee says the CIA overstated the threats posed by Iraq. As a result the US and its allies went to war based on "flawed" information. Similarly the Butler Report in UK concluded the same. The inquiry surprised ministers, officials that the intelligence agencies did not verify the quality of information they collected. UN weapons inspector failed to make finds in months immediately before the war.

Comments: Now thousands of innocents are being killed, by a wrong judgement. A sovereign of a country was removed without any approval by the UN body. Who is responsible for this? Who is going to punish the culprit?

Illegal Wall

International Court of Hague decides that Israel Wall is illegal and it has to be demolished. The UN General Assembly decided that the International Court Judgement should be implemented. It voted 150 in favour, 6 against and 8 abstentions.

Comments: Rule of law is characteristic of a civilized nation. Morality works only when a country is civilized.



My final words of advice to you is – Educate, Agitate, Organise – have faith in yourself. With justice on our side, I do not see how we can lose our battle. The battle to me is a matter of joy. The battle is in the fullest sense spiritual. There is nothing material or social in it. For ours is a battle not for wealth or for power. It is a battle for freedom. It is a battle for the reclamation of the human personality.

Dr.B.R.Ambedkar

Vision Van Vadi

Experiences from a 'collective' working on bio-diversity, natural regeneration, self reliance, water management and self reliance

Bharat Mansata

*Stand by and care — that's all we do and all we can.
The rest ... pure miracles of nature.*

Not too many decades ago, this land was known as the 'Leopards' Run.' That was before the towering forest here was clear-felled for timber. The tenacious re-growth was then periodically cut back (by earlier owners) in diminishing cycles of ten to four years — first for making charcoal, and later, for selling as firewood.

Now, it's almost ten years that 'Vision Acres' was 'born' here. Halfway down the road, it adopted a local name, 'Van Vadi.' The land itself is again flourishing wonderfully, but perhaps our 'vision' needs greater clarity and re-commitment to support future movement from here.

If one follows a flock of birds flying eastward from Matheran to Bhimashankar in Maharashtra, Van Vadi is possibly the biggest and richest forest patch between the two. Long before us, the birds discovered our forest, and the wealth of its diversity. Their flock increases each year... You can hear them now, not just in the morning or evening, but often, even at the peak of the mid-day sun — chattering and singing away.

In 'hard numbers,' the land has — at a rough, conservative estimate — more than forty thousand trees, excluding tall shrubs and tree-climbing vines. (The actual figure may be several thousand more). Of these, at least half are more than twenty feet tall, including a quarter over twenty-five, or even thirty feet in height.

Biodiversity

We have listed (with local, tribal help) over 115 naturally occurring and traditionally useful species, growing on our land. Over 80% of these figure in the

compendium, 'The Useful Plants of India,' with more detailed information available in 'The Wealth of India' — a multi-volume encyclopaedia of natural inheritance. We have compiled a thick box-file, 'The Floral Wealth of Van Vadi,' not half complete, which already has several hundred pages of printed (and hand-written) information on the plant species growing on our land, including their documented uses.

Such botanical wealth is a veritable treasure — increasingly precious and rare. We have listed, for example, over 40 species that — in tribal knowledge — yield some edible part or parts (leaf, fruit, flower, stem, root), usually at a certain time of the year. Of these species, we have been able to identify the botanical names of over 30 plants, and verified their use as food from 'The Wealth of India' and 'Food from Forests.'

Food apart, the land has numerous medicinal and timber species. And then there are plants that yield natural dyes, soaps, oils (edible and non-edible), gums and resins, botanical pesticides, and a dozen or more such species with specialized uses. (Many plants serve multiple functions.)

The above is in addition to the more commonly sourced fodder, fuel, fibre, *kathi* hedge (karavanda) cuttings, ... not to mention rocks for construction, seeds and seedlings for propagation, and a profusion of rich fertility resources like earthworm castings, arrested run-off topsoil (sedimented silt), leaf litter mulch, green manure, etc. to enhance the productivity of cultivated clearances. Moreover, the entire land functions like an enormous sponge to soak and store huge quantities of increasingly precious fresh water (rain), while all the vegetative growth of the forest serves as a 'sink' for absorbing 'greenhouse gases' like carbon dioxide, recycling it back into lung invigorating, pure oxygen.

The truth is that urban dwellers like us are unavoidably parasitical and increasingly vulnerable. Sooner or later, we may be in urgent need of appropriate land and

community support for more wholesome, satisfying and 'sustainable' daily living, with a fair measure of self-reliance in basic survival needs – like food, water and congenial habitat.

Water!

No tanker entered Van Vadi this summer! For the very first time, both our open well and our hand-pumped bore-well yielded all through the year, without drying. Last year, before the end of April, the water level in our tube-well had already fallen too low to draw through our hand-pump. A couple of weeks later, even our open well dried up.

This year, we started in mid-summer, to excavate a reservoir and build a small check dam on a rocky outcrop a little upstream of our well. This, we expected, would not only store a large amount of additional rainwater, but also significantly enhance the recharge of the well, which we hoped would become perennial as a result.

The combination of excavation and damming that we've done here, seems – for us at least – the most cost-efficient way of harvesting rainwater. *And* collecting much 'earth-butter'! (Fertile topsoil run-off from our forest floor, that is arrested and sediments at the bottom of reservoirs as recoverable silt. Great stuff for adding to tree pits and crop cultivation zones.)

Besides recharging our open well, the new 'rock pool' is also expected to provide a good surface water body that does not rapidly drain away when the rains stop, as is common with most soil-bed reservoirs here, particularly those less than a decade old. The higher retentive prospect (with rock-bed reservoirs) holds much promise for us, as it combines water harvesting with storage that permits easy withdrawal for use.

Apart from the above, there are three check dams (built from rock and earth) on our land, which collect seasonal water bodies and arrest eroded topsoil. These too significantly enhance the recharge of ground water.

Plantings and Water Delivery

Our two main farming clearances (which had sparse tree growth to start with) are around our brick and earth house, and around the new bamboo house. A five

minute walk from the latter – at the wide mouth of a minor stream, and surrounded by thick forest – are several reclaimed paddy plots in descending steps.

This year, we've planted lots of different veggies, rice, several varieties of local millets (nachhni/ragi, varie, kangu), sesame (white and black varieties), ... apart from live hedge species, bamboo, and tree species like mango, drumstick, *gavti* neem, ... lots of flowers too, particularly marigold.

Post monsoon, our foremost priority is to build our water delivery system. If we can supply at least our two main farming clearances, this would enable us to obtain a good crop of winter veggies as well, and grow more evergreen fruit trees.

Tips from Bhaskar Save

In early July, three of us visited the outstanding natural/organic farmer, Bhaskar Save's farm at Dehri, near Umergam, Gujarat. The discussions we had with Bhaskarbhai were invaluable and helped instil more motivation and confidence in all of us.

While our adivasi workers are pretty good with their traditional crops like millets and rice, they lack the experience of nurturing fruit/nut trees to fruition. This is perhaps because in the past they have usually had an abundance of fruit/food trees growing naturally in adjacent areas and forests, without any assistance of man. In particular, a very common error that even seasoned farmers often make is to water a young, growing fruit tree near its trunk, instead of watering near the outer lateral reach of its spreading root system. The latter encourages the roots to spread and become self-reliant more quickly by accessing a much greater volume of soil space for its moisture and nutrient needs. Similarly, mulching is more needed near the outer lateral reach of the 'root crown zone,' where irrigation is provided).

Protection, Regeneration, ... and More:

For the last several months, at least two of our workers were almost full time at the job of patrolling the land and reinforcing the dry *kathi* hedge – of mainly coppicible *karvanda* cuttings – all along our (almost 3 km long!) irregular boundary.

As the green live hedge being planted by us (since the last two years) gets well established, progressively less labour will be needed in the periodic reinforcing of the dry, thorny *kathi* hedge. We have mainly put in 4 live hedge species till date: (i) *Kalak* bamboo (good for construction), (ii) *Vanai* (*Vitex negundo*, a valuable medicinal plant, also known locally as *Nirgundi*), (iii) *Sabri* (a thorny cactus), and (iv) *Chandrajyoti* (*Jatropha curcas*, also known as *raan erandi* and *ratanjyot*).

Of the above, we've had best results with *Chandrajyoti*. Before kerosene became widely available, the oil from *chandrajyoti* was commonly used (wherever it grew) for lighting *diyas* or wick lamps that provided good illumination, burning without soot. The *Jatropha* oil is now more often used for manufacturing soaps, candles, and varnishes. It is also a good lubricant, and is used in the wool industry. Besides, it has several medicinal uses (in sciatica, dropsy and paralysis, besides external application for skin troubles and rheumatism.) Further, its leaves provide a natural dye suitable for colouring garments.

At present, there are still gaps in our live hedge. We plan to fill these with more bamboo, *chandrajyoti* and *sagargota*. In a few more years, we can hope to have a wonderful, multi-functional live hedge that will provide useful produce (or income) in addition to protection!

As our trees grow taller – while surrounding areas continue to decline – these are increasingly more tempting to clandestine loggers. It cannot be

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overemphasized that our land now desperately needs more (and better distributed) human presence, habitat and activity for extra deterrence and protection.

Learning Alliance and Community

The key essentials are now falling nicely into place – water security, accessibility (*pukka* road), congenial environment, good relations with neighbouring villagers, ... We have too a wealth of fertility resources and biodiversity, which can be put to good use to meet basic human needs, and also perhaps to earn some money so that we do not continue to depend on members' annual contributions.

Right from the time we tentatively articulated our common vision, the issue of starting some non-formal educational activity here (both with local adivasi kids and urban youngsters) – especially around nature, earth care and ecologically benign self-reliance – has repeatedly come up every year. This is perhaps the most significant, unifying aspiration shared by most members. Now, with better water security, accessibility, more accommodation, etc., pursuing the idea to a degree of fruition is more feasible.

Apart from existing members, a lot more people too are interested in supporting, or collaborating in such a land-based learning alliance. One hopes that around this, a mutually supportive community – partly resident, partly 'floating' – may organically emerge. After all, any 'vision,' to be meaningful, *must* inspire more people!

Protests in New York

An estimated 4,00,000 Americans thronged the streets of New York on August 29, banging drums and chanting slogans denouncing U.S. President Bush and his politics of hatred and war. They believe their country is at war based on a president's lie.

The massive show of dissent on the eve of the Republican National Convention was peaceful and orderly, with police separating the demonstrators from small knots of Bush supporters who lined the protest route, particularly near the convention site, Madison Square Garden.

The protesters included soldiers returned from Iraq now opposing a war that has cost almost 970 American lives, parents who have lost loved ones in the war and those who lost family members in the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks here, an event Bush is now accused of exploiting with the four-day convention so close to the anniversary.



Ghosts of POTA

It is rather absurd that inspite of all the opposition to POTA, the UPA government has chosen not to withdraw the cases booked under it.

Radhika Menon

On the eve of the Independence Day celebrations of 2004, the ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government promised to usher in a new dawn of freedom by repealing Prevention Of Terrorism Act (POTA), instead of allowing it to lapse in October and ending the BJP-NDA era of crackdown on dissent. Announcements for the same were marked by parallel announcements from Tamil Nadu on the withdrawal of charges against Vaiko, the most well-known of all the cases of POTA violations. However, for those who are not Vaiko, the government clarified that POTA is not being repealed retrospectively. This means that all those who have had the misfortune of being booked under POTA, like the children in Jharkhand, the hapless Muslims picked up by the Modi government and the hundreds of others dissenting voices who have been picked up for being sympathetic to this or that organization which have been banned under it – they will continue to be haunted by the terror of POTA trials.

The Terrorism and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA) cases in Bihar are ample reminders of the fact that, a lapsed law like TADA (and now POTA) can be a convenient tool for cracking down on democratic protest. Take the case of Shah Chand, a popular leader from Arwal, founding secretary of Inquilabi Muslim Conference, a former mukhiya whose work to introduce innovations in canal irrigation and free development work from corruption was hailed by everyone including the amazed administration as the “Chand Model.” A noted activist, Shah Chand, had led campaign after campaign, against the Arwal massacre of 1986, when the police re-enacted the Jallianwala Bagh killings by firing at unarmed peacefully protesting agrarian labourers and poor peasants. The struggles that he led forced Arwal massacre onto the consciousness of a callous nation. But the police did not let him be, they got back at him

by holding him as the prime accused in a TADA case in 1988, where the only “evidence” cited against him and others, which included children of 13 and 14 years, was the possession of ordinary Marxist literature! Years after the incident, Shah Chand, who continued his difficult life marked by intense struggles against police and feudal terror and social and economic inequalities was picked up again after he became a political challenge under CPI-ML to the RJD minister and Ranveer Sena patron Akhilesh Singh. In August 2003, the TADA case was re-invoked and he and 13 others were given life sentence, 9 years after the law had lapsed!

Shah Chand’s is not an isolated case. The TADA cases that are being tried today and people who are being sentenced in Bihar under the Act include children, 40 persons accused of stealing mangoes and 17 dalit labourers who resisted an upper caste landlord who forced them to lick spit. The bizarreness of the cases apart, the common factor for their being targeted under an Act that has long lapsed lies in the fact that those accused come from that section of society that is asserting and becoming a challenge to the political establishment of the state.

Bihar’s cases are worth noting only for the reason that, as in the state the RJD government had made tall claims of not having implemented POTA, yet unscrupulously TADA was used for muzzling dissent. Interestingly the same government withdrew the only case of TADA against an upper caste landlord, who had led the massacre of 16 dalits.

The state government could carry out these blatant violations under TADA because the Union government in 1995 had not withdrawn it retrospectively but had instead allowed the states to apply its own discretion. This left ample scope for the rich and powerful to escape while giving a free reign to the police and the administration to crackdown on the poor and those organizing them, with the connivance of the state

governments.

Thus it is rather absurd that inspite of all the opposition to POTA, that was made since the previous National Democratic Allinace (NDA) government introduced POTA in an unprecedented joint session of the parliament, the UPA government has chosen not to withdraw the cases booked under it. It has been pointed out how violations have happened in case after case by 'n' number of human rights groups and civil liberty organizations. Hence not withdrawing POTA retrospectively must be recognized as a cunning ploy of having the cake and eating it too, where the UPA government wants to get the mileage of having "scrapped" the law and yet keep the Act intact for use against adversaries if required. Now take the case of Gujarat, isn't it ridiculous to expect the Chief Minister Narendra Modi to withdraw the cases against those whom he is squashing under POTA, especially when everyone knows that barring one Sikh, all others held under POTA in Gujarat are Muslims. And then again if 9 years after TADA has lapsed, activists, children and agrarian poor can be picked up and tried under the law, what is to assure that a child booked under POTA in Jharkhand or Kashmir would not be tried under the law 20 years from now? And then again TADA cases have shown that people, who had not even been charged at the time of the incident found their names in TADA cases, long after the Act had lapsed. For instance the case might be against Madan Singh and "others" vs the state but the prosecution in many instances managed to add the names of those who had not even been around at that time in the "others."

The UPA government has mumbled that the review panel on POTA, will make sure that innocents are not victimized. The problem is that the review panel has been constituted under POTA itself and it will probe it under the very provisions of POTA itself. Will such a panel withdraw the cases that are of the innocent but those that are booked against the asserting poor? Going by the Bihar TADA cases everyone should know the answer.

Apart from this, Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee has made it clear that POTA may go but its key provisions will remain. In Shah Chand's case the definition of terrorism was convoluted to make possession of legal Marxist literature as being proof of his being a "terrorist." Infuriatingly for those engaged

in movements for social change, the subjective prerogative of defining terrorism leaves the chance for the state to erase differences between democratic protest and actual dastardly acts of terror. UPA government, we find from Mukherjee's statements, is keen on preserving the Frankenstein of POTA alive by keeping the definition of terrorism in the existing Unlawful Activities Act (UAA). Thus, what is worse is that, now POTA is leaving its killer canines behind in the Indian Penal Code and has armed it with the easiest weapon for cracking protest.

Other provisions like using the evidences intercepted from private conversations will continue to be used as evidences in the UAA. Given that, S.A.R Geelani almost got sent to the gallows (in the Parliament attack case) by such evidence, which turned out to be terribly concocted, is enough evidence of what is going to come in UAA. Already there has been series of violations using such acts. For example, the Gangster Act is a favourite in Eastern U.P. for disposing of activists posing problems to a state serving the interests of the rich. Kranti Kumar Singh, a student activist of AISA in Lucknow, who went to live amidst the rural poor and organize them in the *poorvanchal* is today in jail under this very Act. The indication is clear, the POTA boosted UAA is not meant to keep away any criminal or gangster because the POTA charged Raja Bhaiyas will have their cases withdrawn and they will even get elevated to minister-ship but the newly powered UAA and other such Acts will be sufficient to keep the Kranti Kumar Singhs inside jail.

The UPA government has used the mandate of democratic voices that fell in its favour against laws like POTA, too much for granted. It must know from the civil disobedience in Manipur, against the mother of all black laws the AFSPA, is a sign of what people who have been pushed too far can do.

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We welcome analysis, discussions and short write-ups about the various struggles, processes and issues. Please send the matter (not exceeding 800 words) either by email or post.

Editor

Control Over Water

Arvind Susarla

Erik Swyngedouw. 2004. Social Power and the Urbanization of Water: Flows of Power. New York: Oxford University Press.

Worldwide, in urban areas, water problems are acute, contentious among the various stakeholders, and hence adversely affecting the social fabric. Solutions to water problems have eluded most societies thus far. This in part may be due to the analytical frameworks that are applied to identify, assess, and address the problem. This book seeks to offer fresh insights to water problems by analysing from a political ecological perspective. How societies may mend rips in the social fabric that are connected to water problems is also the thrust of this book. In addressing water problems of an urban city, spotlight is cast on the roles and interactions of the social, political, and ecological processes. Specifically, this book is a detailed discussion on “flows of water” in Guayaquil, Ecuador.

Guayaquil is Ecuador’s largest town with two million inhabitants. An estimated 600,000 residents of Guayaquil do not have direct access to potable water, and private vendors meet their water requirements. Residents that depend on private vendors to buy water are mostly poor, living in squatter settlements amidst problems of transportation and high crime. Water is sold at a high price, that is, relatively a large proportion of their household’s income is spent on buying water. There are frequent skirmishes between vendors and residents of the city. This in part is due to the fact that private vendors buy water at a highly subsidized price from the publicly owned municipal water company before selling it to citizenry. Water vendors are both essential for their survival and considered to be thieves and crooks by many of the buyers of water. Water shortages were unheard of until recently in Guayaquil. How might we understand outcomes, such as the one in Guayaquil remains puzzling?

After detailing water problem in Guayaquil, the author discusses results of his investigations that are spread over seven chapters. He removes layers over the

problem to reveal the social, political, and economic processes that have shaped and re-shaped flows of water in an urban area. In other words, the water problem is examined from the vantage point of political ecology perspective. Political ecology approach is distinct in the sense that there is a serious engagement with both the biophysical as well as social worlds. Environment (or in this case water) is not simply an arena in which struggles over resource access and control take place. But biophysical processes play an active role in shaping nature-society dynamics. Furthermore, there are vast differences in biophysical and social characteristics that are associated with the environments of varied places; hence selecting a case study was most appropriate to this investigation.

Early studies of political ecology have been in the settings of third world countries by asking how global capitalism and state policies influence nature-society relations at various scales? In subsequent political ecology investigations attention was devoted to how political processes and power inequalities shape the nature-society relations? Drawing upon this knowledge on political ecology, the author of this book suggests that power, money, and water nexus is a conceptual triad that reveals to analysts political economy of the urban fabric and the functioning of mechanisms of domination and sub-ordination within the urban arena. The book is a description or a story on flow of liquid power.

The book consists of three parts. The first of the three parts is titled “Flows of Power: Nature, Power, and the City” and provides conceptual foundation and details of the theoretical anchor for the entire research work.

In second part of the book a detailed treatment on how political-ecological processes incorporate and generate scaled spaces of interaction is shown. There are five chapters that together constitute the second part of the book. The initial two chapters provide for the time periods 1880-1945 and 1945-2000 a historical account of the forces that shaped flow of water in Guayaquil. At first, water flows were shown to be closely

Continued on inside back cover

Gramdan Act

Five senior Sarvodaya activists of Maharashtra undertook an indefinite fast for the implementation of Gramdan Law on 1st August, on the birth anniversary of Lokmanya Tilak. They included like Govindrao Shinde, Secretary, Gramdan Samiti; R.B. Bhuskute; Dr Shivcharan Thakur; Adv. Ram Singh Rajput, Vice-President, Maharashtra Gramdan Samiti and MT Khairnar, President, Maharashtra Sarvodaya Mandal, Thane.

The Gramdan Law was passed in Maharashtra in 1964 after the Gramdan and Bhudan movement of Vinoba Bhave. According to this Act, the land becomes the property of the village mandal and no outsider (including the state) can purchase the land or takeaway any natural resource of the village without the prior permission of Gram Mandal. Maharashtra Government was not implementing the Act for the past 15 year and Gram Mandals had not been created.

The fast was withdrawn on the second day after the formation of Gramdan Mandal under the Chairmanship of Jst. C. Dharmadhikari. The Mandal comprises of 9 members.

Peace Yatra

Former finance minister, Madhu Dandvate flagged off a nationwide Shanti Sadbhav Yatra (tour for Equality and Harmony) on 9th August, commemorating the 1942 August Kranti. The Yatra conducted on the occasion of the birth centenary celebration of Yusuf Meherally will

cover 10 states and conclude on 11th October, on the birth anniversary of Jay Prakash Narayan. Dr. K R Narayanan, the former President of India would deliver Yusuf Meherally memorial lecture on 23rd September at New Delhi on the occasion of his 100th birth anniversary.

Magsaysay Award to L.Ramdas, I.A. Rehman

Former Indian Navy chief Admiral (retired) L Ramdas is among the winners of the Ramon Magsaysay award. He is the chairperson of the India chapter of Pakistan-India People Forum. Sharing the award with Ramdas is I. A. Rehman, a Pakistani journalist and human rights advocate. Pakistan-India Peoples Forum for Peace and Democracy (PIPPFD) helps build popular support for peace between the two neighbours. Magsaysay award is Asia's equivalent of the Nobel Prize.

Awarded

Anand Patwardhan's *War and Peace* has won the National Film Award this year for best non-feature film. The award comes at a time when over 300 documentary filmmakers from around the country are fighting for freedom from censorship for documentary films. *War and Peace* attacks the nuclear tests conducted by both Pakistan and India. The Censor Board banned it in 2002 but the ban was lifted in 2003 after Patwardhan approached the court.

Mumbai Supports Manipur Struggle

Number of people, representing different organisations in Mumbai

expressed their solidarity with the people struggling in Manipur and demanded the repealing of Armed Forces Special Powers Act on August 24.

Next day a public meeting also was organised on the same issue. Adv. Nandita Haksar, Atrex Shimrey, NESO (Assam) and other human rights activists addressed the gathering. The meeting was co-organised by NAPM, India Centre for Human Rights and other organisations.

Attack on scribes flayed

Political activists, representatives of different organisations, journalists, cine artists included, large number of people gathered at the protest against the attack on senior journalists Nikhil Wagle, Sajid Rashid and Yuvraj Mohite of Mahanagar in Mumbai on August 30. Sajid Rashid was attacked by Muslim fundamentalists for his stand against triple talaq, while Shiv Sena goons attacked Nikhil and Yuvraj for their alleged remarks against the goondalism of Shiv Sainiks. The protesters termed the attacks as fascist and against freedom of speech. They demanded the arrest of the culprits.

Organisations Reject World Bank CAS

In a National Consultation held in Delhi on August 7, 2004, several civil society organisations in India including major national alliances on mining, forestry and dams and hydropower rejected the World Bank's Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) 2004.

They accused World Bank of inadequate consultation process and lack of transparency and trying to impose conditionally reform and privatisation of key sectors and deliberately ignoring the electoral rejection of its policies.

The CAS talks of resuming support for large hydro projects in India after a gap of more than 10 years without explaining what prompts it to do so ever since the Bank withdrew from Sardar Sarovar.

The Consultation demanded that the World Bank unilaterally withdraw the draft CAS 2004 and re-engage in extensive consultations with the civil society, the project affected during the next six months with translated copies of the CAS being disseminated within the country and reiterated that the CAS could only be finalised after being presented in the Indian Parliament.

News from Narmada

Submergence

Water level reached an all time high of 117 mts at the Sardar Sarovar dam site this monsoon and submerged hundreds of houses and standing crops in Akrani and Akkalkuva talukas of Madhya Pradesh and also Alirajpur taluka of Madhya Pradesh. About 10000 families who are affected at 110 mts height are yet to get fair rehabilitation. In Maharashtra hundreds of families are yet to be declared as project affected and even those who are declared are not shifted to rehabilitation sites.

Canal Breach

The monsoon this year has exposed the faulty planning and construction

of the Narmada main canal as it was breached and broken resulting in submergence of nearby villages, causing destruction of houses and standing crops worth crores of rupees. Nearly 50 mts of canal caved in near Bhorda and Moti Uni villages due to pressure from flood water coming from the cross cutting Heran River.

On August 10, another breach occurred in the Narmada Canal near Kadi, sending water into ten villages (in Viramgam and Dholka Talukas, Ahmedabad District), and forcing the evacuation of 2000 people.

Plan to evict Kevadia colony affected villages

The first six villages who lost their land to the building of colony for workers in SSP is in the verge of being evicted again from their villages for tourism project.

The plan is to develop 1,400 hectares of land with golf course, hotels and water park and make it an excellent location for recreational and leisure activities for tourists.

The above said villages were given Rs 50 –250 per acre in 1962 when the land was forcefully acquired. The affected adivasis are demanding the status of project-affected families and to be compensated with land as per the Narmada Tribunal Award.

Convention on employment guarantee

A one-day convention on “employment guarantee and the right to work” will be held in Delhi on 19 September 2004. All organisations committed to the right to work are invited to participate.

This event is a follow-up of the recent convention on the right to food and work, held in Bhopal on 11-13 June. The aim of the convention is to consolidate the growing momentum for the immediate adoption of an Employment Guarantee Act (EGA), and to discuss the essential features of an acceptable EGA. Other aspects of the right to work, such as social security for unorganised workers, are also on the agenda.

The convention is part of a series of events and activities planned in preparation of a nation-wide “day of action for the right to work” on 16 October, another offshoot of the Bhopal convention.

The venue is likely to be either Constitution Club or the Indian Social Institute. For confirmation please check www.righttofoodindia.org closer to the event.

Remembering Lee Kyung Hae

September 10th is the first death anniversary of Lee Kyung Hae, who self-immolated himself at the barricades during the WTO ministerial.

6th to 12th September has been designated as a week of action to commemorate Lee and to struggle against liberalization of rice and for food sovereignty by Korean People’s Action against FTA & WTO (KoPA). The week of action will finish on 12th, with a cultural festival to commemorate Lee and resolve further struggle against WTO and neoliberal free trade.

For more details:
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associated with production and sale of cocoa. In subsequent time-period, bananas and oil trading shaped flow of water in the city. Through the examination of the history of water flows in the city, the author illustrates that there was a necessity to control and harness water flow into and around the city.

To organize, and to control production, transportation, and distribution of urban water in Guayaquil a massive effort was in place. Consequently, “Water Mandarins” emerged in this city. A myriad mix of socio-economic and political-ecological processes come together to explain development or manufacture of water distribution system. Hence, analyses in the chapters highlight the relationship between “water mandarins” and external funding agencies (such as the World Bank), national government, and the local and recently privatised company. An entire chapter is devoted to reveal the relationship between the water company and the private vendors that supply water in the suburban areas by means of tankers. In the final chapter of the part II of the book, tussle that the water company, private vendors, and the local communities engage to gain water have been documented. Money, informal struggles, political clientelist, and “water violence,” all play an active role in the quest for control over water.

*(Arvind Susarla is Director, Jeanne Kasperon Research Library, Clark University, Ma, USA.
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In the third part and final chapter of the book, based on the evidence marshalled in this case, alternatives that may be helpful for future decisions have been noted. The suggested alternatives are different from previous proposals in the sense that the author alerts to the need for fulfilling both (i) increased equitable water supply and distribution to the residents of the city, and (ii) providing greater say to local residents in the right to the water.

This book has been sprinkled with useful figures, tables, maps and cartoons, which are well woven with the text and assist in capturing the information concisely. Written lucidly the book will be helpful for students in the discipline of geography and closely related disciplines. However, lay readers may find the case study to be rich in details with valuable insights.

In sum, a critical message that this book seeks to convey to its readers is captured succinctly by the author: “the question of urban sustainability is not just about achieving sound ecological and environmental conditions, but first and foremost about a social struggle for access and control; a struggle not just for the right to water, but to the right to the city itself.” To this end, this book provides compelling evidence that is grounded in a case study.

National Convention on Right to Information

The Second National Convention on the People's Right to Information, to be held in New Delhi, from October 8-10, 2004. The first National RTI Convention was held in Bewar, Rajasthan, in 1997.

The Second National Convention will commence on October 8, 2004 (Friday) with a National Public Hearing on the issue of the Public Distribution System (PDS), which you will agree is a burning issue. The second and third day (Oct. 9-10) will comprise of 2-3 plenary sessions where issues of common interest will be discussed..

The NCPRI is raising funds in order to enable larger participation of interested people from all over the country. A nominal registration fee of Rs. 100/- per participant will be charged which will cover basic accommodation (from 8th-10th) and food (from 8th night – 10th evening). Participants will have to bear their own travel costs.

For more details: Sowmya <mkssrajasthan@yahoo.co.uk>

Oh Earth, wait for me

Pablo Neruda

Turn me oh sun
towards my native destiny,
rain from the ancient forest,
return to me the fragrance and the swords
that fall from the sky,
the solitary peace of field and rock,
the moisture at the margins of the river,
the scent of the larch,
the wind, alive like a heart
beating among the remote flock
of the great araucaria.

Earth, return to me your pure gifts
the towers of silence that rose
from the solemnity of their roots:
I want to return to being what I have not been,
learn to return from such depths
that amongst all the things of nature
I could live or not live: no matter
to be one more stone, the dark stone,
the pure stone that is carried by the river.

This is the birth centenary year of Neftali Ricardo Reyes Basoalto (1904-1973) known to the world as Pablo Neruda, Chilean poet and political activist. His first collections of poems, written at a very young age, won him acclaim in Chilean literary circles and form a part of popular lore in Latin America. He participated in the anti-fascist struggle during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and was a trade union activist, as a member of the Communist Party in organising mine workers.

He was conferred the Nobel Prize for literature in 1971. He breathed his last on September 23, 1973.