SUBALTERNITY, STATE-FORMATION AND MOVEMENTS AGAINST HYDROPOWER PROJECTS IN INDIA, 1920-2004

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A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE
2014
DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and it has been written by me in its entirety. I have duly acknowledged all the sources of information, which have been used in this thesis. This thesis has also not been submitted for any degree in any university previously.

Signature:  [signature]

Date:  29.04.2014
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In the course of writing my doctoral dissertation I have received countless benefits, both direct and indirect, from several people, organizations and institutions. Naming each and every one of them will not probably be possible in this brief acknowledgement.

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<tr>
<td>CASAD</td>
<td>Centre for Applied System Analysis in Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMO</td>
<td>Chief Minister’s Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPI</td>
<td>Communist Party of India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPI-M</td>
<td>Communist Party of India, Marxist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPI-ML</td>
<td>Communist Party of India, Marxist-Leninist</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>DVC</td>
<td>Damodar Valley Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>E &amp; SIA</td>
<td>Environmental and Social Impact Assessment</td>
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<td>EIA</td>
<td>Environmental Impact Assessment</td>
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<td>FMG</td>
<td>Five-Member Group</td>
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<td>FRL</td>
<td>Full Reservoir Level</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Development Product</td>
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<td>GoG</td>
<td>Government of Gujarat</td>
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<tr>
<td>GoI</td>
<td>Government of India</td>
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<td>GoM</td>
<td>Government of Maharashtra</td>
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<td>GRA</td>
<td>Grievance Redressal Authority</td>
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<td>GSS</td>
<td><em>Gram Sewa Samiti</em> (Village Volunteers’ Committee)</td>
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<td>HKACSF</td>
<td><em>Hutatma Kisan Ahir Co-operative Sugar Factory</em></td>
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<td>HYV</td>
<td>High Yielding Variety</td>
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<td>IBRD</td>
<td>International Bank of Reconstruction and Development</td>
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<td>ICOLD</td>
<td>International Commission on Large Dams</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICID</td>
<td>International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDA</td>
<td>International Development Agency</td>
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<td>INC</td>
<td>Indian National Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>INTUC</td>
<td>Indian National Trade Union Congress</td>
</tr>
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<td>IRN</td>
<td>International River Network</td>
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<td>ISI</td>
<td>Import Substituted Industrialisation</td>
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<td>IUCN</td>
<td>World Bank/ World Conservation Union</td>
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<td>IWG</td>
<td>interim working group’</td>
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<td>KMCS</td>
<td><em>Khedoot Mazdoor Chetna Sangath</em> (Peasants’ and Workers’ Consciousness Union)</td>
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<td>KTAMS</td>
<td><em>Khanapur Taluka Akaal Nirmulan Samiti</em> (Khanapur Taluka Drought Eradication Committee).</td>
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<td>LAA</td>
<td>Land Acquisition Act of 1894</td>
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<td>LNP</td>
<td><em>Lal Nishan Paksha</em> (Red Flag Party),</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAF</td>
<td>Million Acre Feet</td>
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<td>MBA</td>
<td><em>Mitti Bachao Abhiyan</em> (Save the Soil Campaign)</td>
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<td>MDVPSP</td>
<td><em>Maharashtra Dharangrasta Va Prakalpagrasta Shetkari Parishad</em> (Maharashtra State Project and Dam Affected Organization)</td>
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<td>MEGS</td>
<td>Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme</td>
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<td>MKVDC</td>
<td>Maharashtra Krishna Valley Development Corporation</td>
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<td>MLAs</td>
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<td>MoEF</td>
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<td>MoU</td>
<td>Memorandum of Understanding</td>
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<td>MPs</td>
<td>Members of Parliament</td>
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<td>MP</td>
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<td>MPRVP</td>
<td>Multipurpose River Valley projects</td>
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<td>MRDPSP</td>
<td><em>Maharashtra Rajya Dharangrasta Va Prakalpagrasta Shetkari Parishad</em> (Maharashtra Organisation of Dam-Affected and Project-Affected Farmers</td>
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<td>MSC</td>
<td><em>Muki Sangharsh Chalval</em> (Movement and struggle for liberation)</td>
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<td>NASS</td>
<td><em>Narmada Asargrasta Sangharsh Samiti</em></td>
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<td><em>Narmada Bachao Andolan</em> (Save Narmada Movements)</td>
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<td>NBSS</td>
<td><em>Nimar Bachao Sangharsh Samiti</em> (Save Nimar Action Committee)</td>
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<td>NCA</td>
<td>Narmada Control Authority</td>
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<td>NDS</td>
<td><em>Narmada Dharangrasta Samiti</em> (Narmada Dam Affected Organisation)</td>
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<td><em>Narmada Ghati Navnirman Samiti</em></td>
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<td>NVDP</td>
<td>Narmada Valley Development Project</td>
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<td>NWDTA</td>
<td>Narmada Water Dispute Tribunal Award</td>
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<td>OBC</td>
<td>Other Backward Caste</td>
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<td>OED</td>
<td>Operation and Evaluation Department</td>
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<td>PESA</td>
<td>Panchayat Extension of Scheduled Area</td>
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<td>PIL</td>
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<td>participatory resource mapping</td>
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<td>SMD</td>
<td><em>Shramik Mukti Dal</em> (Labour Liberation Party).</td>
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<td>SKSS</td>
<td><em>Shetmajoor Kashtakari Shetkari Sangathana</em> (Organisation of Toiling Peasants and Landless Labourers)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOPPECOM</td>
<td>Society for Promoting Participative Eco-system Management</td>
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<td>SSP</td>
<td>Sardar Sarovar Project</td>
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<td>TANs</td>
<td>Transnational Advocacy Networks</td>
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<td>TMC</td>
<td>thousand million cubic feet</td>
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<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<td>Campaign</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adivasis</td>
<td>Indigenous people</td>
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<td>Ahimsa</td>
<td>Non-violence</td>
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<td>Akhil</td>
<td>Universal</td>
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<td>Andolan</td>
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<td>Setaria Italia Beauv; fox-tail millet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bahujan</td>
<td>The people who are not elites</td>
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<td>Bajra</td>
<td>Sorghum</td>
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<td>Bandh Samachar</td>
<td>Dam News</td>
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<td>Bhajans</td>
<td>Devotional songs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bhoomi Samarupan</td>
<td>Levelling of land</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chakbandi</td>
<td>To measure and consolidate landholdings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chana</td>
<td>Cicer Arietinum; chickpeas</td>
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<td>Chaula</td>
<td>Vigna Unguiculata; cowpea</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chavni Andolan</td>
<td>Occupying sites with cattle</td>
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<td>Chulha Bandhs</td>
<td>Collective fasts</td>
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<td>Dal</td>
<td>Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dalhan</td>
<td>Pulses</td>
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<td>Dalits</td>
<td>Untouchables</td>
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Dan
Charity

Dev-Devani
Gods and demons

Dharma
Moral force

Dharna
Method of sit-in protest

Dnyakosha office
Marathi Encyclopaedia Office

Doobenge,

par hatenge nahin!
We will drown, but we will not move! (slogan)

Dumkha
Hibiscus Saffradifa

Gehu
Wheat

Gherao
Surround

Ghulamgiri
Slavery

Gram Panchayats
Local village governance, decentralised unit of Village Governance under Indian Democracy

Hutatma
Martyr

Ida Pida Javo,

Balika Rajya Yevo
Let troubles and sorrows go
and the kingdom of Bali come (proverb)

Juwar
Pearl millet

Jal
Water

Jungle
Forest

Keeda-Mungi
Ants and insects

Kultha
Macrotyloma biflora

Karkhana
Industry

Ma-Bap’ Sarkar
Depicting a relation between the subalterns and the parental and paternalistic state

Magova
Review
**Mahua**  Madhuka Longifolia; a type of flower for brewing liqor

**Mali**  Gardener

**Mama**  Maternal uncle

**Manav Adhikar Yatra**  Human Rights March

**Mandirs**  Hindu temples

**Martya**  Earth

**Morcha**  Participants

**Narmada Ke Kachar Ke**

**Suvarna Mati ko Daldal**  Please save the golden soil of Narmada Valley from turning into mud (booklet)

**Hone se Bachaiye**

**Naach Gana Bandh Karo,**

**Akaal Sambandhi**

**Kaam Karo**  Stop singing and dancing, solve the problems of Drought (slogan)

**Nevad**  Encroached Cultivation

**Niti**  Policy or strategic politics

**Padayatra**  Long march

**Panch**  member of Gram Panchayat

**Panchayat**  Decentralised governance at the taluka level

**Pani Ki Jail Me Band Gaon**  Villages trapped in jails of water

**Parishad**  Collectorate

**Pataal**  Underground

**Pathshala**  Village school

**Pehla Punarvasan,**

**Phir Dharan**  First rehabilitation, then the dam (slogan)
**Phad**
A block of land where a single crop usually irrigated is grown.

**Prati Sarkar**
Parallel government

**Rajya**
Kingdom

**Rakshasha**
Demon

**Rasta Roko**
Road block

**Sabhas**
Meetings

**Sama Satyagraha**
Non-violent Satyagraha

**Samaj**
Society

**Samarpit**
Dedicated

**Samatalikaran**
Levelling land

**Samvad Yatra**
Dialogue March

**Samyukta**
United

**San**
Crotalaria Juncea; sun hemp

**Sangharsh Gaon**
Village of struggle

**Sannata**
Silence

**Saokars**
Moneylenders

**Satyagraha**
Truth-seekers’ protest

**Satyashodhak**
Truth-seekers’ movement

**Senapati**
Commander in Chief

**Shashan Walon Sunlo Aaj,**

**Smriti Dharan**
Memorial Dam

**Humare Gaon Me**

**Hamara Raaj**
Rulers! Hear our proclamation, in our village we will Rule (slogan).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>Shetji-Bhatji</em></td>
<td>Moneylenders and the Brahmins</td>
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<td><em>Shetkaryacha Asud</em></td>
<td>cultivators’ whipcord</td>
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<td><em>Shiv Sena</em></td>
<td>Army of Shiva (name of a local political party)</td>
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<td><em>Shramdan</em></td>
<td>Voluntary labour</td>
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<td><em>Shudhha Satyagraha</em></td>
<td><em>Satyagraha</em> with violence</td>
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<td><em>Smriti Dharan</em></td>
<td>Memorial Dam</td>
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<td><em>Swaraj</em></td>
<td>Self-rule</td>
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<td><em>Swarga</em></td>
<td>Heaven</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Taluka</em></td>
<td>Administrative divisions in Maharashtra that are one level lower than districts. Several <em>talukas</em> form a district.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Tapu</em></td>
<td>Secluded islands</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Thiyya Andolan</em></td>
<td>Extended sit-in struggle</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Tilhan</em></td>
<td>Sesame oil seeds</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Tut te sapne</em></td>
<td>Breaking dreams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Tuvari</em></td>
<td>Cajanus Cajan; type of pulse</td>
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<td><em>Urdi</em></td>
<td>Phaseolus Mungo; type of pulse</td>
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<td><em>Vaman</em></td>
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<td><em>Zameen</em></td>
<td>Land</td>
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<td><em>Zameen ka Patta</em></td>
<td>Document of registered land</td>
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<td><em>Zilla</em></td>
<td>District</td>
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</table>
Summary

In this thesis I compare the social history of movements against hydropower projects in two states of India, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, from 1921 to 2004 in three phases. The specific aim of this project is to demonstrate the shifting notion of subaltern political subjectivity and ‘state-formation’ in postcolonial India. Here I argue that the subalterns played significant causal and constitutive roles in transforming the structure of postcolonial Indian state in a more democratic direction and in that process considerably changed their political discourses, practices and strategies. The two extended historical cases of movement against large dams illustrated in this thesis mark the different types of subaltern politics that emerged in postcolonial India.

The state of Maharashtra encompasses the largest number of large dams built in India. Consequently it also has the longest history of resistance against large dams in India and throughout the world, since 1921 to the present. The first instance of resistance was led by Senapati Bapat, a veteran freedom fighter, against the Mulshi Dam in the year 1921. Incidentally this is the first known anti-dam movement organised by the project affected persons. However for various reasons this movement failed.

From 1980’s onwards the movement of the project affected people in Maharashtra started succeeding in fulfilling their material demands led by the group Shramik Mukti Dal (SMD; Labour Liberation Party). Here the movement trajectory was strategically localized and oriented towards the politics of the sub-national state. This movement hugely succeeded in forcing the state of Maharashtra to pass the first law for the rehabilitation of the project affected people.

Whereas, though the state of Madhya Pradesh encompasses the second largest number of large dams in India, movements against large dams emerged here much later in 1980’s. It was
mainly the leadership of *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (Save Narmada movement) which mobilized the peasants and tribes here and generated support from many NGOs and a section of the Indian middle class. Though this movement failed in terms of fulfillment of its material demands, which was largely ignored by the Indian state, they captured ‘global imagination’. They immensely succeeded in creating a paradigm shift in building of large dams and were instrumental in the formation of the World Commission of Dams (WCD). Therefore their movement can be easily considered an ideational success story.

I analyse these two contrasting cases with concepts mainly drawn from literature on state-society relations, subaltern and postcolonial studies, political economy and development studies.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

In 1980’s, a number of movements around the issues of hydropower projects emerged throughout the developing world in Africa (Weist 1995), Brazil (McCormick 2007), Thailand (Oo Lin 2006), India (Dwivedi 2006) and many other countries. These movements were mainly fought around the issues of just rehabilitation, proper acquisition of land, loss of common property rights, loss of life, health, livelihood, adverse effects of these dams on women and children as vulnerable populations and disintegration of cultural landscape of indigenous and subsistence oriented communities. These movements were mainly fought by the subaltern communities of tribes and peasants throughout the world. These were not only movements against dams but they question the very model of capitalist ‘development’ imposed by the state and international funding organisations on various vulnerable societies, which disenfranchised them from their rights of life, livelihood and lifeworld (Nguyen 1996).

The dam movements that emerged in India became the most well known of its kinds all over the world. I place my thesis in this global context of ubiquitous movements against hydropower projects to observe and analyse the friction that the subaltern communities have with the state and international donor agencies such as World Bank, and the resultant politics that emerge out of that. The motif is to understand the conflictual interaction of the subalterns with these elite organizations and institutions and their mutual effect on each other. Though two of my case studies are within India, in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, it reflects a global trend of subaltern and state interaction at many levels.
There have been many struggles waged around the issues of hydropower projects in India. Particularly, the states of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh have a long tradition of waging these movements.

In Maharashtra, which encompasses the largest number of hydropower projects in India, these movements started early in 1921, during the colonial period. After Independence, there was a situation of disarray till 1960, but these movements gained slow momentum after that. The number and tenor of these movements became especially high after 1980’s, when the state of Maharashtra ordered the construction of vast numbers of large dams. Many of these movements came together under the federal body of *Maharashtra Dharangrasta Va Prakalpagrasta Shetkari Parishad* (MDVPSP; Maharashtra State Project and Dam Affected Organization) initially and later under the banner *Shramik Mukthi Dal* (SMD; Labour Liberation Party) to lodge an intense struggle against the massive displacement that these projects entailed. Their pressing demands resulted into the formation of Maharashtra Resettlement and Rehabilitation Act in the year 1976, the first of its kind in India. These movements also achieved great success in foregrounding the issues of equity in water distribution, through their innovative campaign on ‘property rights in water’. Moreover, they were the first to design smaller hydropower projects which reduced reservoir submergence area drastically. Through their new strategies of mobilization, they created a united ‘counter-hegemonic’ front by mobilizing the people affected by hydropower projects and the people from the drought prone regions of Maharashtra. These movements were framed in terms of local cultural aspects, where mainly the peasant cultivators were mobilized. They localised Marxism and ‘hybridized’ it with an eclectic brew of ideas and ideologies drawn from popular leaders, such as Jyoti Rao Phule and Baba Saheb Ambedkar.
However, the globally renowned case of anti-dam movements took place in the state of Madhya Pradesh, which encompasses the second largest number of hydropower projects in India. Interestingly, though the state of Madhya Pradesh shares its border with Maharashtra, the movement against large dams emerged here much later in the 1980’s. It was led by the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (Save Narmada movement), which mobilized the peasants and tribes in Madhya Pradesh, mainly against the construction of the Sardar Sarovar hydropower project. Through their relentless campaign, they generated support from a section of media, many national and international civil society organizations and a section of the Indian middle class.

They also captured the global imagination successfully. They were greatly efficacious in creating a paradigm shift in the construction of dams, forced the World Bank to revoke its fund from Narmada Valley Development Project and were instrumental in the formation of the World Commission of Dams (WCD), an independent technical review body (Khagram 2004) for assessing Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (E & SIA) of dams. They framed their movements in terms of ‘neo-Gandhian’ repertoires and the cultural rights of the tribes and indigenous people, who were the main participants of these movements.

These two movements achieved two different kinds of successes within nearly a similar temporal phase, after 1980. They took two different trajectories of mobilization, which resulted into two dissimilar outcomes. Though these two movements operated in an overlapping temporal phase and in a contiguous geographical location, they intriguingly remained strategically oblivious to each other’s influence. They never attempted to form any alliance. Instead, they occasionally engaged in critical debates in popular media, admonishing each other on various political issues. At times these debates went acerbic.
This thesis analyses why and how these two movements charted different trajectories and links it causally to the changes in subaltern political subjectivity and state transformation.

In the next section I present my central argument.

**Central Argument**

I draw from subaltern studies historiography and simultaneously criticize it constructively along with theories of postcolonial development, to forward a novel conceptual framework to explain my cases. I criticize the subaltern studies school for claiming an exclusive and culturally ‘autonomous’ domain of the subalterns, thus neglecting their interaction with the state political economy and their resultant role in state-formation. I argue that in the last eighty years of late colonial and postcolonial state formation in India, the subalterns have played significant causal and constitutive roles, and in that process their ‘subaltern political subjectivity’ (or subalternity) transformed in two phases. Therefore this thesis is a ‘double genealogy’ of the transformation of the state and ‘subalternity’ in causal and constitutive relations with each other.

In the context of Mulshi Satyagraha, that is, the first movement against hydropower projects in 1920’s the subaltern gained ‘counterpublicity’ in the civil society of Maharashtra and that was the first phase of transition of their political subjectivity. The next phase of transition occurred under the late postcolonial state in India in 1980’s where two types of ‘subalternity’ emerged in the context of movements against hydropower projects in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. A more centripetal and state-centric political discourses and practices, which I call ‘Subaltern Localism’, led by the *Shramik Multi Dal* (Labour Liberation Party) emerged in Maharashtra. Whereas a centrifugal, state-resisting and state-evading political discourses and practices, which
I call ‘Subaltern Cosmopolitanism’, led by the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (Save Narmada Movements) emerged in Madhya Pradesh.

Both these politics compelled the state and the “global civil society” (Kaldor 2003) to pass new resolutions, programmes, policies and laws to empower and safeguard the interests of the dam displaced people and consequently transformed various entrenched hegemonic norms, institutions and organisations.

In the next section I introduce the state of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh briefly.

**Introducing the ‘Field’**

*The state of Maharashtra*

The state of Maharashtra situated in the western part of India was created on 1st May 1960 when by the state reorganization act of 1956, the Indian government split the Bombay Presidency into two states- Maharashtra and Gujarat (Kamat, 1980). It is the third largest and second most populous state in India. It is the wealthiest state in India contributing 13.3 per cent of India’s Gross Development Product (GDP). The official language of the state is Marathi. There was a language based *Samyukta Maharashtra* (unified Maharashtra) movement that led to the formation of the state in 1960’s. The caste structure of Maharashtra society is made of Maratha-Kunbi, Brahmins and many other Backward Castes, Scheduled tribes and Scheduled castes. Maharashtra is a caste centric society; there is an inherent tension between the upper and lower castes in Maharashtra running historically. After the 1980’s, the Maratha-Kunbi caste cluster (Karve 1968) has emerged as politically powerful.

The Indian State of Maharashtra is divided into 5 regions and 6 divisions under which comes 35 Districts. The Pune division consists of 5 districts, they are -Sangli, Satara, Pune, Sholapur and
Kolhapur. Historically this particular area has been the hub of most famous movements against hydropower projects in Maharashtra. Here other than Kolhapur all the rest of the districts come in the list of identified drought prone districts in the country. The upper Krishna sub-basin river system drains this division largely. My fieldwork spans in all the five districts of this division.

With large drought affected agricultural tracts that Maharashtra has, it is not surprising that this state also has the largest number of large dams in India, that is, 1529 out of 4291 (Mahagovid: GOM 2006). The state has accomplished about 25 projects on an average per year from 1951-94. Similarly, the state also has a live storage capacity of 26.20 cubic km from the completed projects, which is the highest capacity, created among all the states in the country (Deshpande & Narayanmurthy: 2001). In Maharashtra agriculture is mainly rain fed and accounts for 80 percent of employment in the state. Of the net sown area in Maharashtra 60 percent is in drought-prone districts (Guha: 1987).

The Deccan plateau covers most of rural Maharashtra; the western Deccan is a semi arid region with an average rainfall of approximately 20 inches (D’Souza:2006). Naturally there has always been plans and programmes formulated to develop the existing river basins in Maharashtra, to utilise their potential by creating dams and reservoirs. Maharashtra has five major river basins in addition to the westward flowing rivers in Konkan region. These are Krishna, Bhima, Godavari, Vainganga and Tapi. Major water availability comes from Krishna (including Bhima), Wainganga and Godavari river basins. Among the basins, the development of the sources of irrigation has not been uniform. In the recent past, massive efforts were being made to utilise the available water from Krishna basin. The Krishna, which is the third longest river in India and forms the fourth largest drainage basins, is the main source of water in
Maharashtra (D’Souza:2006). Despite these large water basins Maharashtra has large number of water-scarce regions.

Traditionally the social response to periodic water scarcity in Maharashtra was to construct irrigation wells and *Phad*¹ System Bandharas² along the rivers and streams for drought mitigation. However during the colonial period there was a major shift away in traditional irrigation systems, favouring centralised large dams with large scale canal based structures. These were constructed to support the production of export crops such as Sugarcane, Indigo, Cotton and Wheat (Gulati: 1987). Colonial administration also developed water infrastructure mainly for protection against floods, droughts and famines but these water was largely diverted for Sugarcane cultivation, which is an extremely water intensive crop. Despite this, the government in the pre-independence period of 1930s gave leverage to industrial sugarcane development with the construction of the Deccan canal and the establishment of the first sugarcane factory in Krishna valley in 1932 (Wallach 1985; Bolding, Mollinga Van Straaten 1995).

In the post Independence period the irrigation department of Maharashtra has continued to invest heavily in water for sugarcane development through construction of dams such as Koyna, Dom and Ujani. From 1951, through 1970s green revolution to 1980s more and more land has gone to cane cultivation which has neglected the local millet subsistence production such as *Jowar* and *Bajra* (Phadke R: 2002). These agricultural policies of the colonial and postcolonial period- on the one hand gave rise to a rich class of peasants in Maharashtra, in the

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¹ *Phad* refers to a block of land where a single crop usually irrigated is grown. The command of a *bandhara* was usually divided into three or four such blocks called *Phad*. Each *Phad* grew only one crop. A rotation system ensured that a particular crop is grown on after 3-4 years. The whole irrigation system was entirely managed by farmers and there was no interference from the government until 1964 when many of the *bandharas* was taken over by the state irrigation department (Sane & Joglekar:.2008 eds. K.J.Joy et al)

² Earthen Dams.
form of Sugarcane and Cotton farmers (Omvedt: 1980, Kamat: 1980) who being only 2 percent of the population use 70 percent of the water resource (Sainath: 1996), as the beneficiaries of the large dams. On the other hand there is a large peasant-labor, subaltern population who are the negative stakeholders of these dams. They are either the dam affected or the drought affected, demanding either just rehabilitation or just distribution of water, or both. The typical strategic response from the state is to pit their interest against each other and divide the subaltern population so that water can be appropriated and sold to the ‘propertied classes’ (Omvedt: 1987). These are the conditions that gave rise to a number of movements against hydropower projects mainly lodged by the affected subaltern populations (such as peasants, landless labourers, adivasis and so on) in this upper Krishna sub-basin region (mainly Pune division) of Maharashtra.

Figure 1.1: Political Map of Maharashtra. Source:

The State of Madhya Pradesh

The state of Madhya Pradesh is located in central India. Its capital city is in Bhopal. The state was reorganized and created in 1956 by combining the erstwhile princely states of Madhya Bharat, Vindhya Pradesh and Bhopal. It is one of the least developed states in India with a HDI of 0.375 and a nominal GDP that is fourth lowest in the country. The official language spoken here is Hindi. The state is rich in mineral resources and more than 30 per cent of its areas are covered by forests which are the denizen of hundreds of tribal communities who form per cent of the population here. Madhya Pradesh has 50 districts grouped in 10 divisions. It is a caste ridden society. It has a huge tribe population cut off from mainstream development who mainly resides in the hilly regions of the state.

The Bhil and Bhilala tribes are concentrated in districts like Barwani, Alirajpur, Jhabua, Khandwa and Khargone which partially form the Indore division. This area is part of the Narmada Valley that the river Narmada forms. My fieldwork is mainly concentrated in this region covering these five districts from where the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA; Save Narmada Movements) operates. I also partially cover Hoshangabad district where the first movement against the construction of Tawa hydropower projects in Madhya Pradesh i.e. Mitti Bachao Abhiyan (MBA; Save the Soil Campaign) took place. The whole of Madhya Pradesh and specially the Narmada divisions region is a caste ridden society and the main social division here is between the middle-caste propertied farmers (the Patidars) and the indigenous tribes mainly Bhils and Bhilalas.

The Narmada River flows in this region between two mountains range the Vindhyas and the Satpuras through a deep gorge and thus creating a valley known as Narmada Valley. It is the longest river in Madhya Pradesh. It starts from Amarkantak in Shahdol district of Madhya
Pradesh to flow westward covering Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Gujarat before meeting the Arabian Sea. The Narmada Valley region has fertile black soil and grows good quality wheat, pulses, chilly, and fruits.

Madhya Pradesh has the second largest number of dams in India, that is, 1093 dams out of 4291 in Madhya Pradesh. In the colonial times there were few efforts to ‘harness’ the Narmada river in Madhya Pradesh. A number of dams like Inchampalli, Bhopalpatnam, and Tawa were constructed here in the late colonial and postcolonial times. However, Madhya Pradesh has seen less number of movements against dams because of overall low political awareness and empowerment of the subaltern population.

However, in 1980’s when the Sardar Sarovar project was planned to be constructed in Gujarat, that threatened to cause huge displacement mainly in Madhya Pradesh and also in Maharashtra a massive movement against damming the Narmada River emerged in Madhya Pradesh under the banner of NBA mobilizing the subalterns population (mainly adivasi Bhil, Bhilala and the Patidar farming communities).

Thus, this thesis is a ‘posthumous analysis’ of these two cases of movements in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh with a new framework that I establish. These two intricate cases highlight the nature of transformations that the subaltern politics and the Indian state have undergone in the last eighty years as they came in ‘conflict’ with each other.

In the next section I present a critical commentary on the notion of ‘subaltern’ in subaltern studies.
A Critical Commentary on ‘Subaltern Studies’

The movements of the subalterns in postcolonial India cannot be perceived with the ‘old’ conceptual toolbox of the subaltern studies historiography. The notion subaltern ‘autonomy’ or the ‘autonomous domain’ of the subaltern politics is the most contested concept in Subaltern Studies (Alam 2002, O’ Hanlon 2000). Guha defines this ‘autonomous domain’ in complete disjuncture from elite politics, as neither originating from elite politics nor existentially dependent on that (Guha 1988). The notion ‘subaltern consciousness’ is treated as a static and unchanging category in Subaltern Studies. The idea of the subaltern domain, is derived by
essentialising the ‘subaltern consciousness’ and by locating the Causes of insurgencies internal (and not external) to that ‘cultural logics’.

However, ‘subaltern mentality’ and ‘autonomy’ is a momentous efflorescence, caused by the oppositional action of the subalterns against elite domination (Masselos 2002). The moment of rebellion is an exceptional instance in the life of subalterns. Otherwise, in a greater part of their mundane life they manage, negotiate, bypass and encounter the state through everyday politics. In that political sphere, the subaltern is subject to the power of the state (Sarkar 2000).

In Guha’s framework, the image of the subaltern was created in a manner almost equivalent to the romantic, naïve and untainted, ‘noble savage’ of Rousseau. Guha almost invokes a Hegelian ‘idealism’ in explaining peasant rebellions in colonial India, by essentialising ‘peasant consciousnesses as a ‘supra-historical’ force, devoid of its social and economic connections (Gupta 1985 Singh et. al 2002). He portrays the subaltern possessing ‘pure’ rebel consciousness that is immutable to any major transformation.

Thus, Subaltern Studies resist the notion of change in subaltern consciousness, discourses and practices. Subaltern ‘autonomy’ and their traditional mode of life, embedded in kinship, community and religion, reinforce the myth of the never changing and autarkic Indian village

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3 The later subaltern studies scholars like Dipesh Chakravarty (1989), Saurabh Dube (1998) and Kaushik Ghosh (2006) and many others have brought in different notions of subaltern political subjectivity through their historically and ethnographically rich accounts of subaltern studies. My thesis to some extent is in continuity with their work, though I have not used ethnographic methodology in my research, and have instead used comparative and historical case study method to examine changing notions of subalternity and state.

4 As O Hanlon (2000) says Gupta aptly identifies the historiographical problem of a move towards idealism. It closes a whole field of external structural interaction and determination. So the limits and the potential of any mobilization are understood in what the ‘culture allows’, rather than what the structure forecloses. That is there is a conflation of cause and reasons of any phenomena. There causes are made the phantom surrogates of reasons that reside in the logic of the subaltern consciousness.
That makes the subaltern terrain of villages an ‘exotic’ locus for ethnography and ‘village studies’ by Anthropologists. They hope to revive the subaltern community histories, through supposedly unchanged and ‘pure’ residues of cultural and material practices.

Culture obviously plays a significant role in mobilizations by creating distinct expressions and demands. But it is not a static category. Indeed cultural resistances are possible, but such resistances are not based on any ‘original’ cultural or traditional form. Rather, they are based on the renewal of the real, the mythical and the strategically positioned cultures and traditions that are fluid and change over time. There is no ‘pure rebel’ consciousness that is waiting to be excavated (Schwarz 2002:316). As Gramsci says (1982), peasant consciousness is constructed out of contingent bundles of bizarre combination. The subaltern consciousness is a bricolage (Levi-Strauss 1966) of elements drawn from both dominant and subaltern class consciousness. Through experiences of resistance and rebellion, in interaction with the state and dominant elite classes, a sort of syntheticity develops in it (Sivaramakrishnan 2002: 220-221).

As subaltern history focuses on ‘historical agency’, consequently with some intentionality⁵, Guha completely overlooked the process of ‘subaltern subject formation’ or ‘subjectivation’ of the subalterns under the centralizing state. Hence, subaltern studies does not account for any theoretical understanding of changes in subaltern politics, interaction with the state and its political economy.

It is ‘historical crises’ that shift ‘discursive fields’. The subaltern historians, in order to track the ‘cognitive transitions’ and ‘consciousness narrative’ of the subalterns, give minimal space to

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⁵Spivak says subaltern studies reverted to ‘strategic use of positivist essentialism’ to highlight the historical agency of the subalterns (Spivak: 1985: 342).
the external crisis and contingencies in their narratives. At most, historical shifts are dealt with ambiguous phrases like ‘impingement’ or ‘circumstances for unification’ (Spivak 1988).

The subaltern autonomy is a difficult proposition for another reason as well. The subalterns inhabit a relational world of ‘discourses’ and ‘institutions’, located in a universe which increasingly goes beyond their control and which they seek to subvert (Masselos 2002). As Spivak notes (1985: 333), Subaltern series accounts are accounts of failure, and failure is not the site of autonomy. Rather I argue that repeated failures can affect the subject formation of the subalterns. Such experiences can lead them towards revolutionary and violent movements, or towards strategic deployment of violence or even towards strategic restrained actions.

History shows that subalterns have occasionally entered the domain of elite political institutions, participated in them and thereby transmuted themselves. Therefore the subalterns that we see are not an ‘ideal type’, but a digression from it. Thus, the question is regarding the historicity of the structure, of the resilient subaltern consciousness and autonomy. If according to Guha, the subaltern consciousness is formed within specific historical configuration of power relations, it should change with time (Chatterjee 2010: 295). The theory needs a multi-causal narrative of subaltern history, whereby various interwoven and relational historical trajectories will explain the mutating forms of subaltern consciousness and practices vis-à-vis the state.

The history of the postcolonial Indian state formation should be understood as a continuous interaction between the subalterns and the state through ‘constituted’ and ‘constitutive’ historical processes (Roseberry 1989: 42). Many of these processes are external to the peasant consciousness. Therefore peasant consciousness rather than being autonomous and ‘supra-

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6Culture is socially constituted through activity and it is socially constitutive i.e. give a context for the action to take place (Roseberry 1989: 42).
historical’ should be considered as contingent and historical. It exists in a relational and dynamic world inhabited by people, discourses, and institutions in constant interaction with them (Chatterjee 1989:206). Therefore Subaltern Studies should be radically ‘historicized’, to trace the transformations in the domain of subaltern movements and the state.

In the course of exploration, I explain the changing terrain of subaltern politics, as well as detect the “historical shifts in the configuration of power” (Abu-Lughod, 1990). There is a need to revise subaltern studies “through parallel unpacking of subaltern culture and the process of state-making” (Shivaramakrishnan 2002: 213-245). My work in that sense is a study of how these two political domains are constituted, in its present form in postcolonial India, “through the dialectics of administrative intervention and popular resistance” (Sundar 1997: 1).

Popular culture and state-formation can only be understood in relational term (Corrigan 1975). There is a need “to bring the state back in” (Evans, Rueschemeyer and Skocpol 1985) in subaltern studies historiography to understand transformation of subaltern political subjectivity. However as famous Latin American Subaltern studies scholars Joseph and Nugent (1994: 12) say that bringing the state back in has to be done through great cultural sensitivity whereby we “bring the state back in without leaving the people out”. Hence simultaneously there is a need to “infuse culture into the political economy” (Ray and Sayer 1999) to understand state-formation from below.

In the next section I state how I conceptualize the notion of ‘state’, ‘culture’ and ‘subalternity’ in this thesis.
State, Culture and ‘Subalternity’: A Conceptual Framework

In this section I state the theoretical premises on which this thesis is based on. Drawing from existing literature I have certain notions of state, culture and subalternity, the clarifications of which are necessary to perceive the role that the subalterns played in forming and transforming the state and in that process gaining new political subjectivity.

State as an abstract and mutable entity

“The state is not the reality which stands behind the mask of political practice. It is itself the mask which prevents our seeing political practice as it is. […] (Abrams 1988: 82)

State is not a monolithic entity. Neither is the state formation a unilinear process. The idea that state is a distinct entity from society has its roots in Weberian conception of state autonomy that insulates the state from the society (Weber 1986). This autonomy distinguishes the state from other authorities and places it above the interest that prevails in society. This division is still retained in the “state in society” approach of Migdal (2001) in which state is defined as a combination of discourses and practices which draws boundaries between the public and the private and that state is ‘separated and elevated’ from the society. However the boundary between state and society is ‘elusive, porous and mobile’. State and its political systems are embedded in a wider set of social relations (Jessop 2008). The making of the “everyday state” happens through micro processes of interactions between the state and the people that provide a more nuanced view of the state (Gupta 1995; Fuller and Bennei 2001).

The analytical separation of state and society is highly problematic because it is also based on an essentialist understanding of a state that is ‘real’ and a society that is ‘fleeting and ever changing’. State as a concept that is different from society cannot be conceived, because “its
apparatuses and practices are materially interdependent with other institutional orders and social practices” (Jessop 2008: 5).

It is necessary to understand that statehood crucially depends upon socially produced and reproduced legitimacy that is institutionalized and expressed differently in different settings. Jessop defines the “core of the state apparatus” as a “distinct ensemble of institutions and organizations whose socially accepted function is to define and enforce collectively binding decisions on a given population in the name of their ‘common interest’ or ‘general will’” (Ibid: 9). Therefore the political function of the state is not naturally given but is socially acknowledged. “Their precise content is constituted in and through politically relevant discourses” (Ibid: 10). Hence the state has to be understood as not an analytically separate entity but as a socially contingent idea that is mutable (Abrams 1988: 68 et seq.; Englebert 2000: 74)

While statal operations are most concentrated and condensed in the core of the state, their forms also depend on a wide range of micro-political practices dispersed throughout society. States never achieve full closure and complete separation from society (Jessop 2008: 9 et. seq). Since the state is discursively constructed through these practices, depending on various social contexts the state is likely to take different forms. State is not a uniform variable across the world, but is the outcome of interplay of various differing local circumstances (Englebert 2000: 177).

It is the “idea” of state that has a significant political reality, as the state as a thing does not exist as such (Abrams 1988: 68). In this sense all politics take place within the society, the state being “one institutional order among others” (Jessop 2008: 78). An analysis of power therefore has to go beyond the ‘state’, as a state can only function based on pre-existing power relations. This understanding of state as a malleable entity, gives a possibility of its transformation through
emerging subaltern powers from below, where a causal vector of transformation comes from ‘subaltern agency’.

In the next section I conceptualize the ‘processes’ of state-formation.

**State-Formation as a multi-linear ‘process’**

State is not a *thing* or object or an object that one can point to and thereby seize smash or destroy (Sayer 1987). The state is a psychologically, culturally, and bureaucratically complex subject, and what must be studied is “the way it was produced and reproduced by other phenomena, in the centre and in localities” (Rubin 2002: 123). State-formation is nothing less than a “cultural revolution” (Corrigan and Sayer 1985). As opposed to “nation-building” and “state-making” that traditional social scientists have been preoccupied with such as Skocpol (1979) and Bright and Harding (1984), the state-formation literature is more interested in the ‘cultural processes’ which are embodied in the forms, routines, rituals and discourses of rule. Apart from studying common discursive framework and processes it also simultaneously involves the understanding of material social processes that are not merely abstract but are “organised and lived” (Williams 1980: 38).

The traditional institutionalist perspective of states has failed to understand this “prosaic aspect of the state” and “discursive construction of the state” (Painter 2006). For the state to be a monolithic actor on its own right, it is expected to perform certain core functions and historical tasks. Mainly focus on the making of laws and policies and changing of the state within a certain set of institutional arrangements, of which the state is a central player. These theories conceive the state as an “actor” and assumes a “unified intentionality and internal consistency” of the state. They have a propensity to reify the state as a anthropomorphic, monolithic and singular entity, which is coherent and unidirectional in nature.
Since the state is an ideological construct, law making and policy making is a way through which the state creates the material “state as an effect” (Mitchell 1991) to make its presence felt upon the society. Therefore state-formation is an ongoing, diachronic and open ended process. The subaltern actors in their ‘everyday interaction’ (mainly through contentious politics) with the state discursively construct the state from below. When these movements from below challenge the state hegemony, the democratic state recreates and redraws the hegemonic boundaries and redefines governance, thus reinforcing its power through negotiation and state-craft. When the subaltern actors challenge the dominant state discourses backed by “power”, the state response comes in the form of the creation of a new law or a new policy. Thus the political processes that operate within state and society are porous in nature, where various actors such as the subalterns take part in multiple ways to mould and reshape the state in a relational dynamics.

State-craft is the act of governing and the dynamic practice through which state itself gets reconstituted through the agency of those who are sought to be governed (Chopra 2011). Thus to understand how subalterns change the state form, is a discursive conceptualization of the state. The constant interaction of the subalterns with the state and the resultant change in the structure of the state in a way reflects the “structuration” process that has to be studied. What I study therefore is neither the experience of an individual actor nor the study of any social totality, but social practices and interactions ordered across space and time (Giddens 1984: 2). Scholars like Archer (2010) further elaborated and advanced the idea of duality of structure and agency by introducing the concept of ‘morphogenesis’ that adds the variable of time or diachronicity to structuration theory thus rendering it with a historical angle.

I will conclude this section with a caveat. Following Tilly (2000: 34), I would like to state that in this thesis for the sake of simplification, sometimes I refer to terms such as ‘state’ and
‘subalterns’ in various sections. Here by ‘state’ or ‘subalterns’ I essentially mean the respective dominant and recessive discourses. While I am fully aware about the fragmented nature of state as well as the subaltern domain (multiple discourses, ideas and interests), I often do this to identify the main connections and the central processes through which the ‘subalterns’ and the ‘state’ interact mutually and thus form and transform each other.

In the next section I conceptualize the role of ‘culture’ in state-formation.

**Culture as Discourse and Culture as Resistance**

Popular culture is understood as an “expressive culture” of the subalterns (Joseph and Nugent 1994). The folklorists lament the destruction of this culture by ‘mass culture’ generated by culture industries. However, these scholars generally fail to connect the “relation of issues of meaning to questions of power” (Joseph and Nugent 1994). There are scholars such as Lombardi Satriani (1975) and Garcia Canclini (1988) whose works on the context of Latin America draws from Gramsci to state that culture can only be conceived in relation to political forces (and not by some intrinsic properties of its own) (Joseph and Nugent 1994).

Generally culture can be understood in two ways—culture as ‘resource’ and culture as ‘discourse’. The first approach understands culture as a ‘resource’ which is separated from our day to day practices and is ‘hermetic’ in nature. This constitutes practices such as learning painting, dance and music where people go and participate in certain kinds of acts in certain spaces for entertainment and there is a deliberate choice of ‘spatio-temporal’ entry and exit from these acts. In social movements theory of ‘resource mobilizations’ (the American school), culture in understood as one among many ‘resources’ of a ‘group’ that is instrumentally mobilised and deployed when needed to frame the movement repertoires (Canel 1997). In ‘resource
mobilization theory’ many of these cultural aspects of community life are seen as deliberately ‘invented traditions’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

The second understanding of culture as ‘discourse’ perceives it as a part of everyday life, lifestyle, norms, religion, indigenous knowledge and mores that form the daily life of a community. Here popular culture entail symbols and meanings embedded in the quotidian practices of the subaltern groups. Here culture is not analytically separated from life but wraps around and constitutes the ‘community’ life itself. This approach to culture inspires the European tradition of New Social Movement theories, where culture is understood as ‘discourse’. That is culture and traditions are ‘embedded in (community) practices’ and is part of their lifestyles that constitute their ‘life-world’ and ‘social imaginary’.

This idea of culture as discourse can be political and subversive in nature and can give rise to the notion of culture as resistance, when it comes in tussle with dominant and hegemonic cultures. Culture as resistance may be a ‘false consciousnesses’ for a Marxist theorist; however it is in this language that some authenticity of the subaltern voice can be expressed, as the experience of suppressed cannot be but subjective (Nandy 2007).

The flaws in culture as ‘resource’ aspects are a) that its takes away the critical political edges of cultural discourse and b) the idea of social usefulness of culture in a way first severs it from life and then reincorporates back into it again. Moreover, the modern nation state and capitalist market finds the notion of culture as resource more amenable because it can be separated from everyday life and can be converted into ‘marketable commodity’, manipulated and depoliticized. I use the notion of culture as discourse in my thesis, because the subaltern community life of tribes and peasants are expressed in cultural modes. In fact ‘culture’ as discourse is the core of their day to day existence. For them culture is a social organizing principle that shapes their
religious life, festivities, food, landscape, forest and rivers all of which intrinsically form their cosmology that is inseparable from their ‘life’. Their practice of culture is thus ‘non-instrumental’ and ‘non-rational’ in nature, unlike the culture as ‘resource’ view promotes. However the contents of the symbols and meanings of this culture as discourse is not static in nature (Ibid). Rather it is constantly being refashioned and “read” (Rebel 1989) within and upon the subordinate imagination. It is at once socially constituted and socially constituting in nature (Roseberry 1989).

It is not an autonomous authentic or bounded domain, but produced in relation to the dominant hegemonic culture through “dialectic of cultural struggle”. It takes place in the context of an unequal power arena and entails “reciprocal appropriation, expropriation and transformation” (Hall 1981: 233).

The relation between ‘state’ and ‘culture’ is troubled. There is a continuous tension of relationship influence and antagonism between the subaltern culture, and the dominant culture (Hall 1981) that the state promotes (i.e. a ‘culture’ of science, technology, industrialism, modern agriculture, bureaucracy and government).

When the political economy of the modern state expands and takes over the subaltern terrain, then ‘culture as recessive discourse’ comes in friction with the state-power backed dominant discourses. In these tense historical moments these recessive cultural discourses transform into ‘resistance’. For the advancing state it is the persisting presence of recessive discourses that implicitly and explicitly resist the changes imposed by it.

As the state political economy becomes a large machine that penetrates the subaltern terrain with “Governmentality” (Foucault 2010), police power and “infrastructural power” (Mann 1986), the subaltern terrain comes ‘within’ the reach of the state, but not without intense conflict
and friction. As it comes within, the subalterns put immense resistance against the ‘encroaching state’. To absorb this ‘challenge’ that the state faces due to these movements, the state redraws the boundaries of its power and ‘hegemonic practices’, which changes the structure of the state. As the subaltern terrain from ‘outside’ the realm of political economy comes ‘inside’ its sphere of influence, the configuration of the ‘inside’ does not remain the same anymore.

As the state engulfs the subaltern terrain and increasingly invents and deploys various models of social engineering on its society, demands more and more sacrifices from the people in the name of state sponsored ‘development’, ‘science’ and ‘technology’. When the state appeals to the people to shed their irrationality and unscientific approaches, it is a hidden appeal to the people to soften the resistance that they offer against the state. A subaltern cultural point of view may see the state as paternalistic, ‘protective, critique or a thermostat for culture but never an ultimate leader to guide the society’s way of life (Nandy 2007). Thus a ‘state-centric’ or ‘statist’ approach of development can cause immense harm to society and destroy the civilization of which it is a part, even when the ‘intentions are honorable and honest’ (Nandy 2007; Scott 1988).

However this ‘ politicized’ notion of subaltern resistance is not to capture the state but to transform and democratize the state from within through ‘cultural politics’ and ‘cultural resistance’. Thus the culture as discourse and resistance approach promotes the fact that political democratization has a priority over system legitimacy that give rise to a situation of political empowerment of the subaltern classes, which is desirable (Chatterjee 2004).

In the next section I discuss the conceptual framework that I have propounded to understand transformation of subaltern politics and the state in postcolonial India.
**Subalternity and State Formation**

I use the term ‘subalternity’ here to depict ‘subaltern political subjectivity’ which I argue is historical in nature and hence changes with context (time and space). The term Subalterns can be understood in multiple ways. It can be a figurative term, a collective term, and/or a conceptual and an existing space. The figurative subaltern is the individual figure of a *Dalit, Adivasi* or the peasant who is fighting elite oppression. But not all figurative *dalits, adivasis* or peasants are individually poor, or of marginal class, or non-elite. Yet these groups are “collectively” considered ‘subalterns’ since they have historically faced structural oppression as a collective

Conceptually the subaltern space/terrain is outside the nation, economy and monetary exchange. It is a relational and a conceptual space, which is outside the realm of political economy (there was no political economy before the advent of capitalism in a true sense). As political economy emerges with capitalism\(^7\) and influences subaltern political subjectivity and consciousness, and mutates it in different phases, the story of state –making also changes.

In this thesis the subalterns as a collective are mainly the peasants and the *adivasis* (tribes or the indigenous people) and I juxtapose them against the state, which is the hub of ‘elite’ discourses and holds maximum power over society. Here, marginal political geographic locations of the subaltern terrain/space are conceptual and existing spaces, where dams are being constructed in the name of carrying out development.

By studying the cases of movements against hydropower projects from 1920 to 2004 in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra I argue that there is an ongoing interaction between the subaltern movements and the political economy of the Indian state. Due to this, political discourse and practices of the subalterns have gone through phases of transition. Moreover, in the process of

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\(^7\) Colonial Capitalism in case of India.
this interaction, the subaltern resistances partially formed the structure of the modern state (Sundar 1997). Thus, this thesis is a theory laden narrative of these ‘double transitions’—1) transitions in subaltern politics and 2) transitions in the structure of the state.

I argue that subalternity has undergone two major transitions in India in the last eighty years. The first transition is when a section of the subalterns emerged as ‘subaltern counterpublic’ in 1920s in late colonial India. I define the ‘subaltern counterpublic’ as-- a group of people who have acquired a similar level of reflexivity and political awareness as the elite ‘publics’ of the civil society, but who are conscious of their excluded and subjugated position. Hence their interests and ideas are juxtaposed to that of the ‘elites’ of the civil society. However, the ‘counterpublics’ essentially use the same tools as the ‘publics’ use, to forge their separate identity (Fraser 1997: 81-82; Warner 2005; Calhoun 2010). I will discuss this concept in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Interestingly, Chatterjee in his recent book (2011: 53-74) observes that in postcolonial India after 1980’s, there is a strategic shift in subaltern politics, from Dharma (moral force) orientation to Niti (policy or strategic politics) based politics. I will slightly differ here with Chatterjee. The shift from Dharma to Niti in politics started much earlier in the subaltern domain. I will argue with the example of Bombay Presidency that the first transition of the subaltern to become ‘subaltern –counterpublic’ occurred there, during 1920’s.

Early 1920s was a critical juncture in Indian history, where other multiple historical processes operating in the subaltern terrain fed into the history of elite ‘Nationalism’, as Gandhi tried to mobilize the subalterns during this phase, with partial success. The first anti-dam movement Mulshi Satyagraha in the Bombay Presidency occurred during this phase from 1920 to 1924,
which also had tryst with Gandhi. Here the subalterns developed new strategies of movements in collaboration with the elites.

I argue that the second transition in subalternity occurred in 1980s in postcolonial India, when some of the subalterns even transcended their ‘counterpublic status’ (Hardtmann 2009:13) and a very different ‘strategic’ politics emerged. In the second transition two kinds of divergent politics emerged from a similar locus, they are, ‘Subaltern Cosmopolitanism’ and ‘Subaltern Localism’.

An important transition took place in general in the politics of the subalterns in India after 1980’s, where they have shifted from violent ‘inversion’ to militant and subversive tactics. As opposed to the initial subaltern politics, they deploy ‘strategic use’ of violence or ‘non-violence’. Veena Das (1989: 321) aptly notes that ‘violence’ is a key variable of explaining subaltern politics. This violence often comes as ‘non-rational/irrational’ display of ‘subaltern inversion’ that seeks retributive justice against the ‘elites’ (Dhanagare 1993). Recently Chatterjee (2011: 228-229) has also eruditely observed that the changing nature of ‘violence’ in peasant society, as the one of the most important aspects of transition in subaltern politics in postcolonial India.

The few general characteristics of the new subalterns that emerged after 1980’s are-- they are articulate about their politics in term of ‘rights’ based – claim-making (Madhok 2013) and they

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8 Rights-based claim making is one of the characteristics of recent postcolonial transition in Subalternity. Scholars like Sumi Madhok (2013) talks about the emergence of a ‘vernacular rights culture’ in north-western India, she shows that the emergence of rights based culture is not a result of the unfolding of liberal-democratic scripts. Rather claims of rights of citizenship emerge, refracted and mediated by regional histories and vernacular mediums like the local context of struggles. Similarly scholars like Gunveld Nilsen (2012) in the context of his study on state-making in central India (the adivasi heartland) shows similar emergence of vernacular rights in that part. In a slightly different argument Philipa Williams and Colleagues argue that there has been a proliferation of rights based legislation and activism under the United Progressive Alliance Governments. This provides space for the crafting of ‘rights-based claim making’ by the subalterns. These two processes of vernacularisation of rights and opening up of
practice a more ‘organised politics’. They still liberally draw from their respective cultural-historical movement repertoires and discourses to frame their movement and make their claims to the nation state or take their demands to the arena of global civil society. That is, they still reinforce their cultural markers, such as Dharna (method of sit-in protest) and narratives of mythic figures such as Bali Raja in the process of framing their demands (Ho Fung Hung 2011).9

Having possessed these above mentioned general characteristics, point there are two distinct lines of subalternity that emerge parallelly at certain points, and diverge after 1980’s. I have broadly categorized them into two ensembles according to their characteristics, they are—a) Subaltern Localism, and b) Subaltern Cosmopolitanism. Though both these politics start after 1980’s from the same locus that marks the second transition in subaltern politics, the trajectories that they chart are almost opposite in nature.

Subaltern localism ‘localises a global discourse’. They generally engage with the state constructively and orient their political demands towards the state. They are much more influenced by changes which are endogenous to their socio-political settings and the successes that they achieved are more ‘material’ in nature.

Whereas the ‘subaltern cosmopolitans’ moves in an opposite direction, they ‘globalize a local discourse’, resist the state and are politically oriented towards the ‘global civil society’. They are much more positively susceptible to changes which are exogenous to their socio-political settings. The kinds of successes that they attain are more ‘ideational’ in nature than material.

9 Similar phenomenon have been observed by Ho Fung Hung (2011), in case of the repertoires of protest in China, where, there is a reinforcement of cultural markers in the mode of protest such as kneeling down with glowing incense stick to present its petition to the government.
In the process of this scalar translations from ‘local to global’ and vice versa processes of distillation and ‘hybridization’ of discourses take place, which give rise to different spaces of political imaginations in both the cases.

Having created these typologies, I must state here that a movement can vacillate between these two kinds of politics—start with one and end up with another stage or can be simultaneously active as globalizer and localizer, thus maintaining multiple fronts of movement activities. The two long historical cases of movements of dam-evictees in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh (in India) illustrate the emergence of these two broadly different categories of ‘second transitions’ of subalternity. That is, the emergence of ‘subaltern localism’ in Maharashtra and ‘subaltern cosmopolitanism’ in Madhya Pradesh respectively10.

Also, I do not create these typologies to draw a false dichotomy between universalism and particularism here, nor a binary between global and local, since both these politics are global and local at the same time. Here the global and the local political discourses are implicated with each other as both show global and local dynamics simultaneously. It is the directionality & the trajectory of discourses that matters here apart from the geographical scales/locations at which these political discourses and practices emerge.

Here, I would briefly mention that this transition in subaltern politics is different from Chatterjee’s (2004) notion of “political society”. The notion of political society, defines a political-geographical and analytical space of the excluded, in postcolonial India. The space of political society is an ambivalent locus. It is the space of subaltern politics, which is located within the ‘political space’ of the imagined nation, but ‘not quite’ so. It is simultaneously included in the collectively imagined national space and excluded from the terrain of the

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10 I am not proffering another structuralist typology frozen in time; rather it should be understood as a moment in history, which emerged. Probably at present even that dichotomy has changed, but in this thesis I am theorizing that moment of history, which is fluid nevertheless.
formally constituted and ‘legally propertied’ civil society and its democratic arena (Chatterjee 2001, 2004c). Though the political society is located within the Indian nation state, its political relation with the nation-state is ambiguous and extra-constitutional. In the political society, an extra-constitutional (and extra-legal) nature of political negotiation is carried out between the subalterns and the state. Thus political society is an exceptional and contingently evoked space, where the under classes and poor of the Indian nation manage their everyday life.

This is an interesting concept; however the subalterns in my thesis negotiate with the state in the language of ‘liberal rights’. They demand the formulation and implementation of new and old laws. Once they are successful they challenge the state based on these laws in the judiciary. In that sense they create a ‘legal public sphere’ and thus have conceptually already moved beyond the notions of ‘political society’, as their negotiations with the state are no more extra-constitutional in nature. Rather their political activities make the civil society and the state stronger and more democratic. Moreover, the ability of the subalterns to exist simultaneously ‘inside and outside’ the statal system gives them more ‘agency’.

It should be mentioned here succinctly that these changes in subaltern politics partially overlap with the ‘rise of the plebian thesis’, which talks about the empowerment of the subalterns at the electoral-political level in India, with a caste-centric analysis (Varshney 1995; Jaffrelot and Kumar 2009; Ganguly and Mukherji 2011). However I propose something conceptually different from that thesis, as I focus more on social mobilization aspect, which is an extra-electoral political power, forced on the state. Also, the movements against hydropower projects that I am studying are not caste centric mobilizations, though caste may play some role here at the level of identity formation.
Additionally, the two broad categories of subaltern politics that I propose, differ from the “reactive” and “proactive” categories of movements that Tilly (1978) proposed or even from its advanced version of “state engaging” and “state resisting” protest proposed by Ho-Fung (2011) in his study of Chinese protests. As, in their analysis the category of “reactive” or “state-resisting” protests are not necessarily oriented towards the global civil society, as in this case the ‘subaltern-cosmopolitans’ are. Moreover, the ‘subaltern cosmopolitans’ also practice ‘rights’ based politics, they are not blatantly state resisting in nature, rather they seek state intervention in a different way.

Probably this thesis could have been explained by a Tillian framework of historical and contentious politics but there are two problems lingering with that, firstly the Tillian framework does not explain the role of ‘cultural politics’ in state-formation and secondly it considers culture as a resource, whereas popular culture can be perceived better if it is conceptualized as ‘discourse’. Therefore synthesizing the postcolonial studies, political economy and development studies framework is an apt way to understand changes in subalternity and state-formation from below in postcolonial India.

Last but not the least, I would briefly address the state-society ‘coevalness’ theory as proposed by Sivaramakrishnan (2002) in the context of subaltern historiography in the case of India. In my thesis I would humbly differ from his position. To say subaltern and state interaction is coeval does not state anything, coeval suggests that it has evolved together but it does not provide a singly casual or doubly causal directionality of how it evolved; neither does it explain the thickness or importance of one trajectory of causality over another one and how much each trajectory contributed to the evolution of one phenomenon. Merely ascribing the term coeval only suggests that it is “complex”, but it does not say anything in itself.; Any social phenomena
that is constituted by culture is in some sense coeval. But that does not itself say anything more than that evolved together.

Moreover, even if we consider this argument, the subaltern might have been coeval with pre-colonial states, many of which were limited in capacity. But in colonial state capitalism and postcolonial state capitalism, the state has always played a much greater role. What has happened in these processes of state-formation is that it has been partially affected by the subaltern movement in certain limited areas, so to easily suggest that ‘a vector of causality however limited or more (depending upon the context /area of research) comes from the subaltern movements to the state formation’, merely using the term coeval is not enough, and I have shown in my thesis how it happens.

In the next section I present the methodology followed in this research.

**Research Methodology**

*Methods of Analysis and Data Collection*

The methodology applied in my research is historical comparative in nature. Since there are small number of cases and too many ‘variables’ affecting them, I have therefore concretely historicized the cases. The anti-dam movement in Maharashtra and in Madhya Pradesh will be treated as two long and occasionally entangled and extended historical cases. The ‘extended case method’ (Burawoy 1998) will be used, where a long period of historical ‘process tracing’ and their culmination in important events will be recorded.

The analysis in this thesis would be historical, discourse analytical and political economic in nature. It would be causal and constitutive, that is I will explain as well as interpret (Breslau
I assume that apart from direct ‘processes’ of causal inter-linkages, there are underlying ‘generative structures and its forces’ at work, which, due to their intransitive and transcendental nature, are directly ‘unobserved’. Hence it has to be theoretically discerned, interpreted and described in a linear, chronological and ‘processual’ narrative.

The motive behind this project is to write a contingent and context bound social and cultural history of anti-dam movements to illustrate the broader history of the transformation of subaltern politics and state in India with all the necessary macro and micro-historical details. The history studied here will be of events and processes, which will be constructed from archival, textual and interview data. The principle of ‘eventualization’ (Abrams 1982: preface x) of history or ‘eventful temporality’ (Sewell Jr. 1996) of history will be applied to observe how multiple forms of discourses compete to give rise to the ‘structuration’ (Giddens 1984) of the state, within a given context.

Events are groups of phenomena which transform structures significantly. Eventful temporality thus analyses the transformation of structures through ‘events’. Thus, I explain by connecting the structures, conjunctures, processes and events in a ‘common causal universe’, which gives adequate emphases to subaltern agency (Sewell Jr. 1996).

I have embraced a narrative style of explanation of historical processes, with an admixture of three strategies-- colligation, explanation in detail and explanation in principle. Colligation involves explaining an event by tracing its intrinsic relation with other events and locating it in its historical context. Explanation in detail is the strategy of explaining significant events in detail narrative and explanation in principle will be a purely theoretical, second order analysis to trace the causality of events and its relation with other events (Abrams 1982:203-205). The mode
of analysis is both causal as well as interpretive, or rather how the interpretation of events and their meanings have the power of causality.

I have collected 40 in-depth interviews (each ranging from 2-5 hours) of social movement activists, bureaucrats, NGO personnel, dam evictees, journalists, independent researchers and academicians. I have done a multi-sited fieldwork with participant observations of movements against hydropower projects in Madhya Pradesh (mainly in Badwani, Bhopal, Indore, Hoshangabad and Khargone), Maharashtra (mainly in Pune, Kasegaon, Satara, Sangli and Kolhapur) and Delhi. Apart from that, Dr. Bharat Patankar and Dr. Gail Omvedt shared their well-maintained archive of *Shramik Mukthi Dal* (Labour Liberation Party), which has many pamphlets, newspaper clippings, journal papers and articles about the movements against hydropower projects in Maharashtra. The *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (Save Narmada Movement) shared their official documents and movement archive most generously. Rahul Banerjee, a famed activist mobilizing the Bhils and Bhilala tribes in Madhya Pradesh, shared his collection of documents with me.

For collecting data prior to Indian independence, I visited the National Archives of India in Delhi, the Madhya Pradesh State Archive in Bhopal and the Maharashtra State Archive in Mumbai. Secondary sources of data, such as rare reports, newspapers and books in English and other vernacular languages was collected by me from the library of Indian School of Political Economy in Pune, Gokhle Institute of Politics and Economics in Pune and Swaraj Sangsthant Sangrahlay in Bhopal.
The Logic of ‘Periodization’

Periodization is an important, but complex argument in this thesis. Through periodization I need to capture not only the changes in subaltern politics, but also the changes in state structures due to these movements. The problem is, whereas the changes in subaltern political processes are slow and micro-historical in nature, their political effect on the state is incremental. The causes of changes in the state/regime are largely, abrupt in nature and operate at the scale of the world-historical. Mostly, these two trajectories of changes do not coincide temporally, however they definitely affect each other and I will try to show the processes though which they interact.

The massive changes of the state/regime have their underlying effects on subaltern politics, though gradually. In turn the subaltern slowly changes its movement repertoires (Tilly 2003) strategies and tactics. The influence of their movements on state policies and laws also happens incrementally, until at a critical juncture some policy, programmes and laws are formulated and thus the structure of the state changes. There are certainly various other endogenous and exogenous processes that cause the formation of laws and policies, however my goal is to highlight the vector of causality that emerges from subaltern politics to the formation and transformation of state structure and vice versa.

Through periodization, I will show the emergence of various kinds of subaltern politics, in particular, temporal phases of Indian history. The first transition of subaltern politics, where they become ‘subaltern counterpublic’ occurred in 1920’s. Early 1920s was a critical juncture in Indian history, where other multiple historical processes both colonial and pre-colonial, operating in the subaltern terrain, fed into the history of elite ‘Nationalism’, as Gandhi tried to mobilize the subalterns during this phase with partial success. The first anti-dam movement, Mulshi Satyagraha in the Bombay Presidency occurred during this phase from 1920 to 1924,
which also had tryst with Gandhi. From 1925 to 1960’s there are not many cases of organised protests against large dams in the two states that I am studying\textsuperscript{11}. From 1960’s the movements started accelerating once again in Maharashtra.

The next transition in subaltern politics occurred in 1980’s when new political discourses and practices emerged. It is during this phase that two different kinds of subalternity emerged in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. This emergent politics is related to the endogenous history of the nation; however the liberal to neo-liberal regime change (in 1980s and 1990’s) gave it an accelerated push in the same direction. Thus, the periodization of the long history of anti-dam movements from 1921-2004 will be accomplished according to the shifts in political economy and its relation with the subaltern classes. This history will be periodized into three phases a) the late colonial (1921-1947), b) the early post-colonial/developmental (1947 to 1980) and c) the late postcolonial/liberal to neo-liberal (1981-2004) phases of the Indian state, where distinct discursive and institutional shifts occurred in the political economy of the Indian state.

Before moving to the next section I would point out some methodological limitations regarding this thesis. Though in his recent paper Chatterjee (2012) advocates an ethnographic turn in subaltern studies and a call for a new project, this work is neither ethnographic nor is it ethno-history as scholars like Dirks (1988) advocate. I have engaged with so called ethnic groups and their movements (the Adivasis and the peasants). In that sense the study is about “collective subalterns” and conceptual subaltern space outside the state political economy. However this movement took place from 1920 to 2004 and in that sense it is a post-mortem analysis of a historical movement, a piece of analytical history, where, I, as a researcher stand outside (not as an ‘embedded and participant’ observer) this history and develop categories, classifications,

\textsuperscript{11}But some of these movements occurred in other Indian states, such as the Damodar Valley anti-dam movements in 1960s.
typologies and trajectories with my interpretation from multiple sources that include both subaltern and elite viewpoints. I am not speaking for the subaltern or to the subalterns; neither representing the subaltern nor exhuming the lost voice of the subalterns. I am speaking about the subalterns here and I am aware of my elite position and voice.

**Scope and Limitations of the Thesis**

The state-society relations literature in political sociology and political science, and the subaltern studies literature usually do not acknowledge the positive role that the subalterns play in state-formation. Moreover the notion of subaltern in subaltern studies is almost non-mutable i.e. the political subjectivity of the subaltern is static and unchangeable. In this thesis I demonstrate that the subaltern classes of mainly peasants and tribes not only play significant role in state-formation and deepening of democracy through a politics of demand and expansion of ‘legal rights’. But the subalterns also change their political subjectivities in that process. Thus, the possible contribution that this thesis aims to make is to move beyond the understanding of ‘subaltern’ as defined by ‘subaltern studies’ and ‘political society’, to a view that subaltern struggles can deepen democracy and political society.

This thesis also highlights the positive role of endogenous socio-political ‘conflicts’ in state formation in postcolonial nations like India. The thesis tangentially argues that the analytical differentiation between state and society is not only spurious but such a difference is also not desirable in reality as it can lead to a state that is undemocratic and unresponsive to the changes within society (unlike the Indian state). This is the scope of this thesis.

The thesis has some limitations. I am fully aware that every movement has its inner contentious issues, internal debates and trajectories. In fact I did not touch upon the issues of differences
within NBA and SMD and the feuds between SMD and NBA, though I acknowledge these issues very well. Any thesis is selective in its approach because it has to focus and illustrate one aspect of the whole project. In my view if I try to elucidate everything in one single thesis it would not benefit anything particularly sociologically important. Thus the narrative in this thesis deliberately addresses the central argument in a manner to highlight a single thread (of subalternity and state-formation) without obliterating or silencing other issues. I did not want to reiterate the entire history of NBA or SMD, because I cover them as analytic history and cases to illustrate my argument. In my thesis, I have used certain aspect of the history of these movements and data to bolster my central argument.

I have been working with these movements from 2006 onwards and I am familiar with many of what I have written because of various fieldworks and talks that I have had with the NBA activists and participants both (not only the activists). So I have engaged in many ways with the ‘subalterns’ and the activists both in their day to day activities. Thus the movement trajectory I mention in my thesis is my interpretation of a number of views presented by the leaders, activists, participants, journalists, writer’s, scholars, bureaucrats and lawyers and my detailed study of the data in a summation. I distilled all these data to formulate my argument.

Despite that I do try to provide a ‘thick history’ and a ‘thick theory’ in this thesis. Therefore there is a hidden tension that runs here between conceptualization and historical narrative. Though the social history here is explained through ‘organizing concepts’ that limits its flow through the imposition of a framework, yet I have tried to provide most of the historical details of the cases through events and processes that make it a rather detailed analysis that is largely South Asia centric. Still I consider that this detail data is necessary for understanding the movements against hydropower projects and the issues at stake. Though going through detail
data may be slightly tiring and may divert the attention of the reader from time to time, this data
is necessary to bolster my central arguments. To ease the process of reading I attempt to do a
‘nested multi-level analysis’ where on the first level I analyse the movement history with the
group of various concepts and compare the similarities and differences of SMD and NBA led
mobilisations. On the second level I bring in all the loose ends together to an interpretive
analysis of these events and processes in relation with transforming notions of ‘subalternity’,
differences and similarities between two types of subalternity that emerge and ‘state-formation’.
In the next section I briefly present the contents of my thesis chapters. There are 6 chapters
through which I organize this thesis.

Chapterization

Chapter I- Introduction

In this Chapter I introduce my cases of movements against hydropower projects in Maharashtra
and Madhya Pradesh. I explain the theoretical organizing concepts of my thesis and my central
argument. I also discuss the methodology of research and chapter plans.

Chapter II- Mulshi Satyagraha: Subaltern Counterpublicity and movements against
hydropower project in Bombay Presidency, 1920-2004

In this Chapter I discuss the empirical case of the first anti-dam movements in Bombay
presidency, also known as Mulshi Satyagraha that emerged from 1920 to 1924. Here I
conceptually trace the first transition in subaltern politics, that is, the emergence of ‘subaltern
counterpublic’ in Maharashtra.
Chapter III- Subaltern heterodoxy under the ‘Developmental State’: Mobilisations against Hydropower Projects in Postcolonial India, 1947–1980

In this chapter explain how the notion of ‘development’ and construction of monumental hydropower projects created a temporary legitimacy of the postcolonial Indian state in the initial phase after gaining independence in 1947. Later that legitimacy started withering away from 1960s onward in both the states of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. Movements against hydropower projects started taking place slowly in both these states after 1960’s.

Chapter IV- Vignettes of ‘Subaltern Localism’: The Movement by ‘Dam Evictees’ in Maharashtra, 1981–2004

In this Chapter, I mainly analyse the second transition in subaltern politics after 1981, specifically one of its types i.e. the emergence of ‘Subaltern Localism’ in Maharashtra and in response to that how various policies, plans and programmes were formulated by the state. I also analyze why and how global Marxist discourses was provincialised with local cultural patterns, to give rise to an eclectic ideology to mobilise these movements. I further explain mobilization aspects and achievements of these movements that were led by local organisations here.

Chapter V- Emerging facets of ‘Subaltern Cosmopolitanism’: The ‘anti-dam’ movements in Madhya Pradesh, 1981–2004

In this Chapter, I will analyse the emergence of the movements against hydropower projects in Madhya Pradesh from 1981 onwards. Here I conceptually trace a variance of the ‘second transition’ in subaltern politics i.e. the emergence of ‘Subaltern Cosmopolitans’ in Madhya Pradesh. I elucidate why, how and under what condition the movements here forged
transnational alliances to capture global imagination. I will also discuss mobilisation dynamics, achievements of these mobilizations and their strategic and ambivalent relation with the state and the global civil society.

Chapter VI - Summary and Conclusion

In the conclusion I restate my central argument and sum up the thesis chapter wise. After that I compare the SMD and NBA at various levels and note its similarities and differences. Further I compare the two types of politics that emerged as a result of the second transition in subalternity i.e. subaltern cosmopolitanism and subaltern localism and note down its similarities and differences precisely.

In the next chapter 2, I will state and analyse the first movements against hydropower projects in India (and in the world), *Mulshi Satyagraha* that took place in Maharashtra.
Chapter 2

*Mulshi Satyagraha: ‘Subaltern Counterpublicity’ and Movement against Hydropower Project in Bombay Presidency, 1920-1924*

**Introduction**

In this chapter I argue that in late colonial Bombay Presidency, there was the emergence of a novel ‘subaltern political subjectivity’, in interaction with the colonial state and rising currents of anti-colonial struggle in 1920s, which I call ‘subaltern counterpublicity’. The political discourses and practices of the subaltern counterpublic were distinctively different from earlier subaltern mobilizations. They differed mainly in their mode of lodging protests and their stance vis-à-vis issues of legality, as well as on questions of ideology and violence.

In Maharashtra the ‘subaltern counterpublic’ emerged from a historically existing alternative domain of heterodox traditions and movement sub-cultures of the subalterns. However it did not emerge in a detached and ‘autonomous’ fashion, completely on its own, rather the subalterns were led by various groups of elites who formed the ‘public sphere’ (Habermas 1989) of Maharashtra and who were trained by British education. However towards the end of the movements the subalterns left their distinct stamp in the protest and transcended their elite leadership in terms of radicalism and strategy making.

In 1920 Mahatma Gandhi inaugurated the non-cooperation movements against the colonial rule. This movement provided a platform for the expression of diverse political aspirations and conflicts, which was not visible in Indian National Congress (INC) politics till then (Brown 1977: 4). There was a huge participation of the ‘people’ in the anti-colonial struggles through Gandhi’s Non-cooperation movements. The official history of INC party proclaims that in 1921 there was a rising spirit of ‘nationalism’ and resistance to authority that was the dominant factor
of public life. People in various positions in their lives and with varied ranges of experiences participated in these protests, as a response to the local and civic problems that confronted them (Sitaramayya 1946: 219). The subaltern mass, mainly constituting the rising working class and peasantry felt a sense of belonging to the mobilizations led by the INC, as something that was relevant to their own problem. It is in this context of Gandhian anti-colonial (‘National’) mobilisation that the Mulshi Satyagraha took place (Rodrigues 1998:108).

Here I present with the case of Mulshi Satyagraha, the first anti-dam movement in India (and the world), how the peasants in interaction with the anti-colonial elites of Maharashtra fought the colonial-state and the emerging national bourgeoisie in India, the Tata Company, through a struggle against the Mulshi dam. In the process of that intense conflict their subaltern political subjectivity (i.e.subalternity) transformed and the ‘subaltern-counterpublic’ emerged.

The main participants of the movement were mainly the Mawla peasants. There were many ambivalences and cracks in the ideological currents of the movement and it failed ultimately. This movement also has a history of failure, like many other subaltern movements. Despite a failed attempt the Mulshi Satyagraha raised important questions of legality of land acquisition, land entitlements and displacement that would emerge to be one of the most important movement issues of the subalterns in postcolonial India.

The Mulshi Satyagraha also highlights important choices that the subalterns had to make, which are ‘negotiating’ with the state structure and accepting the paradigm of development that the state promoted on one hand and upholding a ‘non-negotiable’ radical stance due to the collision of different and incommensurable ‘value-systems’ on the other. The subalterns also had to choose between violent and non-violent movements ‘repertoires’ and they often vacillated
between these two. Often they took actions which fell in the liminal space between ‘violence’ and ‘non-violence’, through a novel interpretation of the Gandhian *Satyagraha*.

In the next section I will conceptualise the position of the subalterns in civil society and delineate the space in which subaltern counterpublic emerges.

**On Subaltern Agency, Civil Society and Public Sphere**

In her now famous paper, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ Spivak implied that it is the incommensurability of subaltern discourses with that of the elite discourses which makes them impermeable to each other. Once the subalterns can ‘speak’ in the language of the elites, they transcend their collective condition of subalternity (Chakravorty Spivak 1998).

The aspect of speech here is certainly metaphorical, as ‘to speak’ can be speaking to history and/or in the political arena. By which they can make their demands visible in the political arena, with certain force and efficacy. However, by merely ‘speaking’ to the elite discourse and making them comprehensible to mainstream political language, the subalterns do not lose their status of ‘subalternity’ (or subaltern political subjectivity). Indeed some of the subalterns like *Dalits* (untouchables) have been ‘speaking to history’ and its ‘elite discourse’ for decades (Hardtmann 2009). They have already emerged as a major political force in the arena of Indian national politics from early twentieth century. But they still have not been socially accepted.

The aspect of ‘subalternity’, is deeply embedded within the interests of caste, class and religious structures in the Indian society, where ‘speaking’ is merely a feeble challenge to this long entrenched hegemonic order. The democratic space of the civil society in India is already striated and hierarchically structured by various forms of institutionalized inequalities. Therefore the question that has been raised by Spivak, has to be slightly calibrated to make the aspect of incommensurability visible: the question that should be posed instead is: ‘Can the subaltern be
heard?’ I will try to answer this question in the following paragraphs, by implying the relation of subaltern movements with that of civil society. In doing that, I will point out the limitations of the concept of civil society.

In Habermas’s (1989) theorization, ‘public sphere’ is a sphere in social life, which is democratic and non-coercive. It is a discursive space, where issues of mutual interest and difference can be solved by deliberation and rational dialogue. His notion of civil society is grounded in this sphere, where the ‘public’ is an autonomous authority separate from the state and the private sphere of civil society. Despite having high democratic principles of citizenship and equality inherent in such a conception of open and non-coercive dialogue by the ‘public’, Habermas glosses over the question of the nature of ‘public’ involved in the public sphere, which is already structured by power relations and hierarchy.

Instead, the Gramscian notion of civil society as a buffer of the state and a sphere where the hegemony of the bourgeoisie prevails is much more apt here. It helps to understand the impediments, which prevent a Habermasian open dialogue in the public sphere (Gramsci 1971). The sphere of civil society is already biased towards those who have the social and cultural capital to hegemonise this sphere. The language and the culture of the subalterns are already defeated before any ‘rational’ dialogue can even begin. The subalterns enter the sphere with an unequal status of ‘lower’ social and cultural capital. Moreover, the public sphere is already jagged with particularistic interests that rarely share common concerns among themselves. Therefore when the subaltern ‘speaks’ they are either simply ignored or silenced and therefore they are never ‘audible’ (Chandhoke 2003: 172-173).

The limitations of the civil society are that— it always excludes the ‘multitude’ by including few elite classes and categories of people in it. The excluded naturally tries to find a political space
for them, or to state it in other words-- for the excluded, whatever space remains available, by definition becomes a ‘political space’ because there is a constant contestation that goes on to appropriate that space. In this scenario, the subalterns emerge as movements of the ‘subaltern counterpublic’, in ‘counterpublic spheres’. In this chapter I will show how the subaltern counterpublic emerged from hybrid locations and asserted themselves in case of the Mulshi Satyagraha.

In the next section I present a brief review on various characteristics of the ‘subaltern counterpublicity’ as discussed by different scholars.

‘Subaltern Counterpublic’: a Conceptual Review

The most influential theoretical interventions on subaltern counterpublicity derive from the work of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge. They criticize the notion of Habermasian public sphere for its "illusory" identification of middle-class economic interests with the general social interest and proposed a theory of working-class "counterpublics" as a site for the production of social critique. Negt and Kluge (1993) in their study provide a historical analysis of the limitations of bourgeois public sphere and pioneered the concept of counterpublic. They say that the development of ‘proletarian public sphere’ in Germany can be understood as a form of counterpublic. This proletarian public sphere does not only stand for the working class but also for the oppressed relationships and for things and interests which are not expressed openly, thus giving it a ‘subaltern’ angle.

In their work they focus on the production of ‘experience’ as the central process for the development of subaltern counterpublic. In this process they go beyond the individualist and
rationalist notion of subjectivity and thus pave the way for transcending the dualism of culture and economy.

Negt and Kluge (1993) elaborate that public sphere is a process of production and not something that pre-exists. They also say that when the subaltern counterpublic emerges it stalls many other political processes. There are sudden political activities which are unplanned and not led by the standard left or right groups. This public from below does not want to be told, regulated or directed and they suddenly ignite singular solidarity on diverse issues and on different ideas, to forge an identity (in the case of Mulshi Satyagraha this characteristic is prominent). They engage in fusions and connections of various ideological layers and express their anger. There are dangers as well as democratic possibilities inherent in this politics as the counterpublic goes through inherent processes of learning. These ‘processes’ are historical and contingent in nature, unlike the bourgeoisie public sphere which is like a ‘pre-given foil’.

This notion of counterpublic has been readily adopted by feminist critics of Habermas such as Nancy Fraser. Fraser (1977) states that Habermas’s idea of a single over encompassing arena of bourgeoisie public sphere is implicitly considered as a positive and desirable state of affairs and the proliferation of different multiple public spheres as something harmful for democracy. However impulse for greater democratisation often comes from the subaltern counterpublic sphere than the bourgeoisie public sphere. I will demonstrate this in this chapter in the case of Muslhi Satyagraha and generally in this thesis.

Before moving to the next section I present how I conceptualize subaltern counterpublic in this thesis. I define ‘subaltern counterpublic’ as-- a group of people who have acquired similar level of reflexivity and political awareness as the elite ‘publics’ of the civil society, but who are conscious of their excluded and subjugated position. Hence their interests and ideas are
juxtaposed with that of the ‘elites’ of the civil society. However, the ‘counterpublics’ essentially use the same tools as the ‘publics’ use (such as mobilisations strategies, newspapers, drama, poem, songs, pamphlets etc.), to forge their separate identities (Fraser 1997: 81-82; Warner 2005; Calhoun 2010).

In the next section I will present the historical context in which the decision of making the Mulshi Dam was taken.

**Figure 2.1:** The present map of Pune District in Maharashtra showing Mulshi and Maval Taluka in extreme left in the middle. Source: [http://www.punediary.com/html/dist.html](http://www.punediary.com/html/dist.html)
Figure 2.2: A 1920 map of Mulshi Taluka in Poona (old spelling of Pune) Source: From Bhuskute 1986, Mulshi Satyagraha
The Historical Context of Dam Building in Mulshi Peta

Mulshi Peta was not the first hydro-electric project in India. It was not the first project made by the Tata power Company either. The first hydroelectric scheme was started in Darjeeling (West Bengal) in 1897. A similar scheme in the princely state of Mysore on river Kaveri brought electricity there in 1902. However both these schemes were made in small scale. It was first in 1905 that the colonial government of India showed some interest in these schemes. During World War I the government for the first time felt the need to Industrialize India mainly for military and strategic reasons of the war that needed a constant supply of energy (Vora 2009:25). An Industrial Commission was set up in 1916 of which Dorabjee Jamshedji Tata was a member. Jamshedji who became the head of Tata Power Company later was the nascent and emerging indigenous capitalist bourgeois in India. In a meeting of this commission, in support of hydro-electric power work at Lonavela, R.B. Joyner, officer in Tata Power Company, submitted his case in writing where he said that there is an immense possibility of the development of hydropower projects in India. It will be economical and a continual source of energy for the Industries. He said that in Western Ghats power can be generated very efficiently even in places that have no waterfall. However, he suggested that the private business industry and the government have to work together to undertake these projects. He also proposed ten feasible sites for the construction of these projects, among which seven were already undertaken and remaining schemes were waiting for the collaboration between the private sector and the government (Ibid 25-28).

The commission submitted its report to the government in 1918 and in the report the commission emphatically argued for the development of hydro-power projects to meet the energy demands for industrialization in Bombay Presidency. Following the recommendation the

12 Western Ghat is also known as the Shahayadri mountain range. It is situated in the western part of India, where it runs north to south parallelly along the western edge of Deccan Plateau. It covers part of Gujarat, whole of Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.
government decided to conduct a hydro-electricity survey the same year in 1918. The report of the survey was published in three parts from 1919 to 1922. It contained information on hydro-electric projects such as the schemes that had started coming up till 1921 and suitable sites for such projects (Ibid 28-29).

Sensing a profitable capitalist venture in hydropower, Sir Jamshetji Tata established the Tata Hydroelectric Company earlier in 1910. In the initial phase the company completed a small hydro-electric project on the Dudhsagar falls in Lonavela. Till then only the natural cascades of waterfalls were used in hydro-electric projects. In the case of the Lonavela project however for the first time Tata Company made man-made reservoirs (dams) in the Western Ghats and constructed huge pipes to make the water fall on the turbines, through artificial cascades. This project generated much more energy than any earlier project and made it possible to be supplied to the cotton mills in Bombay city. The dams in Lonavela and Valvan were completed in 1913 and the power supply started in 1915. The cotton mills in Bombay which were until now operated by coal energy shifted to hydropower soon after its opening. The demand for hydropower energy kept increasing after that (Ibid 28-29).

A survey of the Lonavela area was conducted just after the finishing of this project for proposing new schemes for the production of hydro-electric power. A site called Andhra Valley area about 12 miles north of Lonavela was identified for another project. Accordingly, the Andhra Valley Power supply company was set up in 1916 by Tata which was their second project. The scheme was completed in 1921. But even before its completion a third project was being planned near Mulshi on the confluence of the rivers Nila-Mula (Ibid 28-29).
In the next section I describe the socio-political configuration of the place Mulshi Peta where the Mulshi dam was constructed. I also present the events and issues that sparked off a movement in the place.

**Mulshi Peta: the place and the dam**

The place Mulshi Peta is situated in the extreme western edge of the Poona (old spelling) plateau with a steep fall of 2000 ft. In 1921 the place was joined to the Haveli Taluka of Poona District with its 84 villages and an area of 193 sq. miles. The hilly part of Peta is divided into two valleys, Paud Khore and Tamini Khore, drained by river Nila and Mula respectively. In the confluence of this two rivers, in a site called Paritwadi the Tata Power Company decided to construct the Mulshi Dam (Rodrigues 1984: 182).

In Peta the water resource is abundant and the quality of soil is very good. Approximately 31 percent of the total land was cultivated in Peta in 1921. Rice was the main crop that was grown here with an annual production of 54,500 tons. Mulshi Peta was famous for its variety of superior quality rice known as *Ambemohar* that was supplied to the Poona Market. Production of rice was high and the peasantry paid revenue each year to the government. The peasantry here was prosperous, self-sustaining and did not come in the clutches of the *Saokars* (moneylenders) (Jayakar 1958).

The landholding of the peasantry was generally small, with an average of 2.6 acres per head. Revenue collection of Peta was high and there was no known case of remission of revenue except during famines. According to the 1921 census the population of Mulshi Peta was 25,654 consisting mainly of Mawla, Kunbi, Koli and Mahar castes who stood lower in the caste hierarchy. The elite castes such as Brahmins and Prabhus were present only in small numbers.
The bulk of population (both higher and lower castes) maintained their livelihood through cultivation and agricultural labour as there were not many opportunities available. The non-agricultural population in Peta was only 21 percent. The upper caste here were generally educated but there was not much caste or class conflict in Peta. However in Peta caste was implicated in class because the Saokars (moneylenders) here were mainly Brahmins. The small group of rich peasantry in Peta mainly constituted of Maratha Kunbi caste and the bulk of poor peasantry belonged to the Mawla caste. Production system reflected the trend of the larger western Maharashtra society, of a decentralized subsistence oriented agricultural economy (Rodrigues 1984: 184-186).

The Mawla peasantry in general did not possess higher degree of political consciousness or the “corporate awareness that precedes class consciousnesses” (Kumar 1971: 3), which they would ultimately gain through their ‘political participation’ in Mulshi Satyagraha against the dam, in intense conflict with the colonial state and the nascent and indigenous capitalist bourgeoisie, Tata Company (Rodrigues 1984: 188).

The Mawlas were however bound by historical ties of common ancestry. They were descendents of those who fought in the army of the Chattrapati Shivaji\(^{13}\) and received the Mawal territory to settle in. Their nascent political consciousness was derived from this historically shaped, latently militant identity of a ‘fighter’ in a metaphorical as well as real sense. They were considerably proud of their historical legacy. This cultural legacy enriched their subaltern consciousness, where their identity was indistinguishable from their historically meaningful and culturally embedded ‘lived landscape’ or ‘the subaltern terrain’ of Mulshi Peta (Ibid 188).

\(^{13}\) Chattrapati Shivaji Bhonsle (1674- 1680 CE) was the founder of Maratha Empire. The Mawla peasantry fought in his army.
Poona was situated 12 miles from Peta and was a hub of rising nationalist politics in 1920’s. The highly educated Chitpavan\textsuperscript{14} Brahmins were the provincial elites in Maharashtra who played an active role in anti-colonial Nationalism and were the main members of the colonial civil society in Maharashtra (Ibid 185). They would undertake a campaign to educate the subalterns of Mulshi Peta in their style of politics. The spontaneous subaltern movement against dams that would emerge in Mulshi Peta would transform drastically their interaction with these upper caste nationalist elites in Maharashtra.

By the end of World War I Mulshi Peta peasants faced considerable difficulty due to the spiral of rising prices that affected various regions in British India. This situation was further complicated by the outbreak of famine in 1918-1919. However the authorized suspension and remission were high in Mulshi Peta and favourable crop season made the agricultural recovery less arduous than that of other Talukas (M.S.A 555, 1921 Hudson). Thus there was no blatant ‘combustible elements’ of peasant insurgency in Mulshi Peta already simmering underneath. Therefore the origin of Mulshi Satyagraha did not lie in steadily deteriorating agrarian relations, but in the specific issue of loss of land and livelihood of the Mawla peasantry (Rodrigues 1984: 189). The Mawla peasantry here specifically opposed to the draconian Land Acquisition Act of 1894 (LAA) by which the government confiscated their agricultural land for the construction of Mulshi dam (Vora 2009: 56).

On 24\textsuperscript{th} March 1919, the Government of Bombay granted the Tata Power Corporation a concession for the development of a hydro-electric power station. The scheme consisted of the construction of a dam on the confluence of River Nila and Mula near the village Mulshi. The dam was envisioned to generate 150, 000 electric horse power to be supplied to textile mills and

\textsuperscript{14} Chitpavan Brahmins or Konkanastha are one of the two Brahmin clans found in Maharashtra; the other clan is called Desastha Brahmins. Chitpavan clans have been historically more developed in Maharashtra because they ruled Maharashtra after the Marathas and were known as the Peshwa.
other industries in and around the Bombay city (M.S.A File 555 1922). The scheme involved the submergence of 10,000 acres of land in Mulshi in which 3583 acres produced the superior quality Ambemohar rice and the displacement of 9000 Mawla peasants from 54 villages. The Tata Company approached the government for implementing the legal provisions of LAA, 1894 and accordingly on June 1919 the villagers of Mulshi were served with notices under the section 40 of LAA, 1894. In response to this notice the Mawlas refused to surrender their land, or consider compensation. However the government allowed the Tata Company to begin their work on the land even before the lands were legally acquired. The Tata surveyors and Engineers came to survey the land and cordoned off the area and barred the peasants from entry into the area (Rodrigues 1984: 191).

Between 24th March 1919 and 16th April 1921 the protests were expressed as individual resistances and traditional cultural forms of appeal to the ‘Ma-Bap’ Sarkar (depicting a relation between the subalterns and the ‘parental and paternalistic’ state)15. A number of appeals were made to the Collector and a series of about 20 petitions were sent to the government. About 15 to 20 telegrams were sent to the higher governmental levels including the Viceroy. One of the appeals quoted “[…] the Bombay Government has backed the Capitalists to cause discontent. 15,000 persons have to part with their beloved land permanently and they have to wander about anywhere else […]”16. However this traditional mode of making appeal did not give the intended results. As a result temporary alliance of agrarian classes took place and the Brahmins, the Gujar Saokars and the Mawla peasants came together to form a larger mobilization front (Ibid 192)

15 In the history of protest movements in China we can see very similar protest repertoires where the people still revere the state as a paternalistic entity and write petitions to addressed to the higher level bureaucrats and ministers (Hung 2011). This is one of the typical characteristics of subaltern movement.
16 V.R. Gupte’s Resolution page number 1458 (Rodrigues 1984: 192)
The initial phase of appeal and individual resistance ended with an incident that occurred in the village of Tamhini Khorat, where the Tata Company engineers started their dam building works. A peasant who was angry at the destruction of his land blocked the entry of Mr. White (a British official of Tata Company) in his field. Insulted by the opposition of an ordinary peasant, Mr. White took out his revolver and threatened to fire. The peasant accepted the challenge and bravely held on. Mr. White withdrew and a clash was avoided (Bhuskute 1968: 1). The regional newspaper Kesari, published from Pune under the editorship of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, gave wide publicity to this event and proclaimed that the peasants would not hesitate to organise a strike if the injustice continued at Mulshi.

As the nationalist newspaper Kesari started involving itself in the project, it forged the spirit of an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1983) of a single nationhood between the elite nationalists and the subaltern protestors. As a result the political sphere of the subalterns started expanding and they emerged as a counter-public into the nationalist public sphere. As the news reached Pune, Kesari started taking further interest in the Mulshi case from February 1920. They along with the state Congress party passed a resolution to oppose the dams in Mulshi. They also prepared a petition which had detailed demands regarding resettlement of the displaced peasants.

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17 The Newspaper, Kesari was founded by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, prominent leader of Indian Independence movement. This newspaper, published in vernacular Marathi language, was an important tool in print media which helped forge nationalistic sentiments at the provincial level in Maharashtra. This newspaper emerged as an important mouth piece for the Marathi nationalist leaders.

18 Bal Gangadhar Tilak was a prominent Nationalist leader from Maharashtra. He was a very popular leader and one of the first and strongest advocates of Swaraj (self-rule) of the Indians. He was conferred the honorary title of Lokmanya (i.e. accepted by the people as the leader). He was born in a Chitpavan Brahmin family of scholars. He was an active member and leader of Indian National Congress at the provincial Maharashtra level.
and processes that should be undertaken before Land Acquisition. However their petition and demands were ignored and the chief secretary of the government P.J. Mead replied that once the decision of undertaking the project has been made it cannot be stopped. He added that the money that the government gains during the project will be spent for the benefit of the people of that area (Vora 2009: 33).

During March 1920 session of the legislative council in Bombay the noted educationist R.P Paranjpe moved a resolution against the land acquisition process done to acquire lands in Mulshi. The resolution stated that the land acquired by the government for private company under the Land Acquisition Act should have prior claims to the purchase of shares of that company at their face value. The resolution pointed out the loss that peasants would bear when they were dispossessed of their land. Some members form Indian and British government opposed this resolution. Some amendments were suggested in the resolution that Paranjpe accepted. However the bill was defeated by 20 votes to 13. According to Kesari Paranjpe’s bill was defeated because the government officials and the capitalists joined hand against it. The capitalists were mainly represented by the Parsi and the Gujarati communities (Ibid: 34).

In March 1921 with repeated lobby from the newspaper Kesari another resolution was moved into the Bombay state legislative council for a debate. Kesari opined that if the shares of Tata schemes at Mulshi are sold to the peasant at face value that will not solve the problems because it will decrease power supply to Bombay affecting the working of the cotton meals and lowering their output. Moreover profit making companies like Tata enjoys concession as they were deemed to be ‘public utilities’. Kesari held that the problems will not be resolved until the meaning of the term ‘public utility’ is redefined by Amendment in Law (Ibid 35).
Paranjpe intervened at this moment and put a complaint against the Tata Company in the legislative assembly that the company had forced its way into the field of the peasants. The government refuted the charges by saying that the people in fact welcomed the government official in the field and only a handful of peasants who were agitating at the behest of Pune leaders opposed the project. Kesari in turn replied by questioning why the government was taking the help of strongmen from Baluchistan to break the movement in Mulshi. Kesari also demanded the government to publish a list of exact locations and quality of land to be given in exchange of the submerged lands. It also claimed that the company should not be allowed to begin the work before all these demands were met. In a letter captioned ‘the terrified Ryot’ Kesari demanded that the Ryots (the peasants) should not be moved before they are given alternative land and cash compensation (Ibid 36).

In the meantime, Vinayak Mahadev Bhuskute a journalist and a political worker decided to visit Mulshi Peta after reading the Tamhini Khorat incident in the Kesari editorial. He wanted to collect relevant information from the 54 villages facing submergence and displacement for another local Marathi newspaper Loksangraha. However after he visited Mulshi, he stayed on there to emerge as one of the most committed leaders of the movement (Rodrigues 1984: 194).

In the next section I describe the first phase of the Satyagraha protest.

The Preparatory Phase of the Satyagraha

In Mulshi the need for a wide mass based agitation was becoming clear. The growing political consciousness in Mulshi coincided with the Rawlatt Satyagraha\(^\text{19}\) campaign and the launching of

\(^{19}\) The Rawlatt Satyagraha or the non-cooperation movement was launched by Gandhi in 1920 in protest against the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Punjab in which thousands of innocent people were brutally killed by the British force.
Gandhi’s non-cooperation movement in the wider political canvas. However nativism ran high in Marathi speaking regions of Bombay presidency and therefore people were suspicious of Gandhi’s Gujarati politics (Brown 1977).

The situation in Mulshi afforded good leverage for the expansion of the mass base of Indian National Congress (INC) in Maharashtra. The Brahmin and Gujar Sowkars who were mostly the supporters of INC were keen to safeguard their landed and moneyed interests in Mulshi and therefore they brought in the concept, strategy, techniques and organisation of the novel Gandhian Satyagraha (passive resistance of non-cooperation) to the Mawla peasantry in Mulshi who were on the throes of revolt.

The Satyagraha started soon and many strategies were adopted by them. It was mainly propagated by a) spreading the message of Satyagraha among the Mawlas through a network of Brahmin schoolmasters and village Kulkarni’s, where the school masters would go from village to village explaining the actual situation to the people and possibility of resisting the government successfully, if they united in Satyagraha, b) public meetings held at market centres in Mulshi Peta and c) forming two organizations for mobilisation – The Mulshi Satyagraha Mandal (Mulshi Satyagraha Organisation) and the Mulshi Satyagraha Sahayak Mandal (Organisation for the Assistance of Mulshi Satyagraha) (Rodrigues 1984: 195).

The first three meetings from 3rd to 6th December were crucial in the beginning phase of the Satyagraha. It was organised in Tamini Khorat in two local Hindu temples. The leaders did not miss the opportunity to emphasize upon not only the strategic aspects of the movements but also its cultural aspects. They emphasized that the peasants were not only losing their daily bread (i.e. ‘thousands of golden acres’ of Ambemohar) but also their places of worship. The ancient Hindu

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*Kulkarnis* were officials who maintained village records and accounts in Maharashtra, they also collected taxes.
temples which stand in the ways of the dams will also be submerged which is an indirect interference with the religion and culture of the people. These temples are situated in the valley where three centuries ago the Mawlas sacrificed their lives for Shivaji (Bhuskute 1968: 85).

N.C Kelkar a Brahmin anti-colonial leader from Poona (old spelling) also got involved in these movements and emerged as one of the central figures in the movement. In a speech delivered on 14th December 1920, Kelkar outlined the 22 plans of the Tata Power Company for hydro-electric projects in the Shahayadri area. Projects that he said would benefit the rich but will bring dire consequences in the lives of the Mawla peasantry. After this there were meetings organised simultaneously on the one hand to unite the Sowkars and the Mawla peasantry and on the other hand there were exclusive meetings held between the Poona leaders and the Mawla peasants.

From the very beginning the ideologically inspired INC leaders described the Mulshi Satyagraha as a fight against imperialism and capitalism (Vora 2009: 45-47).

The Mawlas were introduced to the ideas of Satyagraha by outsiders such as the Brahman Sowkars and the middle-class intellectuals, whose aim was intensely political in nature. However the Ryots of Mulshi Peta (the Mawla peasantry) now wanted to launch a Satyagraha intensely and they intended not to pay the revenue as a sort of protest against the Nila-Mula project. Increasingly the peasants showed more radical attitude to the company and the government.

On 5th February 1921, the Poona collector visited Mulshi and assured that the displaced Mawlas will receive compensation for their land. However the Mawlas stuck to their demand and asked the government not to proceed with the construction of the dam that will destroy their hamlets. At Awlas in Jyoti Rupeshwar temple the peasants took oath that they will never give consent to the Tata Company for acquiring their land and never accept compensation. A signature campaign was conducted that yielded 1300 signatures. N.C Kelkar sent out a letter of appeal asking the
Mawlas to get ready for the *Satyagraha* and asked them to prove their sincerity by contributing 500 *Khandis* of rice (1 Khandi = 24 maunds) to arrange for the logistics for Satyagraha. The Malwa peasantry eagerly donated the amount of rice and prepared them to launch the protest (Rodrigues 1984: 196-198).

Though the Mawlas were introduced to the repertoire of Satyagraha by the elites (Brahmins and Sowkars), as the Mawlas were increasingly turning towards overt protest, suddenly the Sowkars were ambivalent in their support for *Satyagraha*. They sensed the fact that if the *Satyagraha* started and eventually the government suppresses and fixes the compensation at a lower rate that would be a loss to the Sowkars. Hence they started pulling out from the plan of launching a *Satyagraha*. They also thought that if the *Satyagraha* would turn out to be successful the project would get halted. As a result Mawlas will retain their land and their political power will be strengthened. That would make the Sowkars impossible to remain in Mulshi. On the one hand the Sowkars did not want the Malwa peasantry to be directed by the government as they wanted to maintain their own dominance over them and on the other hand they wanted maximum compensation from the land submerged, thus guarding their class interest.

Thus the compensation issue broke the movement into two camps, one had the Sowkars, and other landed interests who wanted to delay the start of *Satyagraha* and use it a threat to maximise compensation and another had the Mawlas who put in a slogan ‘land or life’ and wanted to go ahead with the *Satyagraha*. The Mawlas were supported by some of the more mass-oriented and radical Poona Congress leaders and later this group eventually developed into a left-wing movement (Ibid 199-200).

However leaders like Kelkar and majority of the Poona leaders also wanted to delay the *Satyagraha*. In the *Poona Zilla Parishad* (Poona District Collectorate) conference that was
organised at Baramati, around 25 Mawla peasant representatives were invited and there Kelkar took the decision to postpone the *Satyagraha* till monsoon and in the meantime negotiation for maximum compensation would be carried out. However two leaders V.M Bhuskute and Shriman Deo decided not to support Kelkar’s decision and casted a dissenting vote. At the same time most of the Mawlas were unmoved in their resolve to proceed for the *Satyagraha*. In that way the subaltern movement constituency was already transcending and moving ahead from their earlier leadership which was getting co-opted (Ibid 200).

On 6th April 1921, in the presence of N.C. Kelkar in a meeting, some of the peasants dared to protest against this ambivalent, disoriented and indecisive stand of leaders like Kelkar. One of them said “Why all these discussions? Make it clear whether or not you are going to have the *Satyagraha*”. At this point, Kelkar realized that the situation was getting out of his hand; he asked the people whether they wanted Narsopanta (N.C Kelkar) or Vinayak Rao (Bhuskute), thus introducing an emotional and personal element to the whole affair. Few of the Mawlas shouted back “We want Vinayak Rao Bhuskute”. Kelkar walked out of the meeting when he heard this. The Mawlas were agitated at Kelkar because they suspected that he (and other Brahmin elites) has been co-opted by the Tata company managers. They complained that the Mawlas never heard of *Satyagraha* before, it was Brahmins like Kelkar who introduced them to these methods of passive resistance and when they were ready to deploy this repertoire in their movement, the Brahmins were deserting them (Vora 2009: 57). In the face of this walk out by Kelkar and some other members, Bhuskute and Deo fixed the date for the commencement of the *Satyagraha* as 16th April 1921, the day of Ram Navami festival. They were supported by independent and radical congress leaders like V.D. Pathak and S.M. Paranjpe (Rodrigues 1984: 201).
On 29th March 1921 S.M. Paranjpe presided over a public meeting at Shivaji Mandir in Poona. There was an audience of about 10,000 people and 20 per cent of them were students. Apart from Kelkar the other leaders of Mulshi Satyagraha such as L.P.Bhopatkar, Appasaheb Gadre and S.G.Lawate were present; they raised important issues about Land Acquisition Act (1894). They said that the Land Acquisition Act in itself as an act passed ultra vires as no government had the right to encroach on the private possession of people. The act was never made to dispossess villagers off their abode for the benefit of any mercantile concern. The grievance in Mulshi Peta was largely also because of the arbitrary application of this act. The leaders proclaimed that the matter should be taken to the court. Thus all the leaders till then emphasized on non-violent action and legally permissible actions (Ibid 201).

In the meantime the rift between Kelkar and other leaders of Mulshi were patched and he consented to put his signature to the notice of Satyagraha that was to be sent to the collector. The letter clearly stated their desire to offer a Satyagraha protest and assured the collector that they would uphold the pledge of non-violence. They asked him to send official agents to witness their conduct and to prevent the Tata officials from committing violence on the Satyagraha (Vora 2009: 59)

In the meantime, the movement leaders established contact with the revolutionary activist Pandurang Mahadev Bapat21 and urged him to join the cause of the protest. Bapat immediately

21 Mahadev Pandurang Bapat or Senapati Bapat abandoned his study in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Edinburgh in 1904 to devote him to anti-colonial struggle. He belonged to the cult of bomb which the British imperialists dubbed as ‘terrorism’ (He brought back with him a bomb manual from London). However even before Gandhi he preached the gospel of broom by cleaning his native village Parner and through services to the untouchables. He believed in Hindu-Muslim unity and was elected as the president of Maharashtra-Pradesh Congress
resigned his job with the *Dnyakosha* office (Marathi Encyclopaedia Office) and arrived in Mulshi along with a few volunteers and eventually became the *Senapati* (Commander in Chief) of the movement. With this the preparatory phase of the *Satyagraha* came to an end. In the next section I discuss the actual events and processes of Mulshi *Satyagraha* (Rodrigues 1984: 202).

**Mulshi Satyagraha: Phase I**

After this a vigorous press campaign was carried on by newspapers like the *Kesari*, the *Mahratta*, the *Loksangraha*, and the *Bombay Chronicle* kept the wider public in Bombay, Poona, Deccan, Nagpur and Southern regions of the Bombay Presidency informed about the mobilisation activities (Rodrigues 1998: 114) and resolve to *Satyagraha* of the subaltern counterpublic. These newspapers thus created a hybridist space of communication between the bourgeoisie public sphere and the emerging counterpublic sphere of the subalterns.

In the first phase the *Satyagraha Sahayak Mandal* was set up and P.V. Gadgil was given the charge to organise the Poona Volunteers and Gokhle took charge of the material arrangements for the *Satyagraha*. The *Satyagraha* started on 16th April 1921 and lasted till 30th Aril 1922. The actual passive resistance (a constitutional mode of agitation) started on the previously decided Ramnavmi Day, 16th April, when about 800 Mawla peasants who were going to be displaced started their march from Poona along with their leaders and volunteers to the site of the proposed dam. They descended on the foundation of the dam in a very orderly fashion and they took their positions in trenches and brought all construction works to a halt. They spread themselves on the freshly laid concrete and laid down there maintaining their non-violent nature as steaming hot

Committee in 1931. He tried to make a unity between the non-Brahmin and untouchables to make the Congress party popular in the grassroots (Phadke 1994).
water were poured on the masonry by pulsometer pumps (M.S.A. Home Polt 555 1921, Kolhatker). After a fortnight of successful passive resistance a temporary truce was reached, when the company officials agreed to suspend work on the dam foundation for the next 6 months, until after the monsoon (till 1\textsuperscript{st} November 1921). The Mawlas on the advice of their leaders agreed temporarily to withdraw the \textit{Satyagraha} (Rodrigues 1984: 204).

The hot water incident of the \textit{Satyagraha} was widely publicized in the local and Bombay press, the \textit{Bombay Chronicle} described it as the ‘ordeal of scorching water’, which it said was deliberately engineered by Mr. Bhaba (General manager of Tata Company) and Mr. Cameron (C. Engineer) with a view to dispersing the \textit{Satyagrahis}. Both governments’ and company’s official however denied that the water was scorching. Both the parties hoped to negotiate a solution in the ensuing months after a mutual agreement was reached between the \textit{Satyagrahis} and the Tata Company (Ibid 205).

In the next place of the \textit{Satyagraha} action was held at Sheregaon, a little village situated about two miles from Mulshi where the company had started laying the Chinchwad-Mulshi railway lines. The Shere \textit{Satyagraha} started and continued till 19\textsuperscript{th} May. Nothing much happened in between (Ibid 206).

The \textit{Satyagrahi} would pull out railway lines and the labourers will put them back. The work continued unabated. The \textit{Satyagraha} initially avoided violence strictly. There were no cases filed against any \textit{Satyagrahi} or no police actions took place because the Company officials did not want to stop the work of the project. To raise the tempo of the protest, Bapat finally wanted to take the movement to the next stage. He convinced the village level leaders of Shere, Paud and other villages and the district collector on 19\textsuperscript{th} May that a larger section of the railway lines would be removed between Paud and Chinchwad on 7\textsuperscript{th} June if the Company did not stop the
work on the railway line construction. The company remained silent to this threat and the district collector gave a lukewarm response by saying that the matter is under consideration (M.S.A. Home Polt. 555, 1921 Hudson’s Reply).

Bapat expected this kind of response and hence on 5th June he and another leader Deshmukh led about 25 Mawla peasants and started their Satyagraha by simply sitting on the tracks near the village Paud. As a result the train service was stopped. A British officers travelling in the train and the local police officers who came on the site asked the Satyagrahis to clear the track but they refused to cooperate. To help the police another British officer Anderson came from Mulshi with 30 labourers initially and then another 75 labourers joined them to forcefully remove the Satyagrahis. In the meantime the trains began moving to frighten the Satyagrahis, but to everybody’s surprise some of them attempted to lay themselves below the wheels of the train but were forcefully prevented from doing so. Suddenly violence broke out in the movement as some of the people began throwing stones and some of the labourers were injured (Vora 2009: 65-67).

According to the news published by the local newspaper Kesari it was Tata Company hired strongmen who started pelting stones as it was pre-planned. Finally when the revenue officer of the area and the sub-inspector arrived and the stone throwing stopped. In the meantime the villagers from nearby villages gathered in the Satyagraha site. There was tense environment when the company employees were ready to attack the Satyagrahis and were somehow dissuaded by the officials. After seeing huge village crowds gathering in the place the labourers who were mainly hired from outside Maharashtra left the place quickly (Ibid).

After this the Satyagrahis pulled out 120 yards of railway line (M.S.A. Home Polt. File 555, 1921, letter No. 4828). The officials tried to dissuade them but were not heeded. The Company filed a complaint against the movement for the damages to property that the people did. The
police held an enquiry and charges were framed against 20 people. A case against these people continued in the court for four months and finally a verdict was declared on 19 October 1921. Four persons including Bapat were imposed with fines and acquitted and the rest were given smaller terms in the jail. Bapat, Ranade and Deshmukh had to sign monetary bonds to maintain peace (NAI file 18. 1921).

Initially during this phase, Gandhi Sympathized with this movement considerably. A session of Maharashtra provincial conference was being held in Vasai of Thane district in the first week of May 1921. Mahatma Gandhi came to attend the conference and supporting the cause Gandhi said he fully sympathises with the Mulshi Satyagraha and that if any help is needed in the movement he is ready to do give it (Vora 2009: 67-68).

As the Satyagraha came to an end with the arrest of the main leaders, a crack appeared in the temporary cohesion of the subalterns and the elites which initially made the resistance possible. The whole issue of compensation resurfaced again. The leader Kelkar and his group became active in the whole affair again and they had a meeting with the Tata company officials. Soon after, the government declared its policy towards the Mulshi Dam that a) the work on the dam will be carried out b) the government will spare lands for the Ryots who come forward and express their willingness to settle elsewhere c) to those who prefer to take cash a liberal compensation will be paid long before they leave their homes. The best thing that the Ryots could do was to make up their minds about whether they wished to go elsewhere or to accept cash compensation and remain as workers on the dam for 7 years (Rodrigues 1984: 207).

The text of agreement between the Tata Company and the Bombay government was published on 27th May 1921 in an attempt to force a division among the Mulshi agitators. The published text stated that the compensation will be settled properly and it will be inspected by an expert
revenue officer and an estimate made of its agricultural outturn (the value of its present prices) would be taken as the basis of evaluation. Additionally an extra of 15 per cent of the compensation will be paid. Moreover the Tata Company expressed its intention to pay a voluntary bonus at the following rates: 15 per cent on Ambemohar lands, 20 per cent on Sal lands, 25 per cent on other lands and house property. This declaration of liberal rates of compensation suited the Sowkars (who held the peasant lands) who supported the Kelkar faction. Hence they lost all interest in the struggle henceforth and were in favour of accepting compensation (Ibid 208).

The government appointed a special Land Acquisition officer for Mulshi, whose primary duty was to select suitable lands for the resettlement of Mawla peasantry who were accustomed to the cultivation of high quality rice. The Tata Company also opened a special office for compensation. Since the Mulshi Satyagraha was mainly led by the Brahmins from Poona the government introduced a caste complexity in it and made use of the non-Brahmin Maratha movement to break the Mulshi Satyagraha. The non-Brahmin Maratha peasantry was traditionally hostile towards the Brahmin led casteist and elitist Congress party in Maharashtra and naturally they were contemptuous of the Mulshi Satyagraha. The Maratha’s had caste ties with the Mawlas and at the behest of Tata Company the Satyashodhak Tamasha groups were called to disseminate the idea of ‘negotiation’ with the government and accepting the terms of compensation among the Mawlas. Thus the pitting of one group of subaltern peasants against another was the strategic ‘divide and rule policy’ taken by the government (Ibid 209).

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22 Mainly the Chitpavan Brahmins mobilising the Mawla peasantry and the non-Brahmin Maratha movement was not very enthusiastic about the Mulshi Satyagraha.

23 A group of dramatists who were part of the Satya Shodhak movements of Jyoti Rao Phule were used as instruments of communication and dissemination of ideas through folk popular forms of dramas called Tamasha.
Kelkar who was already in support of the idea of compensation (instead of a radical Satyagraha position) wrote a piece in the Marathi newspaper Kesari in the meantime, where he advocated the position of compensation strongly. He said that the government holds the responsibility for the difficulties in land acquisition. He thought that land can only be acquired for an honest and genuine ‘public purpose’. He was in agreement with the idea of a syndicate like Tata Company acquiring the land privately from the people and making an honest effort to do that. Additionally he added that if 80-90 per cent of the land had already been acquired by the Company then the government should take the responsibility to justifiably help the company by applying the Land Acquisition Act to make the process faster and easy (Ibid 210).

Even after all these the Mawlas were resolute in their position of Satyagraha. They claimed that they did not want money or other alternatives, rather they wanted their ‘motherland’ and no one had the right to take it away from them. They affirmed that they were prepared to defend their rights by sacrificing their lives. At a meeting in Shiroli on 10th June the Mawlas unanimously passed a resolution protesting against the Bombay government’s agreement with the Tata Company and recorded their determination to not accept compensation. Appeals and pamphlets were published in support of the Satyagraha and the civil society in Bombay presidency started taking cognisance of the movement as the vernacular press gave it a good coverage (Vora 2009: 62).

From May to October 1921, P.M. Bapat and Anna Saheb Dastane went for a tour of Maharashtra to mobilize support for the Satyagraha. The recommencement date of the Satyagraha was fixed on 7th November, 1921. A Sarvavatrik Mulshi Satyagraha Mandal (Universal Mulshi Satyagraha Organisation) was set up with its centre in Poona and Branches all over Maharashtra. It was decided that the Satyagraha would be offered in 20 places. The Satyagrahis were divided
into three groups  a) those who will participate in non-violent resistance in Mulshi Peta itself b) local Satyagrahis practicing Satyagraha in different other locations  and c) those who would arrange the flow of cash and other logistics for the resistance. G.N. Kanitkar published a book of songs the ‘Sarvavatrik Mulshi Satyagraha Melyachin Paden’ (Universal Mulshi Satyagraha Carnival Songs) to be sung during the Satyagraha to keep the morale and the spirits of the mobilised high (Rodrigues 1984: 211).

In the meantime the government had requested the Tatas to not begin work on the dam until the visit of Prince of Wales ended (Prince of Wales planned a visit in Bombay Presidency). Hundreds of Mawlas who reached Mulshi on 6th November had to return back because the work in the dam did not commence.

In November 1921 the chief engineer of Tata Company sought the permission of the company to pump drinking water to the Tata colony. A pump was installed in the river bed far from the dam site. Matters took an unexpected turn on 20th January 1922 as the pump was being installed by a group of labourers. Since the installing of the pump was against the agreement of Tatas with the Mawlas, Bhuskute and few of the Mawlas protested against it. However the representatives of the company and the labourers disregarded their protest and continued to connect the pumps with the watering pipes. Moreover Mr. Hazlum, a mechanical engineer in the company violently kicked Bhuskute and charged his dog at him. After this the labourers attacked the Satyagrahis. Following this the labourers also attacked the Mawlas and forcefully overpowered them. In spite of this the Mawlas stood with the principles of Satyagraha and did not retaliate with violence. As news of this incident spread all over Peta about 500 Mawlas gathered there in the night. The leaders convened a meeting on 21 January and issued a notice to the Tata Company engineers.
The engineers neglected the notice blatantly. After a few hours the Mawlas pulled out the pump and the pipes (Vora 2009: 92-93).

On January 23rd, the pumps and pipes were installed again and as a result 500 Mawlas arrived at the spot along with their leaders. The pump was established further down the river away from the dam site. The Mawlas talked with the engineers this time and they were convinced, hence they withdrew from the site. However matters were not over yet as the company officials filed complaints against the Mawlas for removing the pumps on 25th January and about 16th Satyagrahi were arrested on 27th January, based on this complaint. The company officials threatened to arrest more people if they did not accept compensation. The officials tried to demoralize and destabilize the Mawlas since now their leaders were arrested (Ibid 94).

Between February and April 1922, the Mulshi Satyagraha was relatively quiescent. Two batches of agitators were however served notices under section 144 of the criminal procedure code to prevent interference in recommencement of work on the building of the dam by the Tata Company’s Employees (Rodrigues 1984: 212).

In the next section I cover the second phase of Mulshi Satyagraha where the Subalterns ironically committed violence (with a twist) despite keeping the spirits of Satyagraha intact.
Figure 2.3: Senapati Bapat speaking in a public conference in Pune Source: http://www.savarkar.org/en/gallery?g2_path=Savarkars+associates/savarkar015.jpg.html

Figure 2.4: Statue of Senapati Bapat in postcolonial Maharashtra Source: http://www.mid-day.com/news/2012/aug/060812-Pune-Give-artists-due-credit-says-veteran-sculptor-Khedkar.htm
**Mulshi Satyagraha Phase II**

The second phase of *Satyagraha* started from 1st May 1922. This was exactly one year after the temporary truce signed with Tata Company. In this phase Bapat became the main leader (*Senapati*) of the movement.\(^{24}\) As the *Satyagraha* started, about 150 Mawla women and children and about 150 volunteers participated in the movement. In this phase an attempt was made to derail a train bringing workmen from Chinchwad by packing the railway lines with stones. There were company hired strongmen who committed indecent assaults on Mawla women. The news of this event was published in Poona and there was a sufficient degree of moral outrage. The government however continued the process of construction of the dam (Vora 2009: 97-98).

At this stage Bapat left for Bombay to raise funds for the *Satyagraha* and other leaders went to Poona to get volunteers. Bapat issued a Maharashtra wide appeal in which he proposed that Mulshi issues should be fought by other volunteers outside Peta and not the Mawlas alone because it was an issue of concern for the whole region (Ibid 101).

An ‘*Akhil Maharashtra Mulshi Conference*’ (Maharashtra wide Mulshi Conference) was announced to be organised on 11th June 1922 to decide the forms of *Satyagraha*, to fix its limits in terms of time and expenditure in money and to arrange these programmes within these limits. This conference was successfully organised in Nagpur. About 500 people including 111 delegates attended the conference (Rodrigues 1984: 215).

The first thing Bapat did after taking over the leadership of the movement was to clarify his stand on the movement. He transformed the notion of Gandhian *Satyagraha* significantly and deployed it in the movement in new forms. As the notion of *Satyagraha* entered the field of the arena of actual subaltern protests against dams and land acquisition, the concept mutated as he

\(^{24}\) Later the epithet *Senapati* was permanently attached to his name and he was popularly known as *Senapati* Bapat.
invested new meanings to it. He published a circular as the president of the newly established *Satyagraha Mandal*. Where he forwarded the notions of *Sama Satyagraha* and *Shudhha Satyagraha*, where the concept of *Sama Satyagraha* depicted the non-violent way of protest. However in *Sama Satyagraha* unlike the *Gandhian Satyagraha* protest damage against property was allowed. He defined the repertoires of *Sama Satyagraha* as --obstructing the work in progress, marginally damaging the work already completed, to plead and remonstrate with the labourers, carefully using certain stern measures to morally awaken the people to take sides. Thus he included the destruction of property into accepted activities of non-violent *Satyagraha*.

His plan for *Sama Satyagraha* envisaged that 10,000 Maharashtrian would go to jail, 100 lives would be sacrificed and an amount of 5 lakh rupees would be spent for a *Satyagraha* that may run for 5 years. In the meantime people would devote themselves in raising fund and mobilising manpower. In case the technique of *Sama Satyagraha* fails in achieving its objective because of its non-suitability in case of Mulshi and in the larger struggle for independence, then the *Shuddha Satyagraha* would be launched, which would allow the use of overt violence. By allowing overt violence as the ultimate measure to confront the government when no other measure would work, Bapat transcended Gandhian *Satyagraha*. For Bapat, *Satyagraha* was thus literally ‘seeking the truth’ (that is the literal meaning of *Satyagraha*) where unlike Gandhi the method was marginally and functionally important as long as it serves the purpose. However strategy making and the ultimate goal were of supreme importance (Vora 2009: 106-119).

After reinterpreting *Satyagraha*, Bapat gave a notice to the Tata Company on 3rd May 1922 on behalf of the *Satyagraha Mandal*. In another statement he also encouraged the participation of the volunteers from outside Mulshi area. This new interpretation of *Satyagraha* gave rise to strong reactions all over India. Bombay Chronicle, a newspaper which was committed to the
cause of Gandhian nationalism movement had so far supported the Mulshi *Satyagraha*. However, after these statements from Bapat it reconsidered its stand (Rodrigues 1984: 214).

On 2nd September 1922, Bapat with 23 followers of which 13 were Mawlas (including 2 women) threw stones on the Dam. They were arrested and received rigorous imprisonment for 6-3 months. The *Satyagraha Mandal* paid fines on behalf of the women (Ibid).

After this incident the intensity of the movements slowed down. The peasantry started accepting compensation. Most of them accepted the liberal cash compensation and none of them demanded land for land again. In February 1923 Bapat emerged from the prison and attempted to mobilize the people again for *Satyagraha*. But his eccentric statement that the political situation needed bomb to solve alienated him from the public and led to his re-arrest. He was again sentenced to a year of imprisonment. Bhuskute after his release tried to continue his individual efforts to organise the *Satyagraha* in Mulshi. In 1923 he was prevented from entering Mulshi by the government. He attempted to force entry in the place and was arrested and imprisoned again for a year (Ibid: 216).

When Bhuskute and Bapat were in prison, other leaders like Dastane consulted Gandhi about the continuance of *Satyagraha* in Mulshi. In a letter to Dastane, Gandhi replied “it appears to me that the movement has to be dropped for two reasons, or rather three: a) I understand that the vast majority of the farmers have accepted compensation and the few who have not, cannot perhaps even be traced, b) the dam is nearly half finished and its progress cannot be permanently stopped, c) The leader of the movement is *not a believer out and out in non-violence. This defect is fatal to success* (emphasis mine) (Ibid 217). After this Dastane and other leaders decided to dissolve the *Satyagraha Mandal* and wind up the agitation. Thus Gandhi withheld his moral support from the movement (Gandhi 1924).
On 12th November 1924 after a month of his release from the prison Bapat again planned to continue the *Satyagraha* against the Tata Company. On 6th December he announced his plan to offer *Shudhha Satyagraha* instead of the earlier *Sama Satyagraha*. On 9th December Bapat and his associates put the plan in effect at Paud. Early in morning they stopped a train that carried coolies to the dam site by placing stones on the railway tracks. They attacked the coolies with swords and revolvers. The engine driver was hit by a bullet and eleven men were injured. After this Bapat and his gang went to the police sub-inspector’s house and surrendered themselves. Bapat was sentenced to seven years of imprisonment and it closed the final chapter of Mulshi Satyagraha (Rodrigues 1984: 219-220).

**Conclusion**

In the beginning of this chapter I presented subaltern-counterpublic as a notion forwarded by various scholars and outlined its characteristics. I also defined subaltern-counterpublic as—subalterns who have acquired a certain level of political awareness, identity and reflexivity, but whose interests and ideas are different from those of the ‘elites’. In the process of ‘becoming’ counterpublic they gain awareness of their excluded and subjugated status. They also use similar techniques as the elites to forge their identity, mainly through mobilisations and information dissemination through media, such as newspapers and cultural activities, such as drama. As I conclude I will restate and analyse some of the important facets of this subaltern politics.

Here I deal with the case of Mulshi *Satyagraha* that took place in Maharashtra from 1920 to 1924 against the burgeoning national bourgeoisies, the house of the Tatas. As a political campaign Mulshi Satyagraha was a failure. It was an unsuccessful peasant revolt. It objectively
failed to restore the lands of the Mawlas claimed by them. Mulshi Satyagraha was directed primarily at the arbitrary use of a particular act- the Land Acquisition Act.

It is the need for making a larger front against the British in the anti-colonial struggle that created an urge among the elites to mobilize the subalterns for the service of the country that initially brought them in contact with the subalterns. This proximity was ambivalent in nature because, on the one hand the subalterns picked up the art of ‘constitutional’ passive resistance (*Satyagraha*) and certain repertoires of protest from the elites, but on the other hand they emerged as ‘subaltern counterpublic’ which threatened the position of elites in Maharashtrian society.

In the *Satyagraha* the nationalist elites inspired by Gandhi planned to mobilise the Mawla peasantry who were already simmering with discontent. The Mawlas also protested against land acquisition spontaneously that made the job of the nationalist elites of INC easy. With ulterior motives the nationalists elites wanted a) to appropriate the disorganised subaltern movement into the anti-colonial national struggle in an organised and non-violent manner and civilise and train the rough, rude and violent repertoires of the subalterns through Gandhian *Satyagraha* and b) to use the raw power of the Mawla peasantry and the refined power of *Satyagraha* together for anti-colonial struggle and also to protect the interest of the landed elites, mainly Brahmins and Sowkars in Mulshi Peta, that would help them extract more compensation from the government. The elites wanted to inseminate the idea of *Satyagraha* among the Mawla peasantry to control their violent streak and then use them on their behalf as a potent force, which can be unleashed upon the government when they wished, under the garb of anti-colonial struggle. In this strategy the subalterns had no real position to ‘speak’. They were merely included to constitute the raw
‘massive’ force of the movement. They had no real power to change the course or decide the strategies of the movements. The emergence of ‘counterpublic’ was not devoid of colonial ‘middle class’ elite initiative at all, rather it was the contrary. As the Gandhian notion of Satyagraha was introduced to them by the ‘elites’, the subalterns perceived the non-violent radicalism of the repertoire aptly and embraced it wholeheartedly. However they realised when the elites had no intention to actually apply the repertoires and the subalterns asserted that they want to go ahead with the Satyagraha movement. They forced the elite leadership under Kelkar to quit and chose Bhuskute as their leader. They voiced their concerns and literally told the leadership to change the course of the movement. Differing from the elites they insisted to continue the Satyagraha uninterrupted, that’s how they made a mark. Hence when the elites decided to use Satyagraha as a tool that was instrumental in nature, by commencing it and revoking it whimsically as a political strategy, the Subalterns’ decision to continue with it was more expressive, moral and emotional (in some sense non-rational) in nature. In that moment they already emerged as ‘subaltern counterpublic’ where they became aware of their political power, interest, ideas and subjugated status.

The first phase of the Satyagraha was well organised but the government did not accede to most of the demands of the movements. Hence in the next phase of Satyagraha Senapati Bapat took over the movement leadership and a hybrid of repertoires of contention (Tilly 1978) emerged in the Gandhian Satyagraha where Bapat transformed the notion of Satyagraha into a intriguing dichotomy: Sama Satyagraha and Shuddha Satyagraha, where violence against life and property was allowed in the latter case of Shuddha Satyagraha, when the former method of Sama Satyagraha fails.

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25 Taken from Interview with Livi Rodrigues on 11 November 2011, Pune (Maharashtra)
The provincial INC party tried severely to bring in Mulshi Satyagraha under its ideological fold of non-violent nationalist struggle and succeeded initially. However the Mulshi Satyagraha ‘digressed’ into ‘violence’ (Shudhha Satyagraha) that departed from the mainstream Congress modality of non-violent struggle led by the ethos of Gandhian principles. In a way the subalterns left their mark of the ‘violent inversion’ (Guha 1983) in this struggle in the end.

In Mulshi Peta the farmers liberally adapted Gandhian Methods of Satyagraha to fight the encroachment of capitalism in their life, livelihood and life-world. In this confluence of subaltern and elite mobilizations a subaltern-counterpublic emerged. Though this movement was not very effective in the long run in claiming their demands, because of various equivocal ideological orientations, this was the first glimmer of consciousness that emerged against dams in India.

Much of the dynamics that emerged in the Indian nationalist struggle in Maharashtra was ‘local’ in nature (Seal 1973). Mulshi Satyagraha was largely based on the interest for land rights, protection of historical artefacts and the culture of Mawla peasantry in Mulshi and other economic grievances. Various scholars largely dismiss its importance by locating it as a local agitation, which was a failure and did not make any significant impact on national or even regional politics. However a closer look at the participants, modality of protest, repertoires of contention of these movements, role of leadership and the changing dynamics of ‘subalternity’ or subaltern political subjectivity in interaction with the colonial state and the provincial elites is clearly visible.

The Subalterns who emerged here were not only adept in making their demands, but the discourse of ‘rights’ and ‘legality’ emerged through claim on ‘land rights’ and challenge to the Land Acquisition Act of 1894. The subalterns here, with the help of local leadership, learnt the art of challenging the colonial state in the legal arena and on the eve of independence, a ‘legal
public sphere’ (Sivaramakrishnan 2011) had already coevolved along with the subaltern counterpublic.

The notion of ‘organization’ and ‘organised resistance’ was also introduced in these subaltern movements which infused a sense of order, plan and scheme in the rather spontaneous subaltern uprising. The subaltern peasants turned the existing non-antagonistic social, political and economic contradictions into antagonistic ones and ushered in a new awareness of themselves as a solidarity group. They understood their corporate group identities (as caste, class, tribes) and deployed these same identities and techniques of mobilizations such as Satyagraha in various forms against the elites even after independence to demand their ‘rights’ in postcolonial India.

In chapter 3, ‘Subaltern heterodoxy under the ‘Developmental State’: Mobilisations against Hydropower Projects in Postcolonial India, 1947–1980’, I cover the social history of movements against large hydropower projects from the period 1947 to 1980 in two states of India-- a) Maharashtra, where the legacy of movements against hydropower projects continued after Mulshi Satyagraha and b) Madhya Pradesh where smaller movements against hydropower projects started in this period. I argue in this chapter that due to the configuration of the postcolonial developmental state and the socio political milieu, the subalternity and the state, transformed slowly and incrementally during this period.
Chapter 3

Subaltern heterodoxy under the ‘Developmental State’: Mobilisations against Hydropower Projects in Postcolonial India, 1947–1980

Introduction

In this chapter I present the uneasy relationship between subaltern movements and the postcolonial developmental state in India under the Indian National Congress (INC). Here I argue that the developmental state in India was able to maintain a ‘hegemonic pretense’ mainly over the bourgeoisie and middle class in India. However state hegemony over the subalterns was not very successful. To some extent the subaltern movements remained subdued because of the initial euphoria of independence and their perplexed position under the relatively new democratic political system. Nonetheless Gandhian and Marxist political organizations politicized the subalterns and took the framework of ‘democracy’ to the people and empowered them to a certain level. Beyond the late 1960s the subalterns already started deploying the language of ‘modern’ politics of ‘rights’ and ‘legality’ in their movement discourses. In a way they started ‘demanding’ and pushing their rights as citizens of the state. Thus, in the process of a relatively contained and restrained conflict with the ‘developmental state’, the subalterns were gradually challenging and transforming the state structure. In this process of conflict their ‘subalternity’ (i.e. ‘subaltern political subjectivity) was getting transformed as well.

In this chapter I empirically discuss how the newly decolonised Indian nation state promoted hydropower projects as an important component of ‘national development’ and how this very notion was resisted by subaltern movements in the state of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra until 1980.
The Developmental State and ‘Subalternity’

The concept of the Developmental State addresses the role of the State in the process of structural transformation. These economies were characterized by progressive demographic transitions, robust agricultural sectors and rapid export oriented growth. This model follows state development capitalism where the state has more independence, or autonomy, political power and more control over the economy. A developmental state is characterized by the preponderance of strong state intervention, as well as extensive regulation and planning.

A lot has been written about the market and political aspect of the Developmental State. There have been debates which deal with the ‘autonomy’ (political independence) and ‘embeddedness’ (political dependence of the state on certain/groups/classes in society) of the state in the society. The idea is that to become a ‘developmental state’ it ought to be relatively independent from elite control and internally cohesive. In order to promote development, a competent and capable bureaucracy similar to Max Weber’s notion of a bureaucratic, rational administrative state is required. For example Evans' argues that "a coherent, cohesive state apparatus with close, institutionalized links to economic elite would be more effective at producing industrial transformation than other kinds of state-society relations" (Evans 1995: 225). He termed this kind of productive state-society relationship as 'embedded autonomy'. But in a postcolonial developmental state like India the interaction of the state-bureaucracy with the ‘people’ has been rather tense and fettered.

Literature on the developmental state deals mainly with the state and market. Not much has been written about the relation of developmental state with the ‘subaltern terrain’ that I define as ‘the historically significant and culturally embodied lived landscape of various marginalised communities’. When a postcolonial developmental state in India expands its bureaucracy/market
and intervenes in the society and encroaches upon the property of the ‘commons’ what kinds of political friction, conflict and negotiation does it give rise to?

The complex relationship between the subalterns and the transforming political economy of the state in India has received some scholarly attention recently. Gupta (1995) talks about the ‘imagined state’ of India in examining the discourse of corruption in everyday practices of the lower level of bureaucracy in contemporary India. He sees a discursive construction of the state in the public culture, as the subalterns interact with lower level state bureaucracy and face various levels of ‘structural violence’ that slowly affects the textures of their everyday life and creates a notion of oppressive ‘state’ in their mind. Yet Gupta argues India’s poor are not disenfranchised, they actively participate in the democratic project. The State is not blatantly indifferent to the poor; rather it sponsors many poverty amelioration programmes and policies. The irony is, with ‘expanding bureaucracy’ and increasing Governmentality of the state these programmes are produced systematically in an arbitrary manner in operation and consequence, by the same mechanisms that were meant to ameliorate social sufferings. It is not to state that these programmes do not succeed at all; they benefit some albeit in an erratic and uneven manner. Hansen and Stepputat (2001) argue that the postcolonial nation state is an arena of both political and cultural struggles. They focus on the micro-politics of everyday state making. They observe that the authority of the state is constantly challenged from the local as well as the global level. There is a growing demand to confer rights and recognition to ever more number of citizens, organizations and institutions that help perpetuate the myth of the state as a source of social order and embodiment of popular sovereignty. Harris-White (2003) promulgates the notion of ‘shadow state’ in the context of informal economy in India where state officials are involved in various kinds of parallel ‘shadow roles’ and activities with the subalterns to negotiate
and create parallel modes of taxation and provisions where state institutions cannot penetrate. Similarly Chatterjee (2010) also talks about the notion of ‘political society’ where the state negotiates with the subalterns in the urban informal sector through ‘extra-legal’ and ‘extra-constitutional’ realms. The state goes beyond the sphere of law and negotiates with the peoples as ‘subjects’ and ‘population’, not as citizens. However through this politics of pressure, Chatterjee argues that the subalterns are able to fulfill their demands and elicit responses from the state that paradoxically help democracy to thrive.

Specifying the importance of subaltern politics and the Indian state Corbridge and Harris (2000) aptly argues that the subalterns no longer derive their discourses against the state from an ‘autonomous domain’ of their ‘pure’ politics of culture and subalternity. The subalterns constructively appropriate and use state institutions and discourses that the elites once claimed for them. They also argue that state institutions may be put to use for defence and advancement of subaltern empowerments and the subaltern groups over the years have become significantly familiar with institutions and ideologies of the modern Indian state. In the following sections I will illustrate how the subalterns creatively and constructively engaged with state institutions and discourse to gradually challenge and alter the state from below.

**The Political Economy of the Developmental State in India**

India became independent in 1947. India, unlike China, is not a post-revolutionary state. It is a postcolonial state, whereby an alien state system of liberal constitutional democracy was handed over to the ‘national bourgeoisie’ elite by the colonial masters during the decade of decolonisation. Though primarily a colonial legacy, in this newly formed postcolonial state substantially new ideas were also invested by the national elites. The nation state of India was
modelled from above by the colonisers as a Leviathan, and was not ‘organically’ created through any process of civil war, nor through any ‘social contract’. It was created through a trepid ‘political contract’ between the emerging ‘national bourgeoisie’ and the departing colonisers, which excluded most of the communities and groups from direct participatory involvement. Consequently, the Indian ruling class did not have legitimacy, authenticity and popularity among the subaltern classes, who had enthusiastically participated in the anti-colonial struggle, but were never directly included in the process of postcolonial nation state-making. The postcolonial state under the Indian National Congress (INC) government was oblivious and relatively insulated from the society over which it planned to rule. In that sense, India was a “deliberate act of invention”, with representative democracy as a central “mythology of rule” (Corbridge and Harris 2000: 26–27).

Chatterjee (1993) fittingly argues that the postcolonial state is a continuation of the colonial mode of increasing Foucaultian Governmentality, with no significant difference. However the postcolonial state elites were slightly different from the colonisers in their ‘hegemonic pretense’, because they needed to gain ‘legitimacy’ and ‘hegemony’ continuously to rule in a constitutionally electoral democracy.

Arguably, the only legitimacy that the INC leadership possessed was charisma that they derived from their participation on the frontline in the ‘national struggle’ for independence. The INC party, under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, which ruled India had to maintain a ‘hegemonic pretense’ under the garb of ‘constructed narratives’ of a ‘national freedom struggle’ (Nair 2011). The INC leaders needed a firm basis of consensus and a ‘national-popular imaginary’ around which societal governance would be organised and ‘development’ could be carried out in relative peace. In fact, development became one of the planks around which the ‘imagined community’
(Anderson 1983) of the postcolonial Indian nation was attempted to be constructed. But in those constructed narratives of nationalism, the subaltern and ‘other’ alternative voices of anti-colonial struggles were either silenced or painted with the colours of ‘terrorism’, ‘violent ideologies’ and ‘irrationalism’ (Nair 2011).

M.K. Gandhi was assassinated in 1948. By that time he had already become an archaic and anachronistic figure within the INC party. His vision of a postcolonial national trajectory that hoped to step aside from the economic, social, political and ecological violence of modernity and enlightenment, through non-violence and rural reconstruction, was blatantly ignored. The central and the state INC party branches muted several of the Communist and Gandhian organisations through a combination of pre-emptive moves, persuasion, co-option and brutal coercion. In this scenario, it was Nehru’s vision of socialist and interventionist state-led industrial development with five-year plans that eventually prevailed. The famous statistician, P.C. Mahalanobis, played a significant role in the notion of five-year economic planning and, from the second plan onwards, the Nehru-Mahalanobis model of planning was followed.

It was relatively easy to develop this largely uncontested terrain with a ‘hegemonic pretense’. More so, because the INC party and its “steel frame” bureaucracy was unchallenged by regional states that had weak ‘state capacities’ and autonomy and a relatively demobilised civil society (Khagram 2004). In addition, in states such as Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra the regional governments were also formed by state divisions of INC parties.

Between the dirigisme state (Chibber 2003) and society lay the mammoth bureaucracy that was established to address the needs and welfare of society and reach every corner. But slowly it turned into a partially autonomous, powerful, apathetic, corrupt and inefficient class with entrenched interests that further alienated the state from society. The bureaucratic red tape that
made it slow and inefficient also acted as a buffer to protect the state elites from sudden pressures of mass mobilisations and acted as a target for the public to vent its anger, which further made the state a distant entity for its citizens.

**Figure 3.1:** Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru launching the Hirakud dam project on the Mahanadi River in Sambalpur, Orissa, on April 12, 1948. Dr Kailasnath Katju, Governor of Orissa, and A.N. Khosla, Chairman, Central Waterways, Irrigation and Navigation Commission, are watching. **Source:** Blog of Karunakar Supkar, Managing Director, Engineer-in-Chief, Orissa Hydropower Corporation.  
Figure 3.2: November 5, 1963. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru makes a speech at the opening of Bhakra Dam in Bhakra (Punjab) Source: http://www.corbisimages.com/stock-photo/rights-managed/BE025585/nehru-at-dedication-of-bhakra-dam
‘The Curious Case of Budhni Mejhan’: This is Budhni Mejhan, a 15-year-old Santhal tribal woman, inaugurating the switch of Panchet Dam in the Damodar Valley Project (DVC) project on December 6, 1959 along with Prime Minister Nehru. Budhni was a labourer at the dam site and Nehru, in his usual ‘well meant’, ‘benevolent way’, asked her to inaugurate the dam. When Budhni returned to her village, her family and tribesmen refused to give her a place in the village, because as part of the inauguration ceremony she garlanded Nehru and, according to the rules of tribe, in effect married him. Since she ‘married’ an outsider, she was no longer acceptable in her family, village or community. The tribal ‘wife’ of Nehru was permanently ousted from her village. She was given a job in the DVC by the ‘benevolent’ INC, fired once and then reinstated. She later stayed with a Bengali resident of Panchet, Sudhir Datta, and bore him a child. At the end of her life all she wanted was to go back to her village Karbona (Padmanabhan 2012). This anecdote and photo depict a ‘cultural joke’, albeit a nasty one, about how ‘development’ transformed the Adivasi ‘life-world’ beyond recognition.
Hydropower Projects: The Temples of Modern India

“Dams are the temples of modern India”.

-Jawaharlal Nehru
(First Prime Minister of India)

In this section I discuss how the development state in India invested a certain notion of ‘modern’ capitalist development to uplift a society that had a colonial legacy. As part of that hydropower projects were promoted as an ultimate source of energy for national growth that mainly entailed ‘development’ of agriculture and heavy industries. In the process of developing the society the developmental state with its characteristic paternalistic hubris penetrated the subaltern terrain and came in direct resource conflict with various marginalized communities.

In the initial postcolonial decades, top-down five-year ‘emergency planning’ (Mishra 1981), economic growth and technocratic vision gripped the arena of development. Irrigation projects and large dams played a crucial role in development. The initial economic growth after independence was largely based on heavy industries, such as steel and aluminum manufacturing, and developing infrastructure, telecommunications, mining, banking and insurance. These heavy industries had high electricity and power consumption needs. In a similar vein, Padel and Das (2010) remind us of the nefarious association of large dams with aluminum industry, which has high value in developing the warfare technologies of nation states. To meet this hunger for energy, hydropower was promoted as a renewable, ‘clean’ and pollution-free source of energy.

In Section 30 of the Government of India Act, 1935 which deals with “interference with water supplies” ‘water’ sources are mentioned as “water from any natural source or supply”. The concept and language was directly taken from the Northern India Canal and Drainage Act of 1873, in which the government declared its entitlements “to use and control for public purposes
the water for all rivers and streams flowing in natural channels, and other natural collections of stream water”. However, an interesting conceptual and ideational move was emerging in the late 1930s in the field of water, irrigation and river management, where there was greater emphasis on river valleys, basins and catchments. This emphasis came from the new engineering notion of the ‘hydrological unity’ of a ‘river basin’ that was used as the ‘unit of development’ of water ‘resource’ (Gulhati 1974: 31–32). These engineering and policy texts liberally used utilitarian lexicons that reflected a tri-partisan logic of science/technology, nation and capital that played as the central ideology and force in the development of India.

The focus on multi-purpose river valley development through the construction of large dams and reservoirs was a policy that was adopted in the 1940s in colonial India. The colonial authorities focussed on the semi-arid interfluves26 of the Indus and Ganges rivers in the northwest. From 1945–47, the authorities turned their attention to the volatile flood-prone deltaic segments of the Mahanadi and Damodar rivers and pushed for new basin-wise plans. These projects were endorsed as ‘multi-purpose’ projects and initiated in areas where previous canal irrigation schemes of the 19th century had failed to take off financially (D’Souza 2003: 81–82).

Multipurpose River Valley projects (MPRVP) were conceived for ‘holistic development’ of the ‘command’27 and ‘catchment’28 areas of dams through irrigation, electricity power generation, flood protection and various kinds of supplementary employments and livelihood generation.

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26 It is the region between the valley and the river/watercourse or between two rivers/watercourses that is a slightly elevated upland and that belongs to the same drainage system.

27 The command area is the region around the dam that is benefitted by the project through supply of irrigation water and electricity. Other allied benefits also accrue in the area, such as development of transport and communications.

28 The catchment area of a dam is the place where the reservoir is constructed and water from the river is stored. It is the catchment area that faces displacement due to the construction of the reservoir, powerhouse, officers’ colonies, etc. Thus, the command areas are the benefitted zones and the catchments areas are the affected zones. However, a lot of secondary displacement of ‘livelihoods’, such as petty businesses, takes place around the ‘interstices’ of the command and catchments areas.
During this phase the Mahanadi Valley project in Orissa and the Damodar Valley project in West Bengal were set up. There was considerable mass mobilisation against these projects (D’Souza 2012). The Damodar River Valley project was influenced by the global model of multi-purpose projects initiated by Tennessee Valley Authority in the US that constructed a series of dams on the Tennessee River in the 1930s (Klingensmith 2007). These engineering projects that were practised in the US were directly imported and applied to the postcolonial Indian context as ‘modules of high modernism’ (Scott 1998), that is, prepackaged projects that could be deployed in other parts of the world without much consideration of the socio-geographic or historical context.

The Indian state constructed a large number of massive dams from 1947 to the 1970s (Table 4.1). A dogmatic mindset and belief in the power of the ‘modern science’ of irrigation, almost bordering upon ‘superstition’, prevailed in the techno-bureaucratic apparatus of the state during this phase, which was a colonial legacy. This ‘holistic’ focus on river valleys and the MPRVP gave further impetus to dam-building.

The INC, despite its stated commitment to ‘development’ and social diversity, remained a party of the elite class and caste. In their five-year plans, investment in heavy industrialisation was pursued along with Import Substituted Industrialisation (ISI), which was a state-led model of development set up by the government in favour of the national bourgeoisie (Chibber 2003; Mukherjee 2010). In postcolonial India, these dams in reality served the interests of a “dominant coalition of propriety classes” of rich farmers, industrialists and bureaucrats (Bardhan 1998). Dams such as Bhakra were completed in 1963 in Punjab to provide irrigation to rich farmers who were at the forefront of implementing the Green Revolution in the late 1960s to develop High Yielding Variety (HYV) wheat. Moreover, dams produced power for the industrialists and
provided construction for contractors and prestigious jobs in the bureaucracy as skilled professionals and civil engineers for the urban upper and middle classes (Khagram 2004). In addition, dam-building gave lucrative opportunities to squander public money through a nexus of bureaucratic rent-seeking, and the renewal of dam construction leases to contractors through rampant corruption (Sainath 1996).

As the postcolonial Indian state ruled by the INC government swayed under Gramscian ‘passive revolution’ (Kaviraj 1998), it took the lead in gradually ‘developing’ society. This notion of ‘development’ was a slightly modified version of the ‘improvement’ policies of the British colonial state. The ‘development’ nation-state of India ruled under the ‘hegemonic pretense’ of the national bourgeoisie class started extending its coercive and hegemonic power to penetrate the erstwhile subaltern terrain to reorganise the political geography and consolidate the internal and international borders of the newly established nation-state. The hegemonic apparatus to legitimise the nascent state was through the extension of ‘infrastructural power’ (Mann 1993) of development projects to penetrate civil society and to monopolise the field of ‘development’.

Thus, the postcolonial state claimed the sole ‘right to develop’ its own society in a desperate attempt to gain legitimacy and establish hegemony. Hence ‘development’ became an ‘exceptional’ domain, an imperative without logic and the raison de stat of the Indian nation-state. In the name of urgency of development, the Indian state undermined several of its own laws, policies and rational logic, thus creating a perpetual ‘state of emergency’ for the marginalised sections (Benjamin 1940). Uneasy political metaphors such as ‘nation building’, ‘nationalism’, ‘public-purpose’, and ‘greater common good’ were often mobilised to justify the excesses of development.
‘Developmentalism’ was promoted almost as the ‘sanctum sanctorum’ of the Indian nation, with a ‘depoliticising’ emphasis (Ferguson 1990). However, as the state tried to penetrate every sphere of socio-economic and cultural life and strived to reorganise it, it politicised all socio-economic divisions (Kohli 1997:392). In the name of development, India merely turned to ‘internal colonialism’ and created new ‘extraction zones’ and ‘resource frontiers’ (Tsing 2005) in an unevenly developed terrain of mixed economy (Frank 1970). The development was promoted on capital-intensive growth and the exploitation of natural resources was prioritised. The draconian colonial law, the Land Acquisition Act of 1893, came handy in that process. This law was kept in its original form and never amended, so that any land could be appropriated and declared the property of the state to be utilised for ‘public purpose’. This law was used to convert ‘common properties’ into ‘enclosures’ of private enterprises and the state. In the process the Indian state came in direct ‘friction’ (Tsing 2005) with the agriculturist communities and Adivasis (indigenous people), as the state unleashed ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (as a slightly modified continuation of the Marxian ‘primitive accumulation’) (Harvey 2005) to appropriate the Jal, Jangal and Zameen (water, forest and land) that these communities owned. Soon, huge resistance started cropping up against the appropriation of these resources.

Hegemony is not an omnipotent and monolithic force. It is more often than not deeply contested and is vulnerable to ‘resistance, limitations, alterations and challenges’. It has to be continuously recreated and modified (Williams 1977: 112) in the political processes of struggle (Roseberry 1995:77). Naturally, the ‘hegemonic pretense’ of the INC was never a successful and complete project, but was at best a feeble attempt to reach a manageable consensus to carry out the task of capitalist accumulation through ‘development’ in the face of increasing discontent. The pretense slowly started breaking down in the 1960s, when the euphoria of hard-won independence started
waning. The spell broke with Nehru’s death in 1964; in the 1967 elections the INC lost several seats and they were never able to gain a nation-wide political monopoly after this.

The subaltern groups that participated in movements against the state, by engaging, negotiating and disengaging from it, were mainly farmers, poor peasants, *Adivasis*, and ‘rural proletariats’, such as wage labourers, sharecroppers, agricultural labour, migrant labour, and petty commodity producers. Their lives, livelihoods, and ‘life-worlds’ (Habermas 1985) were being vastly transmogrified by these hydropower projects. Their movements were led by various shades of Neo-Marxists, Gandhian, Socialist, indigenous, religious and anti-caste ‘residual discourses’ (William 1997: 122–123). In fact, there was always a subterranean current of subaltern mobilisations led by these groups at the grassroots that the INC was never able to get rid of. These discourses did not disappear with the INC repression, but were merely subdued. From the 1960s, in a complex and messy postcolonial subaltern terrain they became the ideological voice of the ‘multitudes’.

The Indian democratic liberal framework, once installed, did indeed deepen over the years and politicise the subaltern classes. However, it did not automatically reach the bottom of society. There were actual political ‘agents’ who were involved in carrying the liberal democratic framework to the lowest level of society to politically empower the marginalised classes. These agents did not belong to the INC party or its direct ideological fold and neither were they elites in any sense. These groups generally constituted ideologically inspired political individuals, who lived in suburban or rural areas and came from lower middle-class backgrounds, as the leaders and their subaltern allies. It is these groups that carried the Indian democratic framework to the grassroots. The subaltern political spaces, albeit with different capacities and configurations, in
the states of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh were already simmering with discontent and these groups became ‘catalytic agents’ to precipitate the discontent into movements.

In the next section I deal with the first movement against hydropower projects in Madhya Pradesh.

**Photo 3.4: Political map of Madhya Pradesh.  Source:**

http://www.timesofindiatravel.com/madhya-pradesh-map.html
Figure 3.5: Hoshangabad district in Madhya Pradesh situated on the bank of the Narmada River. Tawa River is a tributary of the Narmada River.

Mitti Bachao Abhiyan: the First Glimmer of ‘Consciousness’ against Hydropower Projects in Madhya Pradesh

“If you are to suffer, you should suffer in the interest of the country.”

-Jawaharlal Nehru

(To displaced villagers, while laying the foundation stone for Hirakud project, April 12, 1948)

“The goat which is sacrificed for the ‘greater common good’ does not go to the sacrificial podium on its own… It is pulled, pushed, whisked, shoved, and dragged to death…”

-Vinoba Bhave

(Follower of Mahatma Gandhi and leader of the anti-colonial struggle and the Bhoodan Movement)

(Mishra 1981:29)

In this section I analyse the rare case of Mitti Bachao Abhiyan (Save the Soil Campaign) in Madhya Pradesh (MP). The provincial state of MP constructed the Tawa dam with a ‘good intention’ of developing agriculture through irrigation. However the dam brought about immense

water-logging in the region. A campaign against the dam named ‘Mitti Bachao Abhiyan’ emerged in the locality that was mobilized mainly by the Gandhians. Though the campaign was restrained in its approach and was not hugely successful, it raised the important issue of local community participation in the decision making process of ‘development’ and challenged the technocratic mindset of the Indian state and its bureaucracy. This was the first movement against hydropower projects in MP. The campaigns that emerged here deployed most civilized forms of ‘non-violent’ Gandhian repertoires of petition, lobbying, information dissemination through exhibitions and dramatics to make their case visible, thus showing a significant transformation of ‘subaltern identity’ or ‘subalternity’ in interaction with the state of MP.

Dams have been woven with the metaphors and imaginary of the Indian ‘nation-state’. From the Nehruvian era, dams have been associated with the ‘religiosity’ of being temples of modern India, and Nehru reminded Indians of the sacrifices that are necessary (Banerjee 2008). However, dam and irrigation technologies in India bear the mark of the violence of colonial modernity and its legacies. Nehru’s sanitised version of the sacrifices for the ‘greater common good’ of the nation hides such facts, histories and narratives of violence and chaos. Nehru’s speech renders an alluring halo of greatness to those displacements and protracted genocides caused by development, by bestowing on them the status of ‘martyr-hood’ and repackaging their narratives of misery as ‘sacrifices they made for the nation’. The irony is that the people who were affected by the excesses of ‘development’ did not sacrifice themselves in their agential capability, but were made to ‘suffer’ and were ‘sacrificed’ at the altar of modernity in the name of ‘nation’. They were despised in their life and glorified in their death. Vinoba Bhave, the avowed follower of Gandhi, understood that well (Mishra 1981).
Due to various unwanted experiments, the areas of irrigation and agricultural development in postcolonial India became laboratories of colonial modernity. Rampant experiments were conducted at the expense of poor farmers. The case of Tawa Dam in MP is a glaring example of such faulty hydraulic experiments (Mishra 1987).

The state of MP was formed under the independent India State Reorganisation Act in 1956. The first chief minister of the state was Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla from the INC. After independence, the general idea behind agricultural development was to bring irrigation water to the Malwa region in MP to increase agricultural production. However, these modernist technocratic principles received a massive setback when it was found that large irrigation projects not only create problems of displacement but also cause severe environmental problems, such as water logging, salination and decreasing agricultural productivity 30.

The first campaign against large dams emerged in MP only in the 1970s in Hoshangabad district against the Tawa dam. However, the campaign was not against displacement, but against the problem of water-logging (Mishra 1987).

The Tawa dam was built on the River Tawa in Hoshangabad district, situated in Malwa region 31 of MP. The dam was part of the Tawa multipurpose river valley project, which laid out grand employment generation plans in the dam command area that included canals, networks of road, co-operative fishery, veterinary hospitals, cold storage and markets. The plan was to bring about complete modernisation of the area.

30 Excerpts from Interview with Anupam Mishra taken on 11th November 2011. In Gandhi Peace Foundation, Delhi.
31 Malwa region is a natural volcanic plateau region in Madhya Pradesh, situated south of the Vindhya mountain ranges. It is an historical and ‘folk’ region where several Muslim, Rajput, Maratha and Bhil principalities flourished. Malwa used to be part of Vindhya Pradesh. Now, the districts of Western Madhya Pradesh and Nimar districts are part of it. Historically, part of Rajasthan and Maharashtra also belonged to this region. Most movements against large dams have historically emerged from Malwa.
The Tawa project was planned in 1956. Construction of the dam started in 1968, under the supervision of the Chief Minister of MP, Shaymacharan Shukla, and was completed in 1975. The cost of the project was estimated at Rs. 643 million in 1968, but the expenditure eventually came to Rs. 914.2 million. It was a grand ‘hydraulic mission’ controlled by a massive bureaucracy of one chief engineer, 9 superintendent engineers, 19 working engineers, 70 assistant engineers, 350 overseers and 20,000 labourers (Mishra 1981: 3).

During the construction of the Tawa dam, the MP government assured everyone that the irrigation acreage of the area would increase from 1.3 per cent to 60 per cent. The government promised to irrigate the maximum agricultural land through canal water from the Tawa reservoir. The bureaucratic procedures of the Bhoomi Samarupan (levelling of land) and Chakbandi (to measure and consolidate landholdings) were carried out in the villages and the names of the owners were registered. To conduct these operations, the government initially demanded Rs. 800 from each landowner, which was later increased to Rs. 2,000. The villagers reluctantly agreed to pay the amount, because they expected that irrigation would change their fortunes (Ibid: 12).

However, after just two years of irrigation, Tawa proved to be a major engineering fiasco that caused serious problems of water logging and salination of agricultural fields. Because of the high absorption capacity of the black soil of this region, the seepage of water from the canals became an acute problem. About 30 village settlements in the lowland regions of the command area were terribly affected and were converted into muddy fields. The green cultivable stretches became a ‘wet-desert’ or as villagers referred to it: “Pani Ki Jail Me Band Gaon” (villages trapped in jails of water) (Ibid: 10).

The water logging in the fields also affected the houses, as water seeped into the walls and houses started collapsing in several villages. When the dam reservoir was full and water was
distributed through canals, it temporarily submerged the village roads, which severely disrupted transport and communications in the command area villages. As water poured in, encircling the villages, it turned them into *tapu* or ‘secluded islands’ that were surrounded by stretches of water. When the waters subsided, villages were affected by the problem of muddy soil, which blocked communications in and out of the region. The state irrigation minister, political leaders, government officials and collectors had an ephemeral presence with vacuous promises that were never fulfilled. The condition of cultivation, roads and houses steadily deteriorated in the area, and no steps were taken to ameliorate the problem (Ibid 11).

The villages of Hoshangabad used to have high productivity in *gehu* (wheat), *dalhan* (pulses) and *tilhan* (sesame oil seeds) without any irrigation. This area had high levels of ground water and an average yearly rainfall of 1,303 mm, so it probably did not need canal irrigation; ground water irrigation through tube-wells and wells were sufficient for the crops in this region. Both the *Kharif* crop in summer and the *Rabi* crop in winter were cultivated without any irrigation water (Mishra 1987).

However, the cultivators were never asked whether or not they needed irrigation. Other changes also took place. After the canals started irrigating the fields, crops such as *dalhan* were displaced and soya bean cultivation was encouraged. The problem is that soya beans cannot be stored for long and had to be sold in nearby factories. Eventually, through the Green Revolution, the tasty, sturdy and indigenous varieties of these crops were replaced by vulnerable and high-yielding varieties (HYV) of seeds that could respond well to the canal water, chemical fertilisers, pesticides, germicides and herbicides to produce surplus crops. These changes, no doubt, increased crop yield but they decreased profit margins of the cultivators. With the increase in surplus crops, the subsistence economy cycle of the peasants, which was partially autopoietic,
was broken and emerging national markets penetrated the region. The MP government enthusiastically propagandised the surplus crop production and Rs.10 million in profit it had made through the canal irrigation of soya bean crop, but the farmers were unable to forget the memory of the dalhan crops, which had brought them about Rs. 90 million in profit each year.

The stagnation of agriculture in these water logged fields and the disruption of lives and livelihood gave rise to the Mitti Bachao Abhiyan (Save the Soil Campaign, henceforth referred to as Abhiyan) in 1977. In 1976 some workers in the Sarvodaya organisation that had been initiated by Gandhi and its rural reconstruction missions were working with farmers on problems of alcoholism in the village. When they found that people were facing problems caused by the Tawa dam, they started examining these issues as well (Ibid 3).

Suresh Dewan, a Sarvodaya worker, took these issues seriously. Suresh lived in Rohna village and taught in a pathshala (village school) in the district headquarters of Hoshangabad. He was joined by Rakesh Dewan, who taught in a primary school in nearby Hoshangabad, and some inspired students named Narendra, Jayprakash and Yogesh. Their efforts were bolstered by two brothers, Banwarilal Choudhary and Ramkumar Choudhary. Banwarilal was a respected ex-bureaucrat and the assistant director of the agriculture department in MP. He had been passionately involved in Gandhian anti-colonial mobilisations in 1942, and when Gandhi made a nationwide appeal to the youth to participate in the anti-colonial struggle, Banwarilal left his job to join Gandhi. In 1952 Banwarilal and his brother Ramkumar started a small Gandhian organisation called Gram Sewa Samiti (GSS; Village Volunteers’ Committee). Banwarilal was trained in agricultural science and was an experienced farmer. He encouraged Suresh (Dewan) and the group to examine the issues in greater depth (Mishra 1989).
The GSS, along with these activists, conducted a preliminary study of the problems caused by the Tawa dam and identified the main issues. Suresh Dewan published a small article titled “Narmada Ke Kachar Ke Suvarna Mati ko Daldal Hone se Bachaiye” (Please save the golden soil of Narmada Valley from turning into mud) in the Hindi quarterly newspaper Shatabdi Sandesh published from Indore in the August 15, 1977 issue. This was not an angry outburst, but a sensitive and sensible appeal. He raised the problems of water-loging, water seepage, increasing soil salinity, issues of land levelling, disease-affected terrain, Chakbandi and decreasing crop yield backed by statistics, arguments and proof. This was the first statement in the media that was written to draw the attention of government and public to save 6 lakh acres of land from the devastating effects of water logging. This appeal was also sent to 14 other newspapers as a Letter to the Editor 15 days later, but only 4 newspapers published it. After reading this appeal in the local newspaper, some farmers wrote to the activists, in which they narrated similar experiences. Based on these letters that acted as feedback, the activists started deeper engagements with the problems of the farmers (Mishra 1981:8).

Most of the activists worked in full-time jobs, so they worked on these issues in their free time; hence, their activism was informal. It was not their employment, but their passion. They started working on Tawa issues without setting up a formal organisation. They were not acting as a social movement, but as a civic ‘conscience collective’ to sensitise and raise the awareness of people. Therefore, they termed their group ‘Abhiyan’ and not ‘Andolan’, i.e. ‘campaign’, and not ‘movement’. Although their activities were political, they did not intend to gain political mileage from them.32

32 From the interview with Anupam Mishra taken on 11th November 2011. In Gandhi Peace Foundation, Delhi
The activists and peasants prepared for four months and then they organised meetings in villages such as Pathauri, Sankhera and Rohna. On the one hand, this was an awareness-raising programme that involved the participation of cultivators; on the other hand, expert suggestions from agricultural scientists were presented to provide a halo of scientific legitimacy in a language that is well-comprehended by the state. With the help of the Madhya Pradesh Jawaharlal Agricultural University Centre for Agricultural Research and Investigation, which was situated in Pawarkheda village, they conducted a survey in various villages. The results of the survey were announced at a gathering attended by NGOs and agricultural scientists. In August 1977, at a meeting of youth workers called by the Gandhi Peace Foundation, these concerns were raised in Delhi for the first time. Later, in October 1977, the same concerns were raised in a regional meeting of agricultural scientists at the Indian Council for Agricultural Research Centre in Kasturba Gram, Indore (Ibid: 11).

These efforts did not go in vain. The famous agricultural scientist, M.S. Swaminathan, set up a sub-committee to investigate the problems of the Tawa reservoir; the sub-committee was chaired by irrigation and soil specialist, D.R. Bhoomla, and the members were bureaucrats from MP government, scientists from Jawaharlal Nehru Agricultural University and activists from Abhiyan. The Bhoomla sub-committee conducted a field survey on March 22, 1977 around Tawa dam and its canals in Hoshangabad. The report admitted that problems raised by the people were more than true; after two years of canal irrigation, the land had become waterlogged and muddy, because it was at a lower height and the black soil retained water (Mishra 1988).

Although the report did not directly affect the policies of the Tawa dam project officials and the irrigation bureaucracy, it increased the confidence of the Abhiyan activists. They consistently tried to hold an open dialogue with project officials. As a result of their efforts, in November
1977 the project officials and Abhiyan activists conducted a joint survey in the villages where the Bhoomi Samarupan had not been completed according to the rules (Mishra 1981: 5).

The strategies adopted by the Abhiyan were not of direct conflict but of persuasion, negotiation and co-operation with the government. Their work with the masses was pedagogy-centered, and they used teaching techniques (their background as school teachers reflected that) to negotiate and convince the people and government officials. Since they were not a full-time organisation, their tactics were contained33.

On March 21, 1978 the MBA activists wrote a letter and sent 15 copies to political leaders, state ministers and various bureaucrats in the state irrigation and drainage departments. The letter consisted of two parts: the first half raised nine problems associated with Tawa dam and requested a quick solution to water-logging, and the second half described the problems in detail. The Abhiyan activists expected the government to come up with a long-term solution.

The farmers started directly engaging in ‘political communication’ through information dissemination of awareness. The activists needed suitable places where they could convey information to the people. The first place and occasion that they selected was the famous local carnival, Ramji Baba. They set up a small exhibition at the carnival that promoted awareness about the goodness of soil for life, facts about soil fertility, and human activities that could degrade the soil. The exhibition was attended by lawyers, members of political parties, government officials, teachers and farmers. Their opinions on the muddy terrain created by the Tawa were recorded in a register and most visitors wrote candidly about their experiences and opinions. Thus, the carnival created an avenue for debate and discussion about the degradation of land due to water-logging in Hoshangabad district. In parallel, the MBA activists started writing

33 Excerpts from Interview with Anupam Mishra taken on 11th November 2011. In Gandhi Peace Foundation, Delhi
regularly about these issues in local newspapers. Consequently, a socio-political milieu of debate, dissent and awareness was created (Mishra 1981: 12-14).

On May 22, 1979, the Tawa dam development project authority invited the Abhiyan activists for a debate and discussion; this was their first invitation. There were 24 officials from the government and the dam authority at the meeting, among who were the head of the Tawa project authority, the Collector of Hoshangabad, three assistant directors from the agriculture department and superintendent engineer of the Narmada division. They came prepared with ‘scientific’ data and statistics. The Abhiyan was represented by four people: Suresh Dewan, Ram Kumar Choudhary, Rakesh Dewan and Banwarilal Choudhary; they raised nine different issues related to Tawa water-logging problems. However, the Tawa authority took about nine months to respond to these issues, but most of the answers were not satisfactory (Mishra 1981:17-18).

I will end this section with the case of Haridas Patel from Byaora village. Patel’s 8-acre fertile land was converted into muddy terrain due to water logging. Patel was a well-to-do peasant in his village. Before the dam was constructed, his land was considered to be of good quality. When canal work started, his 8-acre land was leveled (Samatalikaran) and he was charged Rs 800 per acre. When water entered his field through canals, it never left. Since Patel’s now-ruined land was next to the Hoshangabad-Itarsi highway, he used to show his field and narrate his story to every government or non-government survey team that visited Tawa or went by the road next to his field. His story started circulating around government offices and moved to the Parliament. This embarrassed the government; the drainage department suddenly started co-operating with him and spent Rs. 70,000 trying to improve the condition of his land. Although several types of drains were created to remove the water from Patel’s land, everything failed (Mishra 1981:30).
Patel was not happy with the government despite these efforts. His logic was simple; he said, “Rather than spending Rs. 70,000 on the drainage of my land, if government had given me 35,000, I would have left all claims on my land”. When he asked the government for compensation for his ruined land, the officials rhetorically said, “If somebody dies due to high tension electrical wires, should the electricity department be blamed for that?” Patel retorted angrily, “I did not go near the electric wires to kill myself; I was pushed into it.”

Slowly but steadily, the next generation of farmers also started taking up these issues. Laxman Singh, a young member of the Abhiyan from Rohna village, wrote a play named Tut te sapne (‘breaking dreams’) about the problems of Tawa water-loggeing, which his students from the village school performed on the village stage. In the play, the protagonist, a farmer named Dhanna, takes a loan from the Sahukar (village moneylender) to pay for land-levelling. When he is unable to repay the loan, the government auctions his land. Dhanna and his dreams are sold into the hands of the state—the same state that promised to bring him the fruits of development and modern irrigation (Mishra 1989).

Between 1979 and 1983, there were criticisms by both government and non-government organisations about the Tawa hydropower and irrigation project. In 1983, after seven years of these persistent problems, the situation changed slightly when the irrigation minister and Members of Parliament surveyed the region. The irrigation ministry appointed a commission to investigate the environmental effects of the Tawa dam. The survey was conducted in the 31 most-affected villages from the 785 villages in the Tawa command area (Mishra 1988).

The government installed about 700 tube-wells in the command area of the dam at an expense of Rs. 30 million. These tube-wells were to be used to drain the excess water that had flooded the fields, but this did not work as the water level was higher in Pithauri and Chandrapur villages.
Meanwhile, the campaign slowly died. Although the campaign was politically self-limiting, it had provided the necessary spark and the first glimmer of political consciousness against hydropower projects in the region. It can be considered the precursor of the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (NBA; Save Narmada Movement) that would emerge in the 1980s. The problem of Tawa was local in nature, but an even larger problem of dams and massive displacement was emerging in Narmada Valley. In the *Abhiyan* the *Adivasis* of Narmada Valley played no role, because it was a problem mainly faced by the agriculturist communities living in the valley. However, in the NBA that would engulf this area from mid-1980, the *Adivasis* of Narmada Valley, who were mainly Bhils and Bhilalas, would emerge as the central resilient force against the state-led displacement and social dislocation (covered in Chapter 5).

In the next section I will engage with the mobilisations against hydropower projects in Maharashtra, which continued the legacy of the *Mulshi Satyagraha* (covered in Chapter 2).

![Political Map of Maharashtra](https://www.mapsofindia.com)

**Figure 3.6: Political Map of Maharashtra.** The southern Maharashtra district consists of Pune, Sangli, Satara, Sholapur and Kolhapur. Historically, these five districts have been the epicentre of various mobilisation activities. The Krishna basin covers the states of Maharashtra, Karnataka
and Andhra Pradesh. The five districts come under the upper Krishna sub-basin and most of the dam movements in the postcolonial period (including the Mulshi Satyagraha in the colonial period) emerged here.

Source: http://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/maharashtra/maharashtra.htm

Figure 3.7: Physical map of Upper Krishna sub-basin that is situated in the state of Maharashtra and covers five districts. The picture shows various small, medium and larger dams that are being constructed on the Krishna River as of year 2000.

Source: (D’Souza 2006: 103)
Figure 3.8: This rare photo shows the flood in Pune city caused by the breaching of the Panshet dam in 1961. Source: [http://www.mid-day.com/news/2012/jul/120712-61-flood-affected-living-in-MHADA-colony-have-a-big-reason-to-smile.htm](http://www.mid-day.com/news/2012/jul/120712-61-flood-affected-living-in-MHADA-colony-have-a-big-reason-to-smile.htm)

Maharashtra: The Continuing Legacy of Subaltern Heterodoxy

In this section I argue that unlike MP, Maharashtra had a continuing legacy of movements against hydropower project from *Mulshi Satyagraha*. Naturally the movements against dams that emerged in Maharashtra after independence were more active and less contained in nature. The movements here were mainly led by the Marxists and to some extent by the Socialists. Their interaction with the provincial state and the bureaucracy of Maharashtra was much more radical, organised and focused in nature. The subaltern movements in Maharashtra not only challenged the provincial state but changed its formal structure as new policies and the state passed laws to protect the rights of the people who were displaced by dams and other development projects, as a response to these movements. In this process of dialectical
interaction there was a slow transformation of subaltern political subjectivity whereby they demanded secure legal rights for the ‘displaced citizens’ to get rehabilitation.

After the *Mulshi Satyagraha* (1920–24), the only major movement against hydropower projects in colonial Bombay Presidency was organised against the Bhatgar Dam project in the 1930s. Bhatgar was a gravity dam that was constructed in 1927 on Yelwanti River in the princely state of Bhor by the colonial government. A small movement was led against it by the leader of the *Satara Prati Sarkar* (parallel government), Kranti Sinh Nana Patil. Nagnath Naikwadi, who was a comrade in the same *Prati Sarkar*, joined him. The movement was largely unsuccessful, but both of them continued their fight against hydropower projects in independent Maharashtra until they died. Between 1947 and 1960, several dams were built in Maharashtra and sporadic agitations took place against several of them. Most of these struggles were waged by indigenous tribes and the ‘rural poor’, but they failed to achieve the demands of the displaced persons.34

The Marathi-speaking state of Maharashtra came into political existence on May 1, 1960, as the culmination of a long-drawn struggle by the *Samyukta Maharashtra Andolan* (United Maharashtra Movement) to consolidate the Marathi-speaking regions of India into a separate state. Applying the State Reorganisation Act of 1956, the Indian Government split the Bombay Presidency into two states, Maharashtra and Gujarat (Deo 1947). The first Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Y.B. Chavan, was a prominent leader of the *Samyukta Maharashtra* movement and was backed by huge mass support. After the formation of Maharashtra, the Indian National Congress (INC) retained its power in the state. One of the strongholds of the INC was the powerful sugar farmers’ lobby from rural areas, which was mainly in southern and western Maharashtra.

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34 Interview with Bharat Patanker dated July 3, 2011 in Kasegaon (Sangli), Maharashtra.
Despite organising a number of grassroots mobilisations, the Left parties were never able to claim a stronghold in Maharashtra state politics. The primary reason was that the *Ryotwari* system of land tenure had already been implemented in southern Maharashtra by the colonisers; this provided land to the cultivators who paid tax to the government without the intervention of any landed intermediary classes. This empowered the cultivators significantly as now they had a sense of ‘entitlements’, attachment, rights and empowerments since they paid tax to the government directly, which increased their interaction with the government. In other parts of Maharashtra, the implementation of a well-planned land reforms act by the Maharashtra Pradesh state Congress government in 1956, to some extent, alleviated the radicalisation of the peasantry and played a part in the precipitation of dissent for some time. However, this tenancy act was also enacted in response to mobilisations by the peasantry for land reforms and the abolition of the rights of landed nobilities in other parts of Maharashtra. By abolishing the landed intermediaries, occupancy rights were conferred on a large body of tenants in all parts of the state, which created a powerful group of tenants in the Pune–Kolhapur belt, who were mainly *Kunbi* Maratha by caste

When their land rights were abolished, several of the erstwhile landed nobility made a transition to capitalist farming. Sugarcane cultivation, which had been promoted by the British through dam and canal waters, became one of the mainstays of these capitalist farmers. Maratha as a caste power was already gaining power in the rural politics of southern Maharashtra through the politicisation of ‘co-operative movements’ and by gaining important positions in the sugarcane co-operatives. A relatively propertied class of ‘sugar barons’ emerged, who were a class of

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35 The only intermediary tenures continued today are *Devasthan* and *Wakf Inam* grants (Dandekar 1980).
capitalist farmers that hegemonised the rural politics. The ruling state Congress party formed alliances with these ‘sugar barons’ to entrench their rural base of power and ‘hegemony’ in the state (Lalvani 2008).

The capitalist farmers had a high stake in maximising their share of irrigation water to grow sugarcane, which is a highly water-intensive crop. Sugarcane consumes 10 times more water than indigenous food crops, such as juwar (pearl millet) and bajra (sorghum). This is how sugarcane monopolised the irrigation system in Maharashtra, virtually making it a monocropping system (Lalvani 2008).

To gain political support, the irrigation facility was increased in southern and western Maharashtra during the Green Revolution by constructing dams such as the Koyna. This boosted the growth of the expanding cash crop economy that was based on sugarcane cultivation and cooperatives (Wallach 1985). The sugar co-operative in Maharashtra not only transformed the socio-economic structure of rural western Maharashtra by bringing in greater wealth and prosperity to a few elites, but also changed the political equilibrium of the state. In the mid-1960s there was a rise in the ‘demand politics’ of the people, as opposed to the ‘command politics’ of the state (Rudolph and Rudolph 1987). The decaying hegemony of the INC at the national level after Nehru’s death in 1964, the empowerment of ‘middle peasants’ (the middle

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36 However, not all sugarcane cultivators are capitalist farmers or rich farmers. Several poor farmers with small landholdings also cultivate sugarcane due the lack of market choices. Sugarcane, because of the stability of market prices and assured procurement, gives farmers an assured and reasonable income. Hence even poor farmers in low rainfall zones prefer to cultivate sugarcane with some alternative mixed cropping. This argument is supported by interviews with (Bharat Patanker on October 3, 2011 at Maharashtra, Kasegaon; Suhas Paranjpe in Thane on October 6, 2011; K. J. Joy in Pune, Maharashtra, on September 7, 2011 and Anant Phadke in Pune, Maharashtra October 5, 2012).

37 Although only 3 per cent of cultivable land in Maharashtra is under sugarcane cultivation, it consumes 60 per cent of the irrigation water. Therefore, only 14 per cent of the total land under cultivation in Maharashtra receives irrigation water (R.Phadke 2002).
income/land holding peasants) due to the green revolution and the deepening of electoral democracy accrued its effects in Maharashtra as well.

The rural politics of the Congress depended entirely on alliances with the ‘sugar lobbies’ and their leaders. The ‘sugar lobby’ had given the state prominent leaders such as Y.B. Chavan and Vasantdada Patil, who became chief ministers. The ruling Pradesh Congress had high electoral stakes in constructing a large number of dams to make water available to the rich farmers of the sugar belt. In addition to assuring the production of sugarcane through irrigation and modernising agriculture in the drought-stricken area of southern Maharashtra, the state’s mission was also ‘modernising’ and ‘development’. When the Maharashtra government started building a large number of dams, it led to the emergence of various shades of rural politics around the maximisation of irrigation water, and, simultaneously, mobilisation against the displacement caused by these hydropower projects (Ibid).

**MRDPSP and the formation of the Rehabilitation Law, 1976**

In this sub-section I analyse the processes and events through which the movements of the subalterns changed the structure of the state. In response to the intense demands put forward by the movements, the state was forced to pass a law to safeguard the interest of the displaced people in Maharashtra. This was the first law in India which ratified the legal rights of the displaced for rehabilitation and thus expanded the ‘legal public sphere’ or the legal arena of political contestation in the state.

The struggle against displacement became stronger when the *Maharashtra Rajya Dharangrasta Va Prakalpagrasta Shetkari Parishad* (MRDPSP; Maharashtra Organisation of Dam-Affected and Project-Affected Farmers) was formed in 1962, i.e., just two years after the state of
Maharashtra was formed. Before the MRDPSP was established, several Left workers from the *Shetkari Kamgaar Paksha* (Peasants’ and Workers’ Party) and other unorthodox communist organisations active in southern Maharashtra, such as the *Lal Nishan Paksha* (LNP; Red Flag Party), were already mobilising dam evictees in the Krishna river basin area (Phadke 2000).

The LNP played a leading role in founding the MRDPSP. As an umbrella organisation or a federal body, the MRDPSP was formed at the regional level to ‘articulate’ a number of ‘micro mobilisations’ into a ‘macro collective’. Under the MRDPSP, several dam evictee movements united, where each movement has its own smaller organisation. The first president of the MRDPSP was Datta Deshmukh, a well-known leader of the LNP. He was a civil engineer, which gave him an edge over other leaders, as he understood the technologies of dam building and engineering.

After the state of Maharashtra was formed, the first massive displacement due to hydropower projects in Maharashtra occurred with the construction of the Koyna dam. Construction started in 1956 and was completed in 1964. The dam arguably was constructed on an excellent dam site between two hills that minimised the extent of land submergence and displacement.

The Koyna hydroelectric power project remains the largest dam in Maharashtra. The reservoir is made of a rubble-concrete structure on the river Koyna, which emerges from the Mahabaleshwar hills on Shahayadri Range. The dam reservoir is situated in Koyna Nagar in Satara district of Maharashtra. The power plant can generate 1290 MW of electricity. During the Green Revolution, the Koyna dam acted as the lifeline to agriculture in Maharashtra.

The Koyna Dam submerged 98 villages in Koyna valley and displaced a massive number of people. About 30 per cent of them were resettled in Raigad, Sangli and Sholapur districts, but

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38 Excerpts from four hour interview with Bharat Patanker on October 3, 2011 at Kasegaon (Maharashtra),
the rest never got a rehabilitation package. It displaced the community of *Kunbi Maratha* farmers and the pastoral *Gavli Dhangars* community that rear buffaloes. The *Gavli Dhangars* moved further up in the hills and became marginalised and secluded (Bokil 1999)\(^{39}\).

The movement against the Koyna project was initiated by Nana Patil and later the MRDPSP took over its leadership. After few years of struggle, the intensity of mobilisation ebbed, as the displaced families migrated and scattered for livelihood. However, the movement continued to simmer at a low intensity, and re-emerged on a massive scale after 1986\(^{40}\).

The first major and sustained struggle of the MRDPSP began with people who were evicted when the Panchset dam was constructed about 40 km from Pune. Panchset dam or Tanaji Sagar dam was built as one of three dams on the Ambi River; the other two were Varasgaon and Khadakwasla, which was a mason gravity dam constructed in 1879. The Panchset, which is a mud dam, broke on July 12, 1961, in its first year of storing water because of heavy rainfall and the lack of concrete cement structure. To save Pune, the downstream Khadakwasla dam was blown up using dynamite. However, Pune was flooded; 4,000 people died and the damage to property was massive (Brahme 1967).

When the dam was being re-built, farmers who lived around the reservoir vehemently opposed its reconstruction, because the reservoir would submerge their lands. The MRDPSP took up the issue under the leadership of Datta Deshmukh and his associate Baba Adhav. They demanded *Vikashan-shil Punarvasan* (Progressive Rehabilitation) for the Panchset dam oustees. Datta claimed ‘developmental rehabilitation’ as a progressive demand that not only entailed a claim for land in lieu of submerged land, but also an equal share in the fruits of ‘development’. The

\(^{39}\) In 1967, Koyna was the epicentre of a massive earthquake that is considered to be due to reservoir-induced seismicity. This killed about 177 people and injured 2,300 others in Koynagar village (Hildyard and Goldsmith 1984).

\(^{40}\) Interview with Bharat Patanker on July 4, 2011 in Kasegaon (Sangli), Maharashtra.
MRDPSP claimed that everybody living in an area that faces submergence should be rehabilitated before construction began. So a strategic position of ‘Pehla Punarvasan, Phir Dharan’ (first rehabilitation, then the dam) emerged in this phase. Later, this became the principal slogan of the dam evictees’ movement in Maharashtra. Hence, from the beginning the stance of these movements has been ‘state-engaging’ (Hung 2011). That is, their struggle, demands and dialogues were centripetally positioned around state politics and they constructively engaged with the state for negotiating their demands. This was partly due to the empowerment of the Maratha castes in Maharashtra where, historically, caste-based dynamics played a significant role in social relations (Jaffrelot and Kumar 2009). However, the movements of the dam-affected were not caste-based, because dams affect Gaothans or village communities as a whole and, therefore, their identity as ‘displaced’ to a great extent transcended their caste identity as Brahmin, Kunbi Maratha, Mali, Gayli Dhangar or Dalit, since all of them were at the receiving end of destructive development. Their subaltern identity emerged and consolidated their position and demands by transcending these heterogeneous caste and class identities.

Therefore, the political pressure they placed on the government was not exactly through caste-based electoral politics, but by building up pressure through extra-electoral movement politics and non-party political processes. Moreover, they mostly voted for the INC in the elections, since there was no viable alternative political party in the state politics; at the same time, their movements were organised by varieties of left and socialist organisations. The people understood

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41 From two hour interview with Baba Adhav on July 11, 2011 in Pune, Maharashtra
42 Maratha is a middle caste or Other Backward Caste (OBC) in Maharashtra. The Maratha caste dynamics in the dam evictees’ movement was also ‘nullified’ because the sugar barons and state political elites were mainly Maratha.
43 Chapter 6 will deal with the form, content and cultural, ideological and historical configuration of such an identity in detail.
these as pragmatic political choices that lead to two very different ends—the INC managing the state on the one hand, and the left parties radicalising and democratising society on the other. These movements did not oppose the idea of ‘state intervention’ or ‘development’ per se. However, they did challenge the ‘state-led’ exclusive development, where the benefits of development go to a few people, hinged upon existing and newly created social, economic and political exclusion that eliminated majority of the rural and urban poor from the benefits of development\textsuperscript{44}. These movements did not want state resources to be distributed as paternalistic or clientelistic ‘handouts’, but be given as rightful and legal ‘entitlements’ of the ‘citizens’. However, the state wanted to treat subalterns as ‘subject populations’ that have to be ‘governed’, and not as ‘citizens’ (Chatterjee 2010).

In response to the demands of the MRDPSP, the government started offering land, but much of it was poor quality fallow land that was unsuitable for agriculture. This further enraged the agitating farmers and they demanded irrigated land in the ‘command area’ of the dam, as well as in the surrounding benefitted zones. Their rationale was that through irrigation the productivity of the land in the ‘command area’ was expected to increase four-fold, and, therefore, a farmer who got irrigated land in the command area of the reservoir had to part with some of the land for the rehabilitation of people who were displaced from the reservoir ‘catchment area’. Datta Deshmukh, being a civil engineer, started proposing alternative ‘sites’, plans and designs to reduce the area submerged by the reservoir. These interventions set a new trend of proposing ‘sustainable alternatives’ to upcoming dams planned by the government, which later movements fully embraced\textsuperscript{45}.

\textsuperscript{44} From two hour Interview with Baba Adhav on July 11, 2011 in Pune, Maharashtra

\textsuperscript{45} From four hour Interview with Bharat Patanker on July 4, 2011 in Pune, Maharashtra
Almost immediately after the formation of the state of Maharashtra in 1960, the Maharashtra State Irrigation Commission was set up to look into the problems of distribution of irrigation and drought-affected regions of the state. In particular, Vidarbha and Marathwada regions of the state were severely affected by drought they continue to be so, where mobilisation against drought policies of the state had been ongoing for a long time. The commission was headed by S.G. Barve, the state minister of finance, and the MRDPSP leader, Datta Deshmukh, was also a member. The commission submitted its report in 1962. This is one of the rare government reports that explicitly gives credit to the subaltern agency as causal in the formation of the committee. The committee says “...some problems like difficulties in assessment of betterment levy, localisation of crops, and continuance of certain irrigation management practices, which farmers do not like and are protesting against emphasis mine were also awaiting solution; it was against this background that our commission was appointed” (GOM 1962: 3). The commission tried to take a participatory approach in involving the people, mainly farmers, activists and social workers. Informal discussions were held with the people, where about 102 participants came to discuss how to assess local irrigation conditions.

This is also the first commission in Maharashtra to look into the rehabilitation of farmers who had been displaced by an irrigation project. They asked for a comprehensive rehabilitation plan to be prepared and recommended that the government should rehabilitate the displaced before the commencement of the project. They also suggested an *ex gratia* cash compensation to the oustees (an extra amount of cash that is paid as compensation for the property taken over by the government). At the same time, the commission recommended amending the 1894 legislation for land acquisition to ease the process for acquiring land for irrigation projects. They also recommended that the law on land ceiling should be applicable in the command area of dams to
make surplus land available for the rehabilitation of dam evictees, who should get equal benefit (GOM 1962: 116–117). However, the actual law of rehabilitation took shape much later, in 1976, after another 14 years of struggle by the MRDPSP.

**Figure 3.9**: V.M Dandekar (renowned economist), delivering a speech in a drought eradication conference in 1985. **Source**: Personal collection of Bharat Patanker and Gail Omvedt.
The 1972–73 Drought in Maharashtra

In this sub-section I argue that several of the movements in southern Maharashtra have ‘entangled genealogies’ and cannot be studied separately. Most of the mobilisations emerged here as ‘movements of movements’, where a single demand created cascading dynamics of ever-rising capillaries and networks of demands and rounds of negotiations. Similarly, the movement of the dam evictees that blossomed here is part of a ‘relational history’ of the movements of drought-affected people, the strike by the textile mill labourers in Bombay, movements for sustainable use of water and several others. Thus, the dam evictees’ movement was situated within the centre of large social structural transformations that rural regions of southern Maharashtra was undergoing. The drought-affected people’s movement, Dalit movements, peasant movements and movements of rural toilers, Adivasis and women criss-crossed to form ‘overdetermined’ (Althusser 1985) subaltern political subjectivity, where all these trajectories co-operated and contradicted to give rise to synergistic political consequences.

The southern Maharashtra region is generally drought-prone and there were several droughts in the 1960s and 1970s. People migrated each year to Bombay in search of a living and mainly worked as labourers in the textile mills. The textile mill trade unions were the hub of Left politics in Bombay. From 1970–73, a severe drought affected four districts in southern Maharashtra: Satara, Sangli, Sholapur and Kolhapur. The drought affected 80 per cent of the villages in Maharashtra and about 15 to 30 million people in a population of 50 million. The vulnerable population in rural areas, mainly the rural poor, labourers, women and the toiling masses, were affected the most. A committee called the Dushkal Nivaran Va Nirmoolan Samiti (Drought Relief and Eradication Committee) was set up by independent intellectuals, such as V.M Dandekar, and activist groups; they were joined by independent organisations, such as Yuva
Kranti Dal (Yukrand) and the LNP. The committee eventually gave rise to an organisation called the Maharashtra Rajya Shetmajoor Parishad (Maharashtra State Rural Labour Organisation). They started mobilising people to demand drought relief schemes and the larger purpose of alternative rural and agricultural development programmes in Maharashtra. They were crucial in shaping the response of the civil society of Maharashtra to the drought of 1972 (Patel 2006).

In response to these mobilisations, the government of Maharashtra appointed a committee in 1978, headed by V.M. Dandekar, a renowned economist and V.R. Deuskar, a senior expert in irrigation engineering; Datta Deshmukh from the LNP was also included. The committee is popularly known as the ‘3-D committee’ or the Dandekar-Deuskar-Deshmukh Committee. The report suggested that for sustainable irrigation, a supply of exogenous water and stored irrigated water was necessary and they benchmarked a supply of 750 mm of irrigation water per acre of land. This report suggested that it was imperative to build large water storage dams and canals for the drought-affected regions so that there was a supply of exogenous water; there was also a need to harvest water endogenously. The report also discussed the issue of sugar lobbies appropriating maximum irrigation water in the state.

These mobilisations against drought brought in employment policies to manage drought which initially gave rise to the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme (MEGS) and eventually the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Act, 1977 was passed, which was the first of its kind in India. As part of food for work schemes during drought, several irrigation canals, tanks and hydropower projects were constructed with the help of labourers from drought-affected regions in southern Maharashtra. Thus, recurrent droughts and a need to stabilise and modernise

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46 From movement pamphlet written by Gail Omvedt (no date).
47 Other states began to copy the scheme and this led to the National Rural Employment Guarantee (NREGA) Act, 2005.
agriculture brought about new imperatives for constructing hydropower projects in this region (Patel 2006).

Datta Deshmukh as a member of the LNP was an active participant in the drought eradication movements. As part of MEGS and workers’ movements in drought-prone areas of Maharashtra, Datta Deshmukh had experienced the problems of drought; the demand for ‘first rehabilitation and then the dam’ largely emerged from these experiences. He always linked his opposition to upcoming dams with the need to bring outside water to drought-prone areas for the benefit of the drought-affected people. Datta argued that although a large dam causes huge displacement, the water that it brings in could help prevent de-peasantisation and the migration of rural toilers to Mumbai, which had been going on for several years due to drought. He proposed to bring exogenous water to the area to increase agricultural productivity and prevent labour migration.48

Thus, Datta’s involvement with and support for the movements of dam evictees and drought-affected people came from a sensitivity that was informed by an intensely local understanding of social, historical and ecological conditions. The strategies of his movement emerged from constant interaction with the state and were embedded in the ‘regional discursive formations’ (Peets and Watts 1996) of southern Maharashtra, where history, social movement sub-cultures, ecology, politics and geography intertwine to give rise to distinct patterns of regional discourses. His political stand partly reflected his localised concerns and partly reflected his political ideologies that emerged from a Marxist understanding of mode of production, state and environment.

In the early 1970s, the MRDPSP started demanding land in the command area of the dam. Such a progressive demand was not taken well by the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Sudhakar Vasant

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48 From, four hours interview with Bharat Patanker on September 10, 2011 at Kasegaon (Sangli), Maharashtra.
Rao Naik. He proclaimed that all demands could be met, including bringing exogenous water from high rainfall areas, but how could irrigated land be made available for so many people? He famously retorted, “Land is not a rubber band that can be expanded. From where will we get surplus land?” Instead, he offered a proposition whereby un-irrigated land would be given to the evicted in lieu of submerged land and houses would be constructed for those who lost their homes due to submergence. The MRDPSP retorted that land could indeed be “expanded” with the help of water, which is the most important “means of production” in drought-affected areas, since the production of irrigated crop increases four-fold. Therefore, there should be a ceiling on landholdings in the command area of the reservoirs, and the surplus land acquired by the land ceiling could be used for resettlement. In addition, the MRDPSP asked for employment for one member from each displaced family.49

The radical Marxist ‘land grab’ peasant movement was still continuing, especially in Telengana district of Andhra Pradesh in the 1970s. Referring to that movement, the Chief Minister accused the MRDPSP of obliquely seeking radical ‘land redistribution’ in the rural region of Maharashtra. However, due to rising demands, the Maharashtra government was forced to appoint a Committee of Rehabilitation in 1974 and once again Datta Deshmukh was made a member of the committee. The committee recommended passing a law to safeguard the interests of the dam evictees. The law, which came into being in 1976, is known as the Resettlement of Project Displaced Persons Act, Maharashtra. It was the first resettlement and rehabilitation law to be passed in India.50

49 From four hours long interview with Bharat Patanker on September 10, 2011 at Kasegaon (Sangli), Maharashtra.

50 Same as above.
The law made a significant improvement in the lives of the displaced as it made provisions for rehabilitating displaced families and distributing irrigated land in the command area of the dam for dam evictees. The law also enforced a land ceiling in the irrigated command area, whereby people who own 8 acres of land or below would not lose any land; up to 10 acres they would have to give 2 acres to the government land bank; after 20 acres, 3 acres of land would have to be parted with; beyond 25 acres, 4 acres would be taken from them; and there would be an absolute ceiling on landholdings above that.

While the rehabilitation law was being implemented, the MRDPSP pressed its demand to immediately stop the sale and purchase of land in the ‘command area’ of the dam. This was to ensure that people did not transfer land to their relatives to bypass the ceiling, or start buying and selling land in anticipation of a price increase. This demand was ignored. The warning by the MRDPSP proved to be correct. Although this was progressive mooting of law, it immediately led to several corrupt practices. To save their land, the landed elite immediately started transferring land under fake names. Members of political parties and the legislative assembly started buying land in the irrigated command areas of the dam and enormous tracts of land were allocated to ministers of Maharashtra. MRDPSP activists questioned government officials during this phase, asking why farmers could not get lands in the irrigated zone, whereas all the ministers had managed to get them; however, no satisfactory explanation was given.

51 Excerpts from two hours interview with Baba Adhav on 11 July, 2011 at Pune, Maharashtra.
In the next phase of the struggle, Baba Adhav, who had been working closely with Datta Deshmukh, became the next president of the MRDPSP. Baba Adhav, unlike Datta, belonged to the socialist democratic tradition of politics in Maharashtra. He was left of centre, enormously influenced by national leaders such as Gandhi and the traditions of Marathi socialist leaders, such as Sane Guruji\textsuperscript{52}. He was also an active participant in the \textit{Samyukta Maharashtra} (United Maharashtra) movement.

During this phase, several dams were being constructed in Poona district and Kolhapur. The entire Shahayadri range and the rivers emerging from it contained dams that had been built to supply water to the industrial zones of cities in the Pimpri–Chinchad–Poona region. As the entire zone became industrialised and new projects came up, it created further problems of displacement\textsuperscript{53}. Under Baba’s leadership of the MRDPSP, the movement intensified, and resulted in a new act being passed; the Maharashtra Project Affected Person’s Rehabilitation Act, 1986 was implemented in 1989. This Act replaced the 1976 Act, in which the application of the

\textsuperscript{52} Pandurang Mahadev Sane or Sane ‘Guruji’ was a school teacher. He was an avowed follower of Gandhi and joined the anti-colonial struggle with Gandhi. He also participated in textile labour and peasant movements in Khandesh region of Maharashtra.

\textsuperscript{53} Interview with Baba Adhav (two hours), July 11, 2011, Pune (Maharashtra).
act had been at the discretion of the government and the definition of ‘project displaced’ had been very narrow. On the other hand, the 1986 law was automatically applicable to certain irrigation projects if it fulfilled the conditions laid down in S.1 (4) of the act (MARG, 1993).

Figure 3.11: “The state stands on the backs of the people”. A street play on democracy by Samagra Sadak Natak Chalwal (street play group). SMD activists: Kranti and Bharat below and Ranjana standing on their backs. Source: Personal collection of Bharat Patanker and Gail Omvedt.
Magova: “We will even put Marx under a microscope”

In this sub-section I discuss how the Marxian politics in Maharashtra started embracing issues of resource, ecology and identity politics as they encountered these local movements in Maharashtra and that gave rise to a ‘new-left’ politics. This unorthodox left current would eventually emerge to become the leading organization of the ‘dam-evictees’ movements.

Correspondingly, the texture of Marxist politics was changing in Maharashtra. There were internal churnings and debates within the orthodox and unorthodox currents of the Left to embrace issues of ecology, caste, indigenous identity and gender in their politics. These local movements of the drought-affected and dam evictees created a ‘space’ for introspections within given Marxist conceptual categories, texts and theories. It produced a sense of reflexivity in these movements.

Just after the drought of 1972–73, a Neo-Marxist group named Magova (“review” in Marathi) was established in Maharashtra. It was founded by erstwhile communist leaders of Maharashtra and few young members who were disenchanted with the orthodoxy of the Communist Party of India, Marxist (CPI-M) and the Communist Party of India, Marxist-Leninist (CPI-ML) branches (Phadke 2003). (This) group wanted to ‘review’ the Marxist ideological currents in the Indian context, particularly in the regionalised context of Maharashtra; their slogan was “We will even put Marx under a microscope” to dissect his ideas. Orthodox Marxists in the state were naturally unhappy with their audacity.

The future leadership of the movement against hydropower projects in Maharashtra—mainly Bharat Patanker and his close activist associates, K.J. Joy, Anant Phadke and Suhas Paranjpe—

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54 This narrative has been reconstructed from excerpts of interview with Bharat Patanker (four hours) October 3, 2011 at Kasegaon; Suhas Paranjpe (two hours), Thane, October 6, 2011; K.J. Joy, Pune, Maharashtra, September 7, 2011; Anant Phadke (two hours), Pune, Maharashtra October 5, 2012; and Subodh Wagle (two hours), June 24, 2011.

55 From two hours interview with Bharat Patanker October 7, 2011, Kasegaon (Sangli), Maharashtra.
emerged from this group. *Magova* brought important issues of caste and gender into the ongoing left movement in India. Before that the left rarely deliberated on issues of caste, indigeneity, ecology or gender\(^{56}\) in their ideological discourses.

*Magova* as a group opted to think differently, or rather to ‘rethink’ the given Marxist categories and ‘texts’ through the ‘looking glass’ of the localised context of Maharashtrian history, culture and the movements of subalterns, such as *Adivasis*, *Dalits*, women and rural toilers. The *Magovites* started organising rallies and mass mobilisation. The group organised study circles and disseminated local and non-local literary ideas through poetry, drama and street plays. The *Magovites* joined hands with Ambar Singh Maharaj\(^ {57}\), a local tribal leader of the *Shramik Sangathana* (Landless Labourers’ Organisation) to fight against *Adivasi* exploitation in the Shahada area of Dhulia (present Nandurbar district in Maharashtra) (Basu 1990). Waharu Sonawane, a close associate of Ambar Singh, a poet and *Adivasi* rights leader, later became a prominent leader of the tribes protesting against hydropower projects in Nandurbar district of Maharashtra in the late 1980s, and a close ally of Bharat Patanker in the dam evictees’ movement.

Due to internal differences, *Magova* was dissolved in 1975 and most of the activists joined other parties such as the LNP and CPI (M). Within a few months, the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, declared an Emergency on June 26, 1975. The Emergency brought a huge onslaught against alternative political voices and dissents throughout India, and Maharashtra was no exception. Most of the *Magovites* went underground, but continued to operate mass mobilisation

\(^{56}\) For orthodox Marxist parties, regional social thinkers and leaders such as Jyoti Rao Phule were supporters of the British government and anti-nationalist, whereas a *Dalit* rights leader such as Baba Saheb Ambedkar was merely a bourgeois liberal thinker.

\(^{57}\) Ambar Singh Suratwanti or Ambar Singh ‘Maharaj’, as the Bhils respectfully called him, was a tribal leader who organised the Bhils in Khandesh region of Maharashtra (Basu 1990).
activities. After the 1980s these erstwhile *Magovites* would emerge as the chief activists mobilising the ever-rising number of dam movements in Maharashtra.

In the meantime the political and technological ideas invested in making dams were slowly transforming, affected by the norms of global environmentalism. Although Nehru was largely responsible for the growth of hydropower projects in India, ‘developmentalism’ did not come from Nehru but was a paradigmatic malaise of the postcolonial ‘developmental’ state. Even Baba Saheb Ambedkar, who drafted the Constitution of India and is considered the father of *Dalit* movements in India, was a staunch moderniser. For the construction of the Mahanadi River Valley Project, he pleaded with the state of Orissa and other eastern states to shed their provincial sovereignty to ease the process of construction and for the sake of greater national good (Gulhati 1974:186–187).

Interestingly, Nehru’s views began changing in the last years of his life. The Nehru Memorial Museum and library published a reprint volume of Nehru’s speeches on Science and Society in 1988. In it, Nehru, while speaking to the Central Board of Irrigation and Power in November 1958, said that a “dangerous outlook is developing in India”, which is a “disease of gigantism”. The idea of “doing big undertakings or doing big tasks for the sake of showing that we can do big things”, Nehru remarked, “is not a good outlook after all”, for it is “the small irrigation projects, the small industries and the small plants for electric power, which will change the face of the country far more, than a dozen big projects in half a dozen places”. He also showed genuine concern for the displacement caused by these projects. Perhaps Nehru realized that his mentor, Mahatma Gandhi’s, path of development for India would have been better, which prompted him to rethink. However, his change of mind was too late to reverse a path that had already been set in motion. By that time, industrialists, rich farmers, bureaucrats and contractors
needed ‘hydropower projects’ for their benefit and, therefore, dams continued to be planned and constructed with even greater magnitude after the 1980s (Guha 2005).

**Conclusion**

This chapter examines the difficult relation between the movements of the subalterns against and the postcolonial developmental state. The colonial legacy of ‘improvement’ was transformed into the notion of ‘development’ and then invested as an idea to uplift the newly independent postcolonial nation. The idea of development was a crucial component of the ‘hegemonic pretense’ that the state tried to maintain and was largely successful in seducing the middle-class. However the state was not able to hegemonise the subaltern classes completely who were being politicized by different shades of Gandhian, Socialist and Marxian leaders. The idea of hydropower projects as a crucial component of national development was upheld by the development state in postcolonial India.

As the Indian state encroached upon the subaltern terrain with an intention of ‘modernising’ and developing the society by making large numbers of hydropower projects they faced immense resistance from the peasants and the tribes who were being displaced and whose resources were being appropriated in the name of the nation. However, these movements still functioned under the rubric of a ‘benevolent’ and newly ‘decolonised’ nation state and the euphoria of newly won independence. In this intense process of conflict not only did they challenge the state and altered it to some extent but their subaltern political subjectivity was also transforming slowly, whereby they took on various strategies and modalities to deal with the state.

In this chapter, I empirically presented the case of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra till 1980’s. In Madhya Pradesh the movement against hydropower projects was something new in the 1970s and the first such movement was not against displacements, but against waterlogging in the
fields. In fact it was a campaign led by an active group of Gandhians, not exactly a movement or mobilization. The campaign group took various strategies to fight the state in a ‘non-violent’ manner in varied platforms and meetings through contained and less radical means while their subaltern political subjectivity was transforming rather slowly. Though the movement did not succeed hugely in transforming the state, it raised issues of participatory involvement of the people in development planning and they made themselves visible in the contested political arena of the state as a considerable political force.

In contrast, in Maharashtra there was a long legacy of movements against hydropower projects from *Mulshi Satyagraha* (covered in Chapter 2) and consequently the movements there were less contained and more radical in nature and took a decisive ‘localised’ trajectory from the beginning. The movements here were mainly mobilised by various shades of Marxists and Socialists organisations and they were able to transform the legal structure of the state where the state created new laws in response to these movements. In that process of transformation of the state their subaltern subjectivities changed as they claimed and negotiated the state in the language of ‘legal statuses’ of the ‘displaced’ and legal rights of being ‘rehabilitated’ as a citizen. In the meantime, the texture of Marxist politics in Maharashtra changed and the Marxists themselves started increasingly involving in resource conflicts and identity politics that changed the nature of subaltern politics even further. Both in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra the strategies used by the movements until the 1980s were to ‘engage with the state’ with, more or less, ‘contained radicalism’.

But after the 1980s, the state started promoting an increased number of hydropower projects in both the states and it created massive physical displacement, loss of home, livelihood, social dislocation and the annihilation of the cultural landscape; as a result, the paternalistic ‘trust’ in
the ‘developmental state’ was over. As the state unleashed a political economy of dispossession and wreaked havoc over the ‘subaltern terrain’, various ‘social imaginaries’ came in direct conflict with the state. In that scenario, ‘cultural discourse as resilience’ emerged with greater thrust in both Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, albeit with different types of directionality and discursivity.

Under the developmental state regime, the India state tried to distinctly maintain a separate monolithic identity of its own, but as the subalterns slowly became politicized over the years, thus increasingly bridging the gap between the state and society beyond late 1970’s, it was impossible for the state to maintain hegemonic pretense. There was an ‘institutional crisis/breakdown’ of the political structure of the state in India slowly from 1970’s to 1980’s and simultaneously due to political empowerment, the subalterns pressure on the state institutions increased. In a way the state lost its ‘autonomy’ after 1980’s and increasingly became ‘embedded’ in the politics of different castes, classes and groups. After this subalterns and state started functioning within the same relational field of force centering on state promoted hegemonic discourses of development and counter-hegemonic challenges to these discourses. Beyond 1980’s the subalterns were politically empowered enough to cross the ‘threshold of power whereby they started affecting the state politics, policies and laws. In that process the structure of the state changed, both rapidly and steadily.

In the next chapter 4, ‘Vignettes of ‘Subaltern Localism’: The Movement by ‘Dam Evictees’ in Maharashtra, 1981–2004’, I discuss more about subaltern empowerment and politics as I present the cases of movements against hydropower projects in Maharashtra from 1981 to 2004 with greater details. I also discuss how the movement against hydropower projects in Maharashtra continued to change the form of the state with greater pace and vigour from 1981 onward, and
how in the process of interaction with the state new hybrid and modular forms of ‘localised’ ideologies, discourses, practices and strategies emerged in their movements.

Table: 3.1. *Statewide Distribution of Large Dams in India*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Number of Dams Constructed During</th>
<th>Under Construction</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gujarat</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haryana</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madhya Pradesh</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maharashtra</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orissa</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjab</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajasthan</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDIA</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>695</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: *: up to May 1994.

*Source: CWC (1996).*
Chapter 4


Figure 4.1: Flag of the Shramik Mukti Dal (SMD) (left); banner of the SMD in a national conference in 2010 (right). Source: Bharat Patanker and Gail Omvedt (personal collections).

Introduction

In this chapter I argue that the peasant mobilisations against large dams in Maharashtra continued to steadily change the structure of the state of Maharashtra with greater acceleration as the state formulated new laws and policies in response to these movements. The ‘public sphere’ (Habermas 1989) and democratic domain in Maharashtra expanded significantly as a result of
these movements. In the process of dialectical interaction between the subaltern movements and the state the nature of subaltern political subjectivity and agency transformed as well. I argue that a novel form of subaltern political discourses and practices called ‘subaltern localism’ emerged in Maharashtra. I describe ‘subaltern localism’ as— a kind of subaltern politics which raises intensely ‘local issues’, in disjunction and different from the ‘global issues’. It ‘localises’ a global discourse and creates hybrid version of discourses for socio-political mobilizations (in this case Marxism was localised and selectively hybridised with elements from Maharashtrian culture and history). Subaltern localism is “state engaging” (Hung 2011) in nature that is these movements engage constructively and ‘intensively’ with the state and negotiate with it for concessions as they make their demands. The orientation of such subaltern politics is generally ‘centripetal’ to the state politics, which is the demands made by these movements, are directed towards the state for their fulfillment. Because of their ‘intensive’ political interaction with the state, ‘subaltern localism’ is usually successful in fulfilling their pragmatic material demands.

In Chapter 3 I described the social history of the dam evictee movement in Maharashtra until the year 1981. This chapter carries forward the analytical description up to the year 2004 when the mobilisation in Maharashtra reached its peak. In this theoretically guided social history I analyse several ‘events and processes’ where the subaltern mobilizations came in tussle with the state and forced it to reconsider its laws and policies, and in this dialectical interaction with the state transformed their ‘subalternity’-- as new modular forms of protest repertoires, ideology discourses and practices emerged.

Bharat Patanker organised the chemical factory workers and textile mill trade unions in Bombay from 1976 to 1978, during which a State Emergency was imposed. From 1980, he started working full-time in the rural areas of southern Maharashtra, mainly with people’s
movements involving the drought-affected. From 1986 he became actively involved with the
dam evictees’ movement and later became the main leader of these mobilisations\(^5^8\).

Patanker belongs to an economically underprivileged farming family that was politically active
in Kasegaon in Sangli. They manage their livelihood from the family farm that grows few acres
of irrigated pulses, vegetables and sugarcane cultivation. His father, Babuji Patanker, was a
prominent leader in the anti-colonial movement, Satara Prati Sarkar parallel government, and his
mother, Indutai Patanker, was a leading activist in the women’s rights movement. Immediately
after Independence, the Pradesh Congress government adopted a mixed strategy of coercion and
consent to entrench and to consolidate their rule in Maharashtra and to control multiple political
adversaries. Babuji Patanker, along with other Prati Sarkar leaders, such as Shekh Kaka, was
assassinated by the ruling Pradesh Congress party cadres of Maharashtra to eliminate any
vestiges of alternative political power that could crystallise around the charismatic leaders of
Satara Prati Sarkar\(^5^9\).

Patanker completed his MBBS degree but never practised medicine. He started participating in
and mobilising mass movements from his early twenties for the communist party in
Maharashtra\(^6^0\). In 1980 two Magova members, Bharat Patanker and Vikram Kanhere, formed a
new organisation called Shramik Mukthi Dal (SMD; labour liberation party)\(^6^1\). The SMD started
working from Sangli and maintained an alliance with the Shramik Sangathana in Dhulia. After
Ambar Singh Maharaj’s death, his associate, Waharu Sonawane, became the chief Adivasi

\(^5^8\) Taken from six hour interview with Bharat Patanker on October 8, 2011 at Kasegaon (Sangli),
Maharashtra.
\(^5^9\) Taken from four hour interview with Bharat Patanker, on October 8, 2011 at Kasegaon (Sangli),
Maharashtra.
\(^6^0\) Taken from four Interview with Bharat Patanker, on October 9–10, 2011, Kasegaon (Sangli),
Maharashtra.
\(^6^1\) Patanker, who was a member of Magova, says—“Magova was a highly progressive group, but
nevertheless upper caste and elitist in constitution”, where Bharat Patanker and Waharu Sonawane were
the only lower caste and Adivasi activists (Interview 8 October, 2011).
activist in the *Shramik Sangathana* and a close ally of Bharat Patanker in the dam evictee movements.\(^{62}\)

After Datta Deshmukh and Baba Adhav, the leadership of the dam evictee’s movement came under the leadership of Bharat Patanker from the 1990s. Baba Adhav is still president of the MRDPSP,\(^ {63}\) but due to his age, mass mobilizations and strategies are now decided by the dam evictees in discussion with Patanker and other activists of the movement. Patanker and other groups of activists were abound with transformatory ideas and experiences that they had gained from their involvement with *Magova* and the *Shramik Sangathana* which they applied with sensitivity to the dam evictee movements in Maharashtra.\(^ {64}\)

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\(^{62}\) Informal discussion/interview with Gail Omvedt dated October 6, 2011, at Kasegaon (Sangli), Maharashtra.

\(^{63}\) The MRDPSP has other prominent activists such as Laxman Pasalkar and Dhanoji Gurav, who are given the responsibility for mass mobilisation in certain areas of Pune, Lonaveda, Khandala and Thane.

\(^{64}\) Excerpts from 1 hour interview with Anant Phadke dated 7 August 2011 Pune, Maharashtra.
‘Comrades in Arms’: The Peasant-Workers’ Alliance

In this section I discuss how the textile mills workers who lost their jobs formed an alliance with the drought affected peasants to form a larger solidarity that eventually gave rise to movements against large dams.

In the early 1980s the political trajectory, structure and texture of the dam evictees’ movement were transformed forever with an ‘event’ (Sewell 1996) that occurred in Bombay. In 1981–82, a large strike led by Datta Samant was organised by the Bombay textile mill workers in Girangaon
against the Bombay Mill Owners’ Association and the Union. As part of the strike, which lasted more than a year, 20,000–30,000 workers walked out of the factories and forced the textile mills to close down. The INC government in the state and at the Centre was threatened by the rising power of trade unions under Datta Samant (Patanker 1981; 1988). Consequently, the state Congress, in connivance with industrialists, started demobilising these Marxist trade unions. They were helped by the cadres and strongmen of the radical Hindu organisation, Shiv Sena, which was emerging in the political scene, who unleashed untrammeled violence and murdered trade union leaders, such as Krishna Desai.

During the strike, several workers lost their jobs and returned to their villages in southern Maharashtra, mainly Sangli, Satara and Kolhapur. They urgently needed the support of the peasants and the toiling masses of the villages for their strikes in Bombay to form a state-wide counter-hegemonic ‘peasant-workers’ alliance (SC 1981). However, when they returned to their villages, the labourers were viewed with suspicion by the rural proletariat. Because of a huge income difference between them and the peasants, they were regarded as ‘elites’ in the villages.

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65 Although Samant was initially a part of the INC trade union wing, the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), he rejected the hegemony of the Congress in trade unions and formed an independent movement.

66 The literal translation of Shiv Sena is ‘army of Shiva’. It is a political party that was founded on June 19, 1966 by Bal Thackeray. It is guided by Hindu fundamentalist ideology, which upholds provincial Maratha identity.

67 Desai was member of the Communist Party of India (CPI) and a Member of Legislative Assembly in Maharashtra. He was stabbed to death by Shiv Sena strongmen on June 5, 1970. Although Bal Thackeray’s involvement in the case was never proven, he famously congratulated those who murdered Desai by declaring, “We must not miss a single opportunity to massacre communists wherever we find them.” (Hensman 2010: 135). The incident signalled the Sena’s victory in dominating working class district unions and politics in Bombay (Blom Hansen 2005: 63; Kaur 2005: 90). Much later on January 16, 1997, Datta Samant was also gunned down by contract killers outside his home in Mumbai. By then the cosmopolitan city of Bombay had been transformed into ‘Mumbai’, where political nativism was on the rise (Prakash 2010).

68 Some workers remained in Mumbai to eke out a difficult living and many of their later generations formed the infamous Mumbai underworld. Arun Gavli, the infamous underworld mafia in Mumbai, is the son of an erstwhile mill worker who lost his job during this phase.
The labourers used to have links with the village patrons and rich kulak\textsuperscript{69} farmers, who were mostly large ‘sugar barons’ with large landholdings and political clout in the sugar co-operatives. Also, the labourers used to donate large sums of money to build mandirs (Hindu temples) in the villages, which are the religious and hegemonic centres of the upper castes and classes\textsuperscript{70}. In the current scenario, they were desperate to mobilise the peasants and they started an active involvement with their lives and issues (Patanker 1981; 1988).

To influence and mobilise the peasants, they started distributing pamphlets and organised small sabhas meetings in the village temples at night. They rented vans and toured the mountainous villages of Kolhapur district. They also visited Bilashi village, which has a long history of collective peasant resistance during the colonial period, known as the Jungle Satyagraha (forest protest) that was organised in 1932\textsuperscript{71} (Ibid). This village was also the epicentre of the Satara Prati Sarkar Movement during 1942, was an anti-colonial armed struggle led by the peasants. The labourers wanted to re-invoke the spirit of collective resistance that was put up by the peasant community and mobilise their ‘collective social memory’ in the service of the mill workers’ movement. As they involved themselves with the lives of rural toilers, they realised that unlike what universalist communist dictums promote, the real problems of these peasants were intensely ‘local’ and embedded within the socio-cultural milieu and political ecological discourses of the southern Maharashtra region. The peasants faced droughts, displacement and migration along with caste, class, religious and gender oppression\textsuperscript{72}.

\textsuperscript{69} Kulaks were relatively affluent farmers in the Russian empire. Lenin considered them class enemies of the poor peasants.
\textsuperscript{70} Informal discussion/interview with Gail Omvedt October 6, 2011 at Kasegaon (Sangli), Maharashtra.
\textsuperscript{71} During these protests, two peasant boys were shot by the British police and they died clinging to the National Flag.
\textsuperscript{72} Taken from 3 hour interview with Suhas Paranjpe, 15\textsuperscript{th} October 2011, Pune.
This area had been under the unchallenged rule of Congress party for 35 years. During these years, the forest cover and the water-bearing capacity of the soil of the entire range of Western Ghats vanished due to construction for development projects. From 1976, a soil dam called Chandoli was being constructed in this region along the border of Sangli and Kolhapur districts on the River Varna that was envisioned to radically transform the agrarian social structure. Some government work, but not much, was available in the project for labourers. Most peasants continued to migrate to Bombay to work in the textile mills (Patanker 1981; 1988).

Patanker, who was already leading the SMD in the villages and was also involved in mobilising the Mumbai mill workers’ strike alongside Datta Samant, actively helped these workers to form an alliance with peasants. The SMD and the LNP organised a rally and meeting in Bilashi, which was attended by workers and peasants from 25 villages. On February 21, 1981 the SMD and LNP organised the Agricultural Labourers’ Conference at Satana in Nasik district, where Datta Samant gave the keynote speech. At this conference, peasants raised questions and discussed issues around drought-affected regions, farmers affected by hydropower projects and the entrenchment of sugar lobbies in the rural politics of Maharashtra (Special Correspondent 1981).

Bharat Patanker as the president of the SMD actively participated in all these mobilisations. The movements of the dam evictees were still being organised under the MRDPSP, which had lost its vigour by end of 1980s due to internal dissension. Patanker started actively organising the dam evictees from 1988. Firstly, he organised the long-forgotten evictees of Koyna dam under the banner of Koyna Dharangrasta Sangram Sangathana (Koyna dam-affected protest organisation). From 1995 he became the chief activist of the dam evictees’ movement, since

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73 Patanker and his allies were more left oriented in their approach, whereas leaders, like Baba Adhav, were Gandhian-Socialist in their ideology. The dissension arose due to ideological differences in movement trajectory.
Baba Adhav who was still the president of the MRDPSP channelised most of his energy into organising other movements\(^7^4\).

![Image of Bali Raja and Vaman Avataar](http://www.madhura.ru/achintya/india/mayapur_bali_raja.jpg)

**Figure 4.3:** Left: A modern sculpture; Right: A traditional painting depicting the encounter between the mythical *Bali Raja* (Peasant King Bali) and *Vaman Avataar* (the incarnation of Vishnu as a Brahmin). **Source:** [http://www.madhura.ru/achintya/india/mayapur_bali_raja.jpg](http://www.madhura.ru/achintya/india/mayapur_bali_raja.jpg)

![Image of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule](http://www.iloveindia.com/indian-heroes/jyotirao-govindrao-phule.html)

**Figure 4.4:** Mahatma Jyotiba Phule (1827–1890), social reformer from Maharashtra and chief leader and ideologue of the movement against the caste system. **Source:** [http://www.iloveindia.com/indian-heroes/jyotirao-govindrao-phule.html](http://www.iloveindia.com/indian-heroes/jyotirao-govindrao-phule.html)

\(^7^4\) Interview with Baba Adhav (two hours), July 11, 2011, Pune (Maharashtra).
Creating an Alternative: Struggle for Bali Raja ‘Smriti Dharan’ (Memorial Dam)\textsuperscript{75}

“If you do not like it, you will have to fight it the way one fights myths: by building or resurrecting more convincing myths. However, even myths have their biases.”

Ashish Nandy (An Intimate Enemy, 1983)

In this section I present the processes, ideas and ideologies that were invested to ‘localise’ the global Marxian ideas in the context of Maharashtra by selectively hybridizing them with the ideas of local leaders such as Jyotiba Phule and the mythic discourses available in Maharashtrian society and culture. These hybridizations particularly infused the logic of ‘culture’ into the political economy.

This section narrates the case of Bali Raja movements to show that ‘dam evictees’ movements were negotiating and engaging with the Maharashtra state from the beginning by presenting viable ‘alternatives’ to big dams by making technically sound small dams.

The fables of the peasant king Bali Raja are a recurrent motif in the lives of toilers and peasants in Maharashtra. It is a ‘mythic’ discourse that was embedded in the ‘life-world’ (Habermas 1998) of the peasants in Maharashtra from time immemorial. The fable is about the indigenous peasant king, Bali, who was a \textit{Rakshasha} (demon) and was considered to be a brave and just king. In the kingdom of Bali Raja, equity and justice prevailed and King Bali was known for his charitable nature. The gods of the Hindu pantheon feared that he might win the hearts of his subjects by his just rule. They sent an \textit{Avataar} (incarnation) of \textit{Vishnu} in the form of a \textit{Vaman}\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{75} This narrative has been reconstructed mainly from excerpts of interview with Bharat Patanker (four hours) October 3, 2011 at Kasegaon; Suhas Paranjpe (two hours), Thane, October 6, 2011; K.J. Joy, Pune, Maharashtra, September 7, 2011; Anant Phadke (two hours), Pune, Maharashtra October 5, 2012. Some other key texts written by Anant Phadke, Roopali Phadke, Gail Omvedt and Bharat Patanker were helpful.
(Brahmin) to Bali Raja to ask him for a piece of land. On being asked by Bali about how much land he required, the Vaman Avataar answered, “Just that much my three footsteps can cover.” Bali Raja happily granted him the land as dan (charity). Immediately, the body of Vaman Avatar started growing larger and rose through the clouds. Now he had three feet. With one he covered swarga (heaven), with another martya (Earth) and with the third he pushed Bali Raja to pataal (underground). Thus, Baliraja was deceived by the Vaman Avataar into giving away his entire kingdom because of a promise; and at the same time, he was pushed into Pataal (Omvedt 1976, Bhagavan and Feldhaus 2008).

This ‘myth’ of Bali Raja is present in the folklore and fables in Maharashtrian society in different forms. The festival of Bali Pratipada is celebrated each year in rural Maharashtra by the lower caste agriculturist population and menial labourers commemorates the just king Bali Raja and laments his defeat by the chicanery of Vaman Avataar. They typically greet one another by saying, Ida Pida Javo, Balika Rajya Yevo (“Let troubles and sorrows go and the kingdom of Bali come”). In contrast, Brahmins on the same day celebrate the annihilation of Bali Raja in a ‘ritualistic’ and ‘metaphoric’ manner, where a sharp object is put through a small earthen figure of the demon-king Bali to annihilate him (Omvedt 1976, Bhagavan and Feldhaus 2008).

Jyotiba Phule strategically re-cast the myth of Bali Raja in an emancipatory discourse of anti-caste mobilisations in his book Ghulamgiri76 (slavery) in 1873. He famously said that the supremacy of Brahmins in society is the greatest ‘myth’ of all; Bali Raja may be a myth as well, but let it be a ‘counter-myth’ to fight the mythic supremacy of the Shetji-Bhatji (moneylenders and the Brahmins). He further tactically honed and polished the edges of the ‘myth’ to invest ‘new’ meanings into it. He deployed this fable as a trope to symbolically

76 The full/complete name of the book is “Slavery: In the Civilised British Government under the Cloak of Brahmanism”.

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depict the Aryan conquest over non-Aryan indigenous population and the resultant loss of
territory, agricultural land, resources and property in India. He argued that the so-called ‘lower
castes’, i.e., the Dalit-Bahujan majority that were mainly the agricultural population in India,
were the descendents of the defeated non-Aryan population, and the higher castes, mainly
Brahmins, draw their genealogy from the Aryans. The Dalit-Bahujan collective depicts the so-
called lower castes, where Dalit\textsuperscript{77} means oppressed and Bahujan means ‘many’ or multitude.
The idea of Bahujan\textsuperscript{78} emerges as a ‘folk’ subaltern tradition that depicts a ‘subaltern-elite
dichotomy’\textsuperscript{79} (Bahujan vs. Shetji-Bhatji), as an oppositional, mythic and residual discourse of
the oppressed in conflict with the dominant and hegemonic discourse of the caste, class and
political elites (Omvedt 1976).

Phule attempted to reshape these ‘mythical and residual discourses’ of the subalterns into a
‘counter-hegemonic’ discourse and was largely successful. This discourse was re-shaped in his
book, Ghulamgiri, with greater vigour. Phule interlocked the discourse of Dalit-Bahujan with
the mythic kingdom of Bali Raja, where the Dalit-Bahujan owned the land as a ‘means of
production’ as opposed to the elite, oppressive Brahminical rule that displaced them. Dalit-
Bahujan became the ‘nodal point’ of Phule’s discourse of anti-caste struggle. In a magnificent

\textsuperscript{77} The term Dalit was first used by Jyotiba Phule in 19\textsuperscript{th} century means, ‘suppressed’, ‘crushed’ or ‘broken
to pieces’ (Mendelsohn and Vicziany 1998:4).

\textsuperscript{78} The idea ‘Bahujan’ emerges mainly from Jyotiba Phule’s two key texts Shetkaryacha Asud and
Ghulamgiri. It was further formulated by Vithal Ramji Shinde (1873–1944), a prominent social reformer
from the Non-Brahmin movement in Maharashtra and a follower of Phule. The idea was not very popular
then and Shinde started a party called Bahujan Paksha that was a non-starter. After the formation of the
state of Maharashtra, Y.V. Chavan the first chief minister used this term in his political speeches often,
mainly depicting the various castes of the political majority mainly Maratha-Kunbi caste cluster. By 90s
many political parties were using the term Bahujan. The grandson of Babasaheb Ambedkar, Prakash
Ambedkar formed a party called Bharipa Bahujan Mahasangh (BBM) in 1999 (Interview with Suhas
Palshikar in Pune dated 06 August, 2011in Pune (Maharashtra).).

\textsuperscript{79} Much before the advent ‘subaltern theory’ or ‘subaltern studies historiography in South Asia’. 

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‘colonial reverse gaze’, Phule equated the Judea-Christian tradition of Jesus with a return of Bali Raja to earth and proclaimed that “Jesus is the Bali Raja of the West” (O’Hanlon 2002).

Eventually, the myth (or the counter-myth) of Bali Raja emerged to become a ‘social imaginary’ (Castoriadis 1975; Taylor 2004) among the lower caste agricultural population and Adivasis of Maharashtra and gave rise to a strong anti-caste movement against the Brahmins. These imaginaries were historical-cultural constructs that acquired power through subjects interacting in society and formed the vast backgrounds of their inter-subjectively shared ‘life-world’ (Habermas 1998: 22).

After the 1972 drought, the ‘myth’ of Bali Raja and Bali Rajya kingdom started emerging in a new form and proportion as the ‘moral economy’ (Scott 1977) of the peasants, who were affected by droughts and displaced by dams. The moral economy was centred on ‘justice’ and was opposed to the ‘political economy’ of ‘injustice’ and ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (Harvey 2005) that was unleashed by the state on the toiling agriculturist population. The dams and droughts caused massive physical and ‘social dislocation’ that created immense antagonism. This antagonism precipitated into a slow-rising frontier between the ‘people’ and the ‘elite’.

The notion of Dalit-Bahujan was invested – in constructing the majority ‘popular’ front – against the caste, class, political and economic elites. In the absence of welfare policy to deal with dislocation and dispossession, the myth of Bali Raja and his Rajya (kingdom) emerged as a ‘cultural’ cover-up to ‘suture the fissures’ of the tattered political economy. As the state was not able to fulfill the needs of the people, and instead dispossessed them, they wished for the metaphorical return of the kingdom of Bali—a kingdom based on equity, justice and peace. The
idea of Bali Raja thus gave ‘spaces of inscription’ to consolidate a wide variety of heterogeneous demands and identities that were emerging (Laclau 1990)\textsuperscript{80}.

In bringing about solidarity, the ‘shared cultural core’ of the rural toilers that constitute the anti-caste ideals of leaders, such as Jyoti Rao Phule, Chattrapati Sahu and Baba Saheb Ambedkar, and the mythic narratives of Bali Raja and his kingdom of justice played a major role. In this cultural terrain of heterodoxy and dissent, the seeds of classical Marxian ideas were planted by the left activists of the SMD. Once ‘provincialised’, the revolutionary ideas of Marx took on a shape of their own\textsuperscript{81}.

The ‘sub-cultures of dissent’ were always a part of Southern Maharashtra society, which has undergone various socio-cultural, political and religious revolutions. The cultural discourse of protest simmered in the society, which was mobilised by the ‘left’ through strategic ideological syncretism. The left embraced the strands, symbols and signifiers of regional discourses and hybridised it with suitable Marxian tenets (mainly ‘class struggle’) to form a novel ‘regional discursive formation’ (Peets and Watts 1996). The application of this hybridised discourse initially brought about ‘worker-peasant alliance’ and later ‘solidarity’ between drought-affected and dam affected population.

\textsuperscript{80} The spirit behind the dam and drought-affected peasants’ movements also has its roots in the Satyashodhak (truth-seekers’ movement) tradition of Phule and draws from another of his key texts, Shetkaryacha Asud (cultivators’ whipcord) written in 1881. Phule was Mali (gardener) by caste. Malis were one of the most entrepreneurial castes in Maharashtra; they were the first to take up sugarcane cultivation around the Deccan canals, but were displaced by Maratha cultivators. Phule's approach was to unite traditional methods of bio-fertilisers and water harvesting with the building of large and small reservoirs that had fine-tuned distribution systems that would deliver water in measured amounts to the farmers’ fields (Omvedt 2001).

\textsuperscript{81} Interview with Suhas Palshikar in Pune dated 06 August, 2011 in Pune (Maharashtra)
In the process not only were the regional discourses transmuted, but they also transformed Marxism within a specific regional context. As Marxist ideas encountered caste, gender and local environmental issues, a ‘provincialised’ version of Marxism emerged that was significantly different but sharper than its original form. This was a historically contingent, ‘articulation’ of various discourses to create a synthetic counter-hegemonic discourse to oppose dominant discourses promoted by the state (Laclau and Mauffe 1985), whereby a discursive formation was created by the neo-Marxists by bringing together strands of different discourses and making a composite whole. By deploying this ‘concoction’ of ideologies, left activists mobilised the resentment of the subaltern in an innovative and constructive way to construct a sustainable small dam as an alternative to large dams. The Bali Raja dam was built by the peasants in ‘memory’ of the peasant-king Bali Raja and his kingdom of justice (Phadke R. 2002, Omvedt 2005).

There were number of events and processes that led to the construction of Bali Raja Dam. In 1983–84 the erstwhile mill workers and their peasant alliances from the village formed the Mukti Sangharsh Chalval (MSC; Movement and struggle for liberation). Bharat Patanker played a leading role in the MSC.82

Yerala, a tributary of the Krishna River, flows through Khanapur taluka83 of Sangli district. The idea of constructing a small, ‘peasant-built’ dam named Bali Raja was conceived for irrigating

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82 The activists from the MSC and the Lok Vigyan Sangathana (People’s Science Movement) conducted a survey of water resources, such as jack wells and aquifers, in rural southern Maharashtra through Padayatra (walking through the countryside). They organised a movement against the removal of sand from river beds by the local sand mafia that was destroying the water-bearing capacity of wells and aquifer formation around the Yerala River (Joy and Rao 1988; Omvedt 1987).

83 Administrative divisions in Maharashtra that are one level lower than districts. Several talukas form a district.
two villages, Balawadi and Tandulwadi, situated on the banks of the River Yerala. The 1972 drought had left these villages with stretches of barren agricultural fields. The peasantry, along with MSC activists identified a site for the dam. This small dam was designed to irrigate these two drought-affected villages without any supply of water from large dams and with minimum submergence of land. This plan was supported by the socially committed civil engineer and ex-bureaucrat, K.R. Datye, from the Centre for Applied System Analysis in Development (CASAD) and activists, such as K. J. Joy and Suhas Paranjpe from the Lok Vigyan Sangathana (People’s Science Movement). Datye prepared a detailed plan, budget and site for the Bali Raja dam through constant participation and discussions with the villagers, without taking any money (Phadke R 2005).

The plan was that once the dam was built, the impounded water would submerge the river bed permanently and thereby stop the excavation of sand by the mafia and contractors. The villagers needed to generate funds, which they hoped to collect by obtaining limited rights to sell some sand from the river bed. On October 16, 1986, the villagers submitted an application to the district collector of Sangli, followed by another detailed application on November 21, 1986. The collector gave them permission to take out and sell 1,900 brass of sand until January 14, 1987. At first, the government tried to bring in the auction procedure to sell the sand to contractors, but had to retract due to rising protests (Omvedt 1987).

As part of the continued process of protest and negotiation with the state and civil society, on October 22, 1985 the villagers of Khanapur Taluka demanded the involvement of Shivaji University in Kolhapur district to eradicate drought in the region. They said that the knowledge that is caged in the ivory towers of universities should come down to the grassroots to solve the problems of the people. The movement demanded that students of the university should
contribute through scientific knowledge and voluntary labour to set up alternative water resources. At first, the university students and the management were oblivious to these demands. But when the protestors marched into the university with the slogan “Naach Gana Bandh Karo, Akaal Sambandhi Kaam Karo” (Stop singing and dancing, solve the problems of drought!) and threatened to shut down the library, the university management and students agreed to set up a research wing on drought eradication in Khanapur, and opened a Khanapur Taluka Akaal Nirmulan Samiti (Khanapur Taluka Drought Eradication Committee). In this committee, the concrete plans for Bali Raja dam were drawn up as an alternative water resource.

From November 23, 1986 the construction of Bali Raja dam started through Shramdan (voluntary labour) from Kolhapur University students, who lived in the surrounding villages, and continued for 40 days. When the construction reached one foot, the state suddenly declared that the dam was ‘unauthorised’. Bureaucrats told the villagers to stop work on the dam because the Yeral River was not a ‘notified’ river and did not come within the government gazette. A state minister satirically said, “What will the government have left to do if peasants go on building dams themselves?” (Gadgil and Guha 1995: 6).

The interesting question that emerged was why the state government was not willing to allow the peasants to construct a dam for themselves? It was not merely a problem of corruption, bribe or bureaucratic red-tapism but it was the notion of state’s responsibility to develop the society that was important here. The terrain of development was a privileged and monopolised domain of the state by which the state gained its legitimacy of rule and maintained its hegemony. To challenge the state monopoly over the ‘development’ of society was to challenge the legitimacy and the ‘existential being’ of the Maharashtra state, which still functioned under the legacy of the

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84 SMD Movement Pamphlet written by Bharat Patanker and Gail Omvedt.
postcolonial Indian ‘developmental state’. The small, peasant-built dam thus went against the rural political system prevailing in Maharashtra (Omvedt 1993).

For the construction of Bali Raja there ensued fierce struggles and rounds of negotiations with the government and dharnas (sit-ins) for 20 days in which the protestors demanded a meeting with the Water Ministry in Maharashtra. Other complications emerged, and ultimately K.R. Datye intervened to resolve the issues. The Bali Raja dam was approved in March 1988 by the Maharashtra high court and construction was completed in the 1990s. *Bali Raja Smrti Dharan* is 4.5 metres high and 120 metres long, and provides protective irrigation for 380 hectares of land in two villages consisting of 400 families. The Bali Raja dam committee decided that the dam water would not be used to irrigate water-intensive sugarcane plots and the water would be divided equally among the villagers with a limit for each family. The water tables of the villages have risen after the building of Bali Raja dam because the reservoir water has percolated into the soil. The dam water is used by everybody, including *Dalit* families of the village (Phadke 1990, 2002).

![Figure 4.5](image-url): A nostalgic moment. SMD activists, Jayant Nikam and Jyoti Nikam, sitting in front of the Bali Raja Dam when it was first filled with water. *Source:* Bharat Patanker and Gail Omvedt (personal collections).
Demands for ‘Equity in Water Distribution’ and ‘Hydraulic Property Rights’

In this section I discuss how the ‘dam evictees’ movements in Maharashtra gave rise to novel and innovative demands such as ‘equity in water distribution’ and the notion of ‘hydraulic property rights’. These demands were linked with one another that created pressure on the state to democratize the arena of water distribution. As the state was forced to accept these demands the nature and structure of the state and civil society in Maharashtra was visibly getting transformed through the making of new laws and policies.

The construction of the Bali Raja Dam as an alternative irrigation precipitated another movement for restructuring state-run Takari irrigation projects. Based on the experience of the long struggle for Bali Raja dam and the eventual victory, the MSC demanded a major

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85 Hydraulic Property Rights were initially demanded in the Pani Panchayat movements in Maharashtra (Sangameswaran 2009).
restructuring of the Takari irrigation scheme in Satara district. This was a lift irrigation scheme for the low rainfall zone villages of the district that would lift the dammed water and distribute it through canals to fields at a higher level. This project cost around Rs. 2,800 million and was envisioned to lift 4.6 thousand million cubic feet (TMC) of water from canals to a height of 116 metres by consuming 31 megawatts of power. According to the plan, about 13,000 hectares would be irrigated, which covered 8 villages fully and 22 villages partially. According to the Government of Maharashtra (GoM), there would be ‘negative externalities’ of massive land submergence along the banks of the canals (Phadke and Patanker 2007).

Since water was the most important means of production in drought-prone southern Maharashtra, the MSC formulated the notion of property in water, by decoupling it from property in land. This was an attempt to decrease the hegemonic power of the ‘propertied classes’ in rural areas who entrenched their positions through the cultivation of irrigated cash crops, mainly sugarcane, and to empower the subaltern classes. To start with, the MSC demanded ‘equitable distribution of water’ from the Takari scheme for all the dam evictee families. They demanded a minimum amount of water to be allocated to every family in the rural region, regardless of their landholding status. Through this strategy, the landless would not only receive equal water from a specific project but would also have ‘equal rights’ to ‘water use’ or ‘hydraulic property rights’ (Singh 2002) as region-wide entitlements, through which they could eventually claim ‘right to land’ or equal distribution of land.

The MSC proposed an alternative design for Takari that covered a larger irrigation area and drastically reduced the amount of land that would be submerged. The MSC, along with CASAD, put forward an alternative plan of allocating 3,000 cubic metres of water to each family, which

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86 Interview with Suhas Paranjpe (two hours), Thane, October 6, 2011; K.J. Joy (two hours), Pune, Maharashtra, September 7, 2011
covered 60 villages and 6,000 hectares of land. Thus, the MSC again came in direct conflict with the state and its techno-bureaucracy. From May 15, 1989, they started a movement for ‘equitable distribution’ of water from the Takari scheme. A petition was signed by 1,520 peasants to be submitted to the Chief Minister in August 1989, which was followed by a resolution passed by 12 Gram Panchayats (local village governance). There was a signature campaign drive that was popularised by poster exhibitions. On December 6, 1990 a conference of rural toilers was organised, which was attended by 2,500 people. This was followed by a one-month campaign and Padayatra (long march) along the canal banks (Omvedt & Patanker 2005).

In March 1990 a Rasta Roko (road block) was organised, when men, women and children from 16 villages along with their bullock carts and cattle blocked 12 places in the entire Khanapur taluka in Satara district. From May 1990, a Chavni Andolan (occupying sites with cattle) was launched. In addition, the participants organised a ‘people’s court’, in which candidates contesting local elections were asked to clarify their political positions regarding droughts, dams and displacement (Phadke and Patanker 2007).

As the struggle intensified through the deployment of various “disruptive repertoires of contention” (Nair 2009), in October 1990 the chief engineer of the irrigation department in Mumbai was forced to come down for a compromise. A widely publicised meeting was held at Shivaji University in Kolhapur district. The government agreed to accept most of the demands. The villages were allowed to form Water User’s Associations (WUA) that could distribute the allocated minimum water to every family once they start receiving water through lift irrigation. Further, the initial plan for the Takari scheme was altered to include more villages that were not part of the canal ‘command area’ under the earlier scheme. This was a fillip to the ‘equitable water distribution’ movement of drought-affected people and dam evictees. The idea of
‘equitable water distribution’ gained increasing acceptance in the circle of middle class intelligentsia, political parties and media (Phadke and Patanker 2007).

Equity in water distribution led to the blossoming of demands for ‘rights to water’ or ‘hydraulic property rights’. The movement for ‘rights to water’ was led by Nagnath Anna Naikwadi, the legendary leader of the Satara Prati Sarkar, who was still active in mass mobilisations. Anna was among the few leaders who were not co-opted by the ruling INC party. By then, Anna was already senile, but he led the movement with full vigour. He established the Hutatma Kisan Ahir Co-operative Sugar Factory (HKACSF) in Walve Taluka of Sangli district to commemorate Hutatma (martyr) Kisan Ahir. The factory was owned by peasants and workers and turned out to be a corruption-free, highly efficient and committed unit. The factory, which has a current annual turnover of US$10–25 million, began funding several of these mobilisations of the people affected by drought and the dams, and continued funding them for about a decade until 2000 (Patanker and Phadke 2006). The funding was given mainly for the logistics of the movements: their conferences, marches and dharnas that lasted for months. Their transport and provisions were taken care of by funds from the HKACSF. In 2000, the SMD, led by Bharat Patanker, disassociated itself from this source of funding as they did not want any kind of dependence but wanted to generate a more self-sufficient and autonomous source of funding for the movement. The decision was taken on principle.87

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87 Excerpts from 2 hour interview with Bharat Patanker in Kasegaon (Sangli district), Maharashtra, dated 11 October 2011 (Kasegaon, Sangli)
Figure 4.7: Bharat Patanker addressing a rally of the dam-affected and drought-affected peoples’ movements led by the SMD. 

Source: Somnath Waghmore (personal collections).

Figure 4.8: People walking in a protest march by the SMD. 

Source: Somnath Waghmore (personal collections).
Demands for ‘Equitable Distribution of Dammed Water’ in a Neoliberal Era

In this section I discuss how the transition of postcolonial Indian state to a neoliberal phase affected the domain of dams and water distribution in Maharashtra. The initial effects of neoliberal political changes were subtle but visible. I also show here how the neoliberal water management strategies were fought back by exponentially increasing the demands for equal share of water for the drought affected and dam affected population.

The 1990 liberalisation policy in India did not immediately affect the domain of water management in Maharashtra (its effect mainly started from 2000)\(^{88}\). However, the attitude of the state bureaucracy in managing water in a way that favours the propertied elite and ‘free market’ principles became visible. That is, at a subterranean level the state started pushing the ideologies, agendas and principles of liberalisation and privatisation. An important change occurred in 1990 when the Congress was in power; the method of distributing water through canals was aligned to the ‘free market economy’.

Earlier, water from dams used to be distributed at specified times through canals and sub-canals into the agricultural fields. Now, the state began to release water into the rivers at a distance far from the canals. It was done to supply water to those who had machinery, such as high power water pumps to lift water directly from the river. For example, canal construction work on Chandoli dam was halted and water was released from the dam in Warana River throughout the year; water from the Kalammawadi dam started to be released into the Dudhganga and Panchganga rivers in a similar way. Another step in this policy was to build dams without considering the construction of canals; in the Wang-Marathwadi dam in Kolhapur and the Uchangi dam in Satara, the number of canals was drastically reduced. With these changes in

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\(^{88}\) Interview with Priya Sangameswaran 19 May 2011, Kolkata and Shripad Dharmadikari on 20 September, 2011, Paud gaon (Pune)
policy practices, the command area of the dam was slowly becoming restricted to whatever water people could lift on a private basis by using pumps. As an extension of this policy, shares of the Maharashtra Krishna Valley Development Corporation (MKDVC) were sold openly\(^89\).

In 1993, Nagnath Naikwadi, Bharat Patanker and Nana Sheyete from the LNP and other left-wing leaders formed a broad front called the *Shetmajoor Kashtakari Shetkari Sangathana* (SKSS; Organisation of Toiling Peasants and Landless Labourers). The SKSS organised a conference in Kini near Pune (*Kini Parishad*) that was attended by 25,000 people. By that time, the movements for ‘equitable water distribution’ had impacted the lives of the landless, who were mainly *Dalit* landless labourers and women who had no property in land. They further felt a sense of entitlement when the claim for ‘rights to water’ (or hydraulic property rights) captured their collective imagination (Phadke and Patanker 2007).

These demands for equity in distribution of water from lift irrigation schemes and ‘rights to water’ movements gave rise to another demand for equal distribution of ‘dammed’ water. Inspired by the *Kini Parishad*, around 25,000 toilers from drought-prone areas rallied on July 11, 1993 in Atpadi taluka (Satara). Within the 8 days that followed, about 66,000 signatures were collected from Atpadi Taluka (almost every adult living there was a signatory) and a memorandum was submitted to the Chief Minister, Sharad Pawar, demanding an equal share of impounded water from the Dhom Dam in Satara and the Ujani Dam in Sholapur for drought- and dam-affected people (Phadke 2000).

Initially, there was lukewarm response from the state of Maharashtra. To increase pressure on the state, within a month 56 *gram panchayats*\(^90\), with a unanimous decision from all members of

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\(^89\) SMD pamphlet written by Bharat Patanker.
\(^90\) Decentralised unit of Village Governance under Indian Democracy.
the governing body of the *panch*\textsuperscript{91}, passed a resolution in support of these demands. By August 30, various organisations of students, teachers and ex-army men and the co-operative society of Atpadi *taluka* forwarded the original memorandum again to the chief minister, which was followed by a *taluka panchayat*\textsuperscript{92} resolution in support of the demands. Several rallies were organised in the *taluka* after September 1993. The activists held meetings in 10 adjoining villages of the taluka every night to decide on further strategies for these movements.

The intense pressure on the government elicited some favourable response. The GoM agreed to supply water on an equitable measure from the Urmodi dam, which was yet to be constructed, but not from the Dhom and Ujani dams that were already functioning. This promise seemed to stand on a precarious ground and was seen as an attempt to disperse the focus of the movement by making false claims, since there was no certainty about the construction of the Urmodi dam.

In 1994, for the first time in the history of the collective mobilisation of the drought- and dam-affected population, a massive ‘disruptive repertoire’ (Nair 2009) was employed to challenge the state. The activists and participants of the movement took a collective decision not to pay taxes to the government. This was a rare but albeit a true ‘subaltern’ moment, equivalent to a ‘rebellion’ and a direct challenge to the sovereignty and legitimacy of the state of Maharashtra that lasted momentarily. It was an unprecedented move in this area after the *Satara Prati Sarkar* (parallel government), when there was non-payment of taxes to the British government and a parallel government was established in 1942 (Phadke and Patanker 2007).

\textsuperscript{91} Head of *Gram Panchayat.*

\textsuperscript{92} Decentralised governance at the *taluka* level.
‘Spill-over of Surplus Demands’: Restructuring the Tembhu Irrigation Scheme

In this section I discuss how the principle of ‘equitable water distribution’ was demanded to be applied by the movements in new Tembhu lift irrigation project in Maharashtra.

These mobilisations scaled new heights when they started demanding the restructuring of Tembhu, which was another lift irrigation scheme in Atpadi taluka of Satara district. Tembhu is a lift irrigation project that was designed to lift 22 TMC of water from the Krishna River to supply it to 173 villages in six low-rainfall talukas that covered Sangli, Satara and Sholapur districts. It was designed to irrigate 79,600 hectares of agricultural land. Of the 22 TMC allocated for the whole scheme, Atpadi taluka was allotted only 4.4 TMC. The SKSS demanded that the principle of ‘equitable water distribution’ be applied to the Tembhu project. After organising a number of protests and dharnas, in September 2001 the government agreed to include 21 more villages in Atpadi in the scheme at an additional cost of US$20 million. The government, for the first time, created an elaborate blueprint based on the guidelines set up by participants and activists in the movement. The extension of the scheme benefitted 22,000 families in 21 additional villages, irrigated 7,400 hectares of land, and allocated 5,000 cubic metre of water per family (Phadke and Patanker 2007).

These movements for equitable distribution of canal and dam waters and the restructuring of lift irrigation projects subsequently proliferated to 13 talukas in southern Maharashtra, mainly in the low-rainfall areas of Sangli Satara and Sholapur districts. Several protest rallies were organised and the orthodox left party, the CPI-M, as well as Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) and Members of Parliament (MPs) of the INC participated. The state Congress party even included the idea of equitable distribution of dammed water in a section of their election manifesto. However, when they won the Maharashtra Vidhansabha election in 1999, they started
delaying the implementation of the policy. In response, there was sustained and mounting pressure from the movements and ultimately the state acquiesced to their demands and accepted the policy of ‘equitable water distribution’ in principle. However, the policy was implemented only in the case of newly constructed dams and not for existing dams. Equitable water distribution on per capita basis was included as the first point in the 51-point common minimum programme planned by the GoM (Phadke 2002, 2003).

‘Increasing Effervescence’ of Dam Evictee Movements, 2000–2004

In this section I discuss how the dam evictees’ movement in Maharashtra gathered momentum after the year 2000 and how they placed two new demands of Pani Bhatta (compensation for water) and Nirvaha Bhatta (cost of living allowance) on the state.

In the 1970s, several interstate water conflicts surfaced in various parts of India. One of these contestations involved Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh over sharing the water from Krishna River. To solve the problem, Maharashtra set up an interstate water conflict tribunal in 1973, which after much deliberation declared its award on May 31, 1976, which is known as the Bachhawat Award. In 1997 the government of Maharashtra established an autonomous corporation named the Maharashtra Krishna Valley Development Corporation (MKVDC). The work ahead for the MKVDC was to complete the hydropower projects, which were at various stages of completion, before the time limit set by Bachawat Award, i.e., the year 2000. The Maharashtra government indiscriminately accelerated the process of building dams in Maharashtra between 1996 and 2000 in an attempt to utilise the allocated share of water before the deadline set by the Award. The MKDVC sold 50 per cent of share bonds to raise money to...
complete its work, and in the process the government blatantly disregarded the proper rehabilitation of the dam oustees or even any proper assessment of the environmental and social impact of these projects (D’Souza 2006). Moreover, after 1995 the government took a decision to prioritise water use for the industries; they would be given a steady supply from the dammed water despite the fact that 75 per cent of the population was affected by drought and most of them earned their livelihood through agriculture.

As a result, the resilience on the part of the project affected population increased. It emerged primarily in the form of large number of micro struggles waged against these large dams in various places of Maharashtra. The MRDPSP & SMD forcibly occupied a number of dam sites and from 1997–98 stopped the construction of Chitri, Wang–Marathwadi and Urmodi dams. During this phase the MRDPSP and the SMD deployed several innovative strategies to force the state and its bureaucracy to yield. One such strategy was to insist on written assurances with deadlines from the bureaucrats. When these promises were not fulfilled, they usually forceably occupied the dam sites (Phadke and Patanker 2007).

In 1999 the tempo and the scale of mobilisations were increased as the state started to utilise the last phase of water before the year 2000 by constructing a large number of dams. One mobilisation strategy in this phase was 8–9 hour gheraos of government offices to make the bureaucracy accountable for rehabilitating the dam oustees. This was particularly prevalent in Sangli, Satara and Kolhapur districts.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1986 assured a number of civic amenities at rehabilitation sites for the dam evictees, but provided only a few of these amenities. To force the government to fulfill its promises, the villagers halted dam work on several sites until all 13 civic amenities94 were

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94 These civic amenities include schools with playgrounds, piped water, constructed drainage, cemetery, etc. (Phadke 2000).
delivered. They would not allow dam work to start until the promised 2 acres of irrigated land (by the 1986 Act) was actually transferred to evictees in the command area of the dams. Under pressure, the government also arranged for vehicles to bring the village representatives to meet government officials. The new rehabilitation sites had better facilities than their old villages; they have brick houses instead of thatched huts, broad roads with drainage and schools with playgrounds. Apart from the 13 civic amenities, the dam evictees demanded another 5 civil amenities, which the government met. During the takeover of the land plots and while cultivating them, the evictees faced opposition from erstwhile land-owners, which was overcome by sustained mobilisation.

In the meantime, due to increasing pressure from the MRDPSP and the SMD the Maharashtra Rehabilitation Act of 1986 was amended in 1999 to give irrigated land to the dam oustees in the command area. However, it takes years to construct irrigation infrastructure by which water can actually be delivered to these rehabilitation villages. Moreover, the government deliberately delayed rehabilitation projects, which is often used as a strategy to rupture the intensities of social mobilisations in India.

In the year 2000, the MRDPSP raised a unique demand. It started pushing for Pani Bhatta (compensation for water), that is, monthly compensation for the loss of income until irrigation water actually reached their agricultural plots. This atypical demand was met with resistance by the state and its bureaucracy. However, when the villagers forcibly halted construction on the Marathwadi Dam during the decisive pre-monsoon construction phase for about three weeks and simultaneously threatened to stop the construction of other dams, the state was forced to give a written promise of monthly compensation for the loss of irrigation water. An amount of Rs. 600 per month was decided as the compensation until the irrigation facility reached their agricultural
fields. Simultaneously, another group of dam evictees led by the SMD occupied the Warna Dam site in Kolhapur and started an indefinite dharna on May 24, 2000 with a similar demand. On the 10\textsuperscript{th} day of their dharna, the government capitulated. However after the first 3–4 installments were paid, the government started falling behind on further payment, citing the excuse of empty state coffers. There was an enormous backlog of compensatory payment to the evicted farmers. Consequently, the MRDPSP insisted on payment by escalating the tempo of the movement, as they only had the power to negotiate until the dam was constructed.

In the meantime, evicted farmers who did not get proper rehabilitation started demanding a Nirvaha Bhatta or cost of living allowance until they were resettled. Despite written assurances and demonstrations, rallies and negotiations, the government did not fulfill several of these demands. The dam evictees, therefore, launched an indefinite Thiyya Andolan (Extended sit-in struggle) on 24\textsuperscript{th} December 2001 around the district collector’s office with about 10,000 morcha (participants) under the banner of the MRDPSP and about 2,000 villagers (Phadke 2004).

This ‘event’ got huge political popularity, since the local politicians extended their support to get political mileage and increase their vote bank. The ruling Pradesh (state) INC party felt threatened by the rising tide of political dissent. On the 10\textsuperscript{th} day, the Chief Minister, Vilasrao Deshmukh, invited the main activists of the MRDPSP and the SMD to a meeting. In the meeting, the Chief Minister verbally acceded to all the demands. However, when there was no written communication from the Chief Minister’s Office (CMO) after a few days, the villagers continued their agitation. The minutes of the meeting were finally faxed by the CMO after six days, by which time the participants had almost decided to do a Padayatra (long march) to Mumbai to fetch the minutes.
Simultaneously, in Kolhapur region the oustees of Warna Wildlife Sanctuary had been organising their protest from November 2001, with demands for rehabilitation. The CMO held a meeting with all the activists of Satara and Kolhapur on January 2, 2002 and told them that most of the demands would be assured in writing. An amount of Rs. 2.5 crore was sanctioned to construct civic amenities and plant trees at the rehabilitation sites. This long-drawn struggle also resulted in the delivery of the promised 2 acres of land to the dam oustees in the command area, irrespective of their pre-eviction landholding status. Although the Rehabilitation Act of 1986 (that was implemented by the state in 1989) provided only 1 acre for rehabilitation, the dam evictee’s movement successfully educed 2 acres of land per family from the government. The Chief Minister also sanctioned Rs. 2 crore to pay the outstanding dues of *Pani Bhatta* (Phadke and Patanker 2007).

However, the struggle had just begun. Even after one year, there was no sign that the demands would be fulfilled. Therefore, another indefinite *Thiyya Andolan* was started on January 6, 2003 in front of the Collectors’ offices in Sangli, Satara and Kolhapur districts. About 300 to 3,000 dam evictees in different district centres occupied the surroundings of the Collector’s office for 24 days. In the middle of these protests, there was political fiasco because the Chief Minister had to resign due to internal power struggles. Before his resignation the CM acceded to most of the demands of the dam evictees. Although the cabinet became non-functional, the dam evictees continued their sit-in until the next Chief Minister was appointed. The new Chief Minister, immediately after resuming office, sanctioned Rs. 400 million for the outstanding water allowance dues. This was a victory for the evicted rural toilers and peasant movements (Phadke 2003, 2004).
Figure 4.9: The SMD banner on the stage depicts an intriguing ‘concoction’ of ideological discourses. The photos above from left to right are of Kabir, Sant Guru Ramdas, Shivaji, Jyotiba Phule, Savitri Phule, Karl Marx, Sahuji Maharaj and Baba Saheb Ambedkar. Source: Somnath Waghmore (personal collections).
Figure 4.10: A MRDPSP poster in Marathi language giving call for a *Thiyya Andolan* (extended sit-in struggle) that was to be organised in Pune. **Source:** Baba Adhav (personal collections).
‘Unexpected Co-operation’ by the ‘Drought-affected and the Dam Evictees’

In this section I analyse how the dam evictee’s movements in Maharashtra brought about collaboration among the drought affected and dam affected population that is unanticipated in other cases of movements against dams.

When constructing a large dam, the standard rationale offered by the state of Maharashtra is that the water will be supplied to drought-affected regions. However, during and after the construction, the usual strategy deployed by the state is to pit the ‘dam-affected’ and ‘drought-affected’ population against each other by rhetorically supporting one against the other. In the process, the impounded water is appropriated by the state and sold to urban and rural industries and the ‘propertied classes’. However, in Maharashtra this strategy has been foiled by the acumen and strategies deployed by the leadership of the SMD and the MRDPSP. These movements reached the zenith of success, as they begot an ‘unexpected co-operation’ of the drought-affected and dam-affected people. The discourse of the Baliraja and Dalit-Bahujan collective struggles was deployed against the state in which the Marxist ideas of class struggle were embedded to give rise to a novel ‘regional discursive formation’ (Peets and Watts 1996).

All these micro struggles of the ‘dam affected’ population were first consolidated under the umbrella of the MRDPSP and then this subaltern ‘macro collective’ was mobilised along with the movement of the drought-affected population, mainly led by the SMD, through a ‘double-articulation’ to confront the state (Laclau and Mauffe 1985).

From October 27, 1999, a three-day dharna commenced in 13 talukas of three districts—Satara, Sangli and Kolhapur—in support of the dam evictees and people in drought-prone areas. Under the banner of the SMD, there was a ‘programmatic unity’ and a ‘joint front mobilisation’ of the dam-affected and the drought-affected populations in solidarity with each other.
The experience of earlier participation in the anti-drought movements gave the left leadership of the SMD an edge in bringing about co-operation between these seemingly hostile groups. In January 1999, nearly one lakh dam-affected and drought-affected people participated in these movements and jointly demanded *Pehla Punarvasan, Phir Dharan!* ('First rehabilitation, then dam construction!'); moreover, they claimed equitable distribution of dammed water in water-scarce regions at the rate of 3,000 cubic meters per family including landless families. They specifically demanded that the impounded water of Kanher dam\(^{95}\) be distributed equally in the surrounding *talukas* (Phadke and Patanker 2007).

As part of their strategy, in August 1999 the Wang\(^{96}\) dam evictees continued to prevent the construction of the dam, even after their specific demands of rehabilitation were met, because the demands of the ‘drought-affected’ people had not been fulfilled. The *dharna* was discontinued only after the authorities agreed to start canal work on the Tembhu lift irrigation scheme to supply water to drought-affected areas. They demanded that no further work should be done to build dams in the Satara area until the impounded dam water was distributed equally. The dam- and drought-affected people tangibly opposed the privatisation and commercialisation of water and the dam ‘industry’ of the state of Maharashtra. As discussed earlier, the usual practice of the state after liberalisation has been to release the dammed water in the river so that it could be lifted by those who owned pumps; as a result, for the next 15 years the construction of canals in Maharashtra was drastically reduced. After the long spate of *dharnas* and series of demands and negotiations, on January 2, 1999 the Chief Minister, Vilasrao Deshmukh, agreed to invest additional funds in the distribution mechanism of the dammed water by constructing canals.

\(^{95}\)Earth filled gravity dam on Wenna River in Maharashtra.

\(^{96}\)Situated in Satara district.
Significantly, this victory came about due to the ‘programmatic unity’ of the dam- and drought-affected people’s movement\textsuperscript{97}.

**Giving Alternatives: Re-designing the Uchangi Dam\textsuperscript{98}**

In this section I present the case of Uchangi dam where the dam evictees’ movements provided an alternative design of the dam to the government and there was an intense tussle between the bureaucracy and the activists to implement the design. This section demonstrates that when the scientific or technocratic hubris of the state experts is challenged by alternative and advanced scientific notions, it creates a crisis of legitimacy for the state. Because the state experts consider themselves superior in account of knowledge and power and invest certain ‘technocratic’ ideas to develop the society, they feel insecure when challenged.

Uchangi is a small village in the Ajra taluka of Kolhapur district. This is not a drought-prone area, but a high rainfall area. From 1985 the Maharashtra government started drawing up a blueprint for the construction of a dam on a small rivulet called Tar-ohal near Urmodi village. The proposed dam would hold about 660 million cubic feet (mcft) of water and would partly or fully submerge around six villages. In 1986, villagers from the region that would be affected started an agitation and pointed out that the annual rainfall in Ajra area is about 4,000 mm and several small reservoirs that were lower in height would be enough to impound 660 mcft of water. These suggestions were quietly ignored.

In November 1997, when the government of Maharashtra started preparing to construct this dam, villagers from the affected regions started agitating under the banner of the SMD. The tempo of the agitation was set very high from the beginning; after a few rounds of fierce

\textsuperscript{97} SMD Pamphlet written by Gail Omvedt (Not dated).
\textsuperscript{98} This narrative reconstructed from excerpts of interview with Suhas Paranjpe (two hours), Thane, October 6, 2011; K.J. Joy, Pune, Maharashtra, September 7, 2011;
opposition and negotiations, the district administration of Kolhapur agreed to hold a meeting with the villagers along with the activists of the SMD. At the meeting the activists and participants struck a deal with the government that if they proposed a scientific, cheaper, viable and sustainable alternative to the government plan for Uchangi dam, the government had to consider the alternative design. The activists and participants immediately collaborated with K.R. Datye the activist-engineer associated with CASAD. Datye and his close associates, Suhas Paranjpe and K.J. Joy from the Society for Promoting Participative Eco-system Management (SOPPECOM), a civil society organisation working to preserve traditional ecological knowledge and for sustainable management of water resources in the area, started preparing a blueprint for an alternative design for Uchangi dam. In 1997–98 a participatory resource mapping (PRM) and detailed survey was carried out by a team of experts under the guidance of Datye, with the participation of villagers from Chaphawade, Jeur and Chitale.

Based on the survey and the PRM, a preliminary plan was prepared. However, basic but systematic and comprehensive data about the topography of the region was still required. Since the government carries out large surveys, only they could provide this data. When the activists asked the government for topographic survey information, the state bureaucracy declined to give the data, saying that these were ‘official secrets’. This was long before the promulgation of the Right to Information Act, 2005. However, the SMD demanded access to survey data as their right as citizens and at the same time submitted their preliminary plan to the government to show the veracity of their ‘truth claim’ of providing a viable alternative. Their plan was rejected arbitrarily; moreover, their plea to talk to higher officials of the MKDVC was unheard (Phadke R, 2005).
After that the government rapidly started preparing to construct the Uchangi dam based on the original plans. On the day when the construction was to start, the villagers blocked the dam construction site with their cattle, amid heavy rain. They were warned repeatedly by the officials to clear the space and around 1,000 local and state reserve police were deployed to break the human cordons created by the protestors. It was a tense situation, but suddenly the superintendent of the police backed off in the face of this dogged resistance. He took a decision to ‘negotiate’ with the villagers, and as a result avoided violence. Rounds of negotiations followed and the agricultural department of Maharashtra agreed to provide the much-desired toposheet data to the movement (Phadke and Patanker 2007).

However, it took another 16 months for the data to arrive through the channels of bureaucratic red tape. Meanwhile, the government started planning to begin the building of the dam and was stopped yet again as demonstrations started mounting. When ultimately the government provided the data, Datye with his associates from SOPPECOM and SMD activists submitted an alternative design for the Uchangi dam in 1999. This alternative design proposed to build three smaller dams at three separate sites near Khetoba, Dhamanshet and Cheralakatta villages on the River Tar-Ohal. This alternative plan intended to impound 624 mcft of water, which was significantly more than the government’s proposed plan. It also proposed ‘equitable distribution of dammed water’, where every family in these villages would get about 3,000 cubic metres of water per year. Any extra water requirements would be developed through local watershed development. The alternative plan proposed to irrigate almost double the area of the original government proposed plan and avoided any displacement and submergence of good quality land.

This alternative plan was not fully accepted. The MKDVC techno-bureaucracy, mainly consisting of engineers, agreed to build a smaller dam in Khetoba. But the other dam sites were
rejected on the grounds that they did not meet the cost-criteria of the agricultural department. Thus, instead of three dams, they agreed to construct only one new dam. The new dam in Khetoba, upstream of the river, reduced the height of the Uchangi dam situated downstream by 2 metres. As a result of the 2-metre reduction in dam height, not a single house in the Gaothan (village settlements) came in the submergence zone (Omvedt 2005).

Although good quality agricultural land was submerged around the river banks, the government agreed to supply dammed water by lift irrigation to the rest of the affected upstream villages. Since a substantial amount of good quality land was getting submerged, the villagers did not accept the Uchangi dam on principle. They accepted the government’s decision, but they decided to express their disagreement with the MKDVC and decided to stage a symbolic protest by courting arrest on the inaugural day of the dam construction. However, the pace of the movement dropped, because the MKDVC insisted on constructing the Uchangi dam, albeit with a reduced height (Patanker and Phadke 2006; Phadke 2005).

![Figure 4.11: Bharat Patanker leading an SMD Annual Conference Rally in 2010. Source: Bharat Patanker and Gail Omvedt (personal collections).](image-url)
Mobilisation Strategies of SMD: Conflict, Demands and Negotiations

In this section I present the mobilisation strategy, organizational structure, ideas and ideologies of the dam evictees’ movements in Maharashtra. I also analyze their modality and tactics of dealing with the state officials.

The SMD consistently attempts to not exclusively legitimise its movement in terms of cultural idioms or instrumental politics. They selectively blend Marxist ideologies with the ‘regional’ culture and ideological idioms of anti-establishment, mainly the heterodox ideas of Babasaheb Ambedkar, Jyotiba Phule and Sahuji Maharaj available in Maharashtrian history.

The Dal’s repertoires are usually well planned, organised and routinised. Patanker fixes meetings with government officials, and leaders of dam evictees and other groups usually attend these meetings in huge numbers. While debates rage between activists and state officials during these meetings, negotiations are carried out simultaneously to improve the condition of people affected by dams and droughts. Government officials are usually forced to write down their consent to the activists’ demands.

Officials are held accountable for their promises; if these are not fulfilled, huge mass rallies are conducted by the SMD to pressurise them. For this reason, in some of the meetings intriguing conflictual negotiations are visible. The usual tactics employed by the government officials are to protract the period of negotiation by discussing and raising unnecessary issues and blocking solutions by provoking altercations so that the duration of the meeting is not spent fruitfully. Patanker and other activists have mastered techniques of articulation to stride through and avoid these situations, and bring the discussion back to the issues.

The SMD argues that there cannot be a universal, a-historical, decontextualised, political ‘subject position’ or dictum against large dams. Because of their Marxist lineage, the SMD’s
positioned perspective starts with an ‘anthropocentric’ focus; they argue that dams might be necessary for a severely drought-stricken or drought-affected population such as southern Maharashtra, because external water supply has to be brought there. Therefore, Patankar maintains that their movement is not anti-dam per se; that is, they are not blindly against the construction of hydropower projects, but they struggle for the rehabilitation of ‘dam evictees’ and to humanise hydropower projects by distributing the water and their benefits to the dam- and drought-affected. Hence, the strategies and practices that emerge from these movements are methodical and ‘pragmatic’.

The SMD consciously attempts to avoid violence, but they do not link their practice of non-violence to Gandhi’s ideology or any of his tenets; rather, they link it to their democratic, law-abiding and constitutional nature. As Bharat Patanker reminds his associates about the Satara Prati Sarkar movement in which his father Babuji Patanker was a prominent leader, “Prati Sarkar has a mixed legacy; on the one hand it was for the good of people, but it was a violent struggle…which ultimately digressed from its path. The politics of guns ultimately leads to dictatorial and authoritarian politics, subjugation and annihilation of subjectivities“. Patanker said in an interview, “We are Marxists, but unlike Maoists, we are non-violent…we don’t practice the politics of guns…which can only give rise to murder, mayhem, subjugation of women and abuse of power…it’s not that our guns and our violence will take over your system…but it’s our system of ideas, that will defeat your system of ideas. Through these small struggles…as we go on achieving small victories…against the state…one day the ‘people’ will realise that…these small victories are not enough…that the system has to be replaced…we are

99 Taken from 3 hour interview with Bharat Patanker on October, 5 2011, Kasegaon (Sangli), Maharashtra.
already within revolution then"100. Quoting Gramsci, another activist Anant Phadke says, “It’s a matter of developing consensus in the civil society through ‘war of positions’ and creating counter-hegemony against the state”101.

Their movement is crafted in a moderate idiom that operates within the state’s framework of ‘development’ and ambit of power. Their politics of demand is practised in a pragmatic neo-Marxian framework operationalised in dealing with the culture and political ecology of the sub-national state of Maharashtra. The SMD frequently publishes booklets and pamphlets, and regularly organises public meetings and press conferences to raise the consciousness of the people.

It is a rural cadre-based organisation. It has a committed group of activists who are trained by the leadership to carry out mobilisation activities. They hold different positions within the SMD and are given the responsibility of organising grassroots activism in specific localities. The decision-making structure of the organisation is decentralised and major decisions are taken in public meetings in discussion with Patanker, participants and other activists. The SMD holds regular meetings where activists record the minutes. It frequently conducts political activism programmes, where Patanker trains villagers as future leaders of the movement. The movement led by the SMD is distinctly local/regional and rural with little participation from the urban, middle-class intelligentsia. The regional and vernacular Marathi media has often given good coverage to this movement. However, this movement has not been widely reported in the national or international media, the CSO or university networks. Consequently, the dam-evictees’ movements in Maharashtra are little known to outsiders.

100 Taken from 3 hour interview with Bharat Patanker on October, 7 2011 in Kasegaon (Sangli), Maharashtra.
101 Interview with Anant Phadke dated August, 7 2011 Pune, Maharashtra.
Conclusion

In this chapter I analyse how the dam-evictees’ movements in Maharashtra changed the structure of the state, whereby the state formulated new laws and policies of water distribution and resettlements and rehabilitation to cope with the rising demands of the people. In this process of conflicts and negotiation, the subaltern movements slowly transformed themselves and new forms of protest repertoires, political discourse and practices emerged. I call this novel ensemble of political discourses and practices as ‘subaltern localism’. I defined the characteristics of ‘subaltern localism in the beginning of this chapter. It is a form of subaltern politics which raises intensely ‘local issues’ in disjuncture from fashionable global issues. They politically engage with the state to make constructive negotiations through tussle. They take ideas from global discourses to ‘localise’ them thus creating hybrid fields of discursivity. Their mass mobilisation strategies are ‘intensively’ local which transforms the movement participants into a considerable political force both electorally and non-electorally. As I conclude I reiterate and discuss some of the important facets of this politics in greater details.

The dam evictees’ movement in Maharashtra fought for ‘progressive rehabilitation’ of the people affected by hydropower and other projects in Maharashtra, so that they can share the fruits of ‘development’. Their primary focus was on the politics of demand and negotiation with the state, where they increasingly extracted facilities from the state as entitlements and rights for the marginalised and not as ‘paternalistic handouts’. Several demands of the MRDPSP, such as equity in water distribution and civic amenities for the rehabilitated villages, were largely fulfilled by the state. Moreover, these movements of the subalterns have considerably transformed the structure of the state in Maharashtra in the form of changes in projects, policy, programmes, schemes and new laws. As a result of their mounting resistance, the Maharashtra
government mooted the first rehabilitation law in India in 1976, which was replaced and amended in 1986 and 1999, respectively. These laws expanded the ‘legal public sphere’ (Sivaramakrishnan 2011) of the state as new laws and policies were formulated that democratised the sphere of civil society further. As the arena of law expanded, the demands raised by subaltern movements were gradually ‘legalised’, that is, they carved a space within the legal-judicial arena of the state with their heterodox activities. Now they were able to challenge the state with these new laws whenever there was a flaw in its application or implementation.

The dam-evictees’ movement created a strategy of linkages with other movements, demands and issues in the region for a radical democratic transformation. They brought about an alliance between the drought-affected and dam-affected peoples’ movements to form a ‘counter-hegemonic’ alliance against the state. This counter-hegemony was achieved by bringing together ‘similar demands’ among Dalit-Bahujan people which created an antagonistic frontier between the people and the state. To make the alliance possible, the local discourse of Dalit-Bahujan and the global discourses of Marxism were aligned, oriented and framed in certain ways, where the universal Marxian tenets were hybridised with the ideological currents of Jyotiba Phule, Baba Saheb Ambedkar and Prince Sahuji Maharaj; in that sense, it ‘provincialised Marxism’.

The local mythic discourses of Bali Raja and his kingdom of justice seeped in through the ambivalent ‘cracks’ of the ideological construction of discourses by the SMD. This, in turn helped construct a parallel ‘subaltern’ power centre against the state by forming counter-hegemonic alliances, which also partially affected the electoral politics. On the surface, they contained their politics of demand within the development paradigm of the state, but in parallel they subverted them through slow and piecemeal construction of an alternative development paradigm by designing and producing alternative hydropower projects. Thus, they challenged the
legitimacy, authority, expertise and monopoly of the state in the arena of development and ‘modernisation’ of society by claiming equal participation of the people in ‘decision-making’.

The dam evictees’ movements were positioned as a ‘small clasp’ in a long chain of ever-expanding politics of surplus demands and the resultant slow but radical democratic transformation of society. In the process of unfolding of ‘surplus’ demands and claims that were put forward by various movements, the SMD aims to change the present socio-political structure in a process of ‘gradual and emancipatory revolution’ from below. Therefore, the SMD practises nothing less than an emancipatory and radical politics and expects nothing less than a structural transformation of society. They were ‘state-engaging’ in the sense that they practised ‘claim-making’ on the state and identified the state as an enemy as well as an ally. However, they were never co-opted, preempted or contained by the state. They clearly articulated and enunciated their demands with utter clarity and little ambiguity, equivocation or vacillation to negotiate with the state.

In the process they localised their politics in every sense, in ‘strategic disjuncture’ from international ecological issues and global civil society concerns. They raised ‘local ecological concerns’ and found ‘localised solutions’ to them as they started to transform the design of the state’s irrigation and hydropower projects by contextualising them. A significant new political trend in subalternity emerged, where ‘subaltern localism’ as a political trajectory transpired in discourse and practice in Maharashtra. By this localism, not only did they reject global, a-historical, decontextualised theories and dictums of environmentalism and Marxism, but they also practised a radical, culturally resilient, non-violent and state-engaging demand politics based on the rights of citizenship, in disengagement with international civil society networks, but with intense grassroots mobilisation and alliance formation at the regional level. They did not lose
touch with the local movement base and constituencies, but focused, constructed and rejuvenated them painstakingly with great cultural sensitivity. Consequently, their demands thrust on the state of Maharashtra, as an accumulative centre of alternative ‘power’, became hugely successful.

In the next chapter 5, ‘Emerging facets of ‘Subaltern Cosmopolitanism’: The ‘anti-dam’ movements in Madhya Pradesh, 1980–2004’ I deal with the case of ‘anti-dam’ movements in Madhya Pradesh where the subalterns forced the World Bank to revoke its fund from Sardar Sarovar Project in Gujarat and in that process of conflict with the Indian state and the Bank a new form of ‘subalternity’, the subaltern cosmopolitanism emerged.
Chapter 5

Emerging facets of ‘Subaltern Cosmopolitanism’: The ‘anti-dam’ movements in Madhya Pradesh, 1981–2004

Figure 5.1. The Narmada Bachao Andolan logo reads “Narmada Bachao, Manav Bachao” (Save Narmada, Save mankind) Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:NBA_logo.jpg

Figure 5.2. Khandwa Maha Rally of Narmada Bachao Andolan in 2008. Source: http://www.narmada.org/
Introduction

In this chapter I argue that in the process of the anti-dam movements in Madhya Pradesh the movements of the subalterns interacted with the state in a highly contentious terrain. They attempted to change the legal domain of the Indian state. The Indian state reacted strongly to subdue these movements because it challenged the very notion of ‘development’ that the Indian postcolonial ‘developmental state’ aspired. The involvements of the World Bank from the beginning in the building of dams in Gujarat, made Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA; Save Narmada Movement) seek international alliances of civil society organisations and social movements against the Bank. On the one hand though the movements’ effect on the state structure was slow and incremental they succeeded in bringing about normative changes in the World Bank policy framework that deals with large dams. They were also instrumental in the creation of World Commission of Dams (WCD), an independent review body for assessing the social and environmental impacts of dams throughout the world (Khagram 2004).

I argue that in the process of this international struggle a type of ‘Subaltern Cosmopolitanism’ emerged in the case of NBA in Madhya Pradesh. This phrase has been used by some scholars in more or less similar manner before, however I use this in a much more specific sense. I describe subaltern cosmopolitanism as a kind of politics of the marginalized that raises ‘global issues’ parallelly though their practices are local. They ‘globalize’ local discourses and create synthetic discourses for socio-political mobilisations (in this case the ecological discourses of indigenous people were hybridized with the anarchist environmental ideas). Subaltern cosmopolitanism is “state resisting” in nature (Ho Fung 2011) that is it resists the state as it encroaches upon the terrain of the rights of marginalized communities. The subaltern cosmopolitans appeal to the global civil society through transnational alliances and networks of organisations. Being
increasingly neglected by the state, their demands are ‘centrifugal’ to the state politics and while slowly disengaging with it, they put indirect pressure on the state through international lobbying. Because of their decreasing engagement with the state and ‘extensive’ international networks, they are often successful in bringing about ideational changes, whereas their pragmatic material demands are often neglected. In the next section I will do a conceptual review of the notion of subaltern cosmopolitanism that is already available in the scholarly literature.

‘Subaltern Cosmopolitanism’: A Conceptual Review

Ulf Hannerz (1990) describes cosmopolitans as those who are willing “to become involved with the other” and is concerned with “achieving competence in cultures, which are initially alien”. I use the word ‘cosmopolitan’ with reference to its conventional meaning of being ‘at home in the world’. Cosmopolitanism is not only the prerogative of globally circulating elites. The subalterns also aspire to be cosmopolitans and the subaltern ‘sociality’ that I analyse in this chapter is ‘cosmopolitan’ in nature. This cosmopolitanism is, however, different from that of the elites.

Santos (2002) defines ‘subaltern cosmopolitanism’ as a variety of cosmopolitanism of the oppressed that is ‘oppositional’ to the economic, cultural and political aspects of neo-liberal Globalisation. It is counter-hegemonic in nature, not only because they fight against economic, social and political outcomes of hegemonic globalization, but also because they challenge the conception of generalized interest that underlies the latter. It calls for an alternative globalisation of emancipatory projects that demand social inclusion. Gidwani (2006) describes it as a sort of cosmopolitanism that enables connectivity between the disenfranchised. He says that subaltern cosmopolitanism is a dialectics of non-identity that is neither “‘subaltern’ nor “‘cosmopolitan’”
in any final or identitarian sense. Instead, it enables practices of thinking, border crossing, and connecting that are transgressive of the established order and that shame and expose its hermetic and de-politicized grids of *Difference* as political relations of *difference*. Rejecting the sacred and secular motifs of tolerance and multiculturalism, it views participation in the affairs of society neither as rights-borne privilege nor as charity, but as irrevocable claim.

Marchetti says (2008) “subaltern cosmopolitanism” or “cosmopolitanism of the oppressed” is a kind of political engagement with the global civil society, which is rooted, thick and embedded in nature. It is ‘subaltern’ in nature because these voices emerge from the minorities of the global south. Such cosmopolitanism is ‘thick’ in nature because it is imbued with solidaristic principle of social justice. It is also ‘embedded’ because it is inserted within a social context characterized by mutual obligation and sense of attachment to a comprehensive political experience. It is ‘rooted’ because its discourses emerge from local practices that remains tightly connected with political struggles from below. They constitute multiple projects that loosely link with one another against hegemonic globalisation. But these loose bundles of projects and alliances of movements never achieve the status of singular global entity (neither do they aim to do so). In the case of anti-dam movements in Madhya Pradesh, what emerged were loose transnational networks against hegemonic developmental paradigms of the World Bank and the Indian nation state.

In Chapter 3 I narrated the Save the Soil Campaign that took place in Madhya Pradesh that brought about slow changes in subaltern politics. In this chapter I analyse the social history of ‘anti-dam’ movements in Madhya Pradesh till 2004. In this theoretically framed historical narrative I analyse several ‘events and processes’ which trace the intense tussle of the subalterns with the state of Madhya Pradesh, the Indian national state and the World Bank, and in the
process of this conflict how their ‘subaltern political subjectivity’ or ‘subalternity’ slowly transformed giving rise to new modular forms of protest repertoires, ideology, discourses and practices.

**Big Dams on Narmada: Contentious Issues**

In this section I discuss the crystallization of various controversial issues related to the building of Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) that gave an initial spark for a movement to take place. The Narmada River originates in Amarkantak in Shahdol district of Madhya Pradesh (MP). From there it flows 1,077 km westwards, crosses Maharashtra to enter the state of Gujarat and flows for about 161 km to enter the Arabian Sea, meeting it in the Gulf of Khambat. Since the river passes through three states, all of them have ‘riparian rights’ to ‘harness’ its water. However, as each state had its respective plans without any consensus, all of them were in conflict over their share of rights. The state of Gujarat conceived a grandiose plan of constructing series of hydropower projects on the river Narmada. This included a mega dam called Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP). The SSP, which is one of the largest and most controversial of the large dams in India, is located at Navagam in the state of Gujarat. The dam site, Navagam, is located at a place where Gujarat shares its borders with Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra (Kuchimanichi et al. 2005: 9).

The SSP was planned as the terminal dam on Narmada River. It was a part of the series of 30 large, 135 medium and 3,000 small dams that were planned on the river and its 419 tributaries, collectively known as the Narmada Valley Development Project (NVDP). There was massive conflict between MP and Gujarat, because the SSP on the borders of Gujarat state caused huge displacement upstream in Madhya Pradesh and partly in Maharashtra. Its submergence zone was
214 km long and 16 km wide. About 45,000 families (i.e., around 200,000 people) were displaced in 245 villages: 19 in Gujarat, 33 in Maharashtra and 193 in MP. Gujarat claimed the need to supply water to its drought-affected region in the Rann of Kutch and develop an elaborate network of canals. In a clever move, the state of Rajasthan was made a partisan in this conflict, although it was not a riparian state, by showing the urgency for canal-irrigated agriculture in the Thar Desert. Gujarat extended a part of its canal network into Rajasthan to show solidarity. MP, which had to bear the brunt, did not derive much benefit from the dam except for a negligible amount of electricity, so it vehemently opposed the SSP (Kuchimanchi et al 2005: 10).

![Map of the Narmada Valley Development Project](http://www.narmada.org/maps/nvdp.jpg)

**Figure 5.3.** Map of the Narmada Valley Development Project. **Source:**

http://www.narmada.org/maps/nvdp.jpg
To resolve the deadlock, the central government intervened in 1969 and set up a Tribunal as per the Inter-State Water Dispute Act, 1956. The Tribunal was headed by a Supreme Court judge. After hearing all the disputing states, the Tribunal delivered its judgement in 1979. The final decision that was delivered is called the Narmada Water Dispute Tribunal Award (NWDTA). The NWDTA fixed the Full Reservoir Level (FRL) of the SSP at 138.7 metres (455 feet) and the Maximum Water Level at 140 metres (460 feet) (Sharma et. al IPT: 2004:10). It was decided that the dam would be 1.21 km long and situated about 17 metres above mean sea level. It was decided that the SSP would depend on another feeder dam called the Narmada Sagar Dam that would be situated within MP\textsuperscript{102}. The tribunal divided the water in Narmada among three states. It claimed that about 28 Million Acre Feet (MAF)\textsuperscript{103} of water would be available on an average in Narmada each year. From the available water, about 9 MAF was allocated to Gujarat, 18.25 MAF to MP, 0.25 MAF to Maharashtra and 0.5 MAF to Rajasthan. Rajasthan was not a riparian state and yet it was made part of the case. All these states were given equal decision-making power and a voice to implement the NWDT award. The reason the Gujarat government wanted to make SSP was simple. More than putative economic and developmental benefit the dam brought immense ‘political benefits’, as cheap water would be supplied to industries and rich Patidar farmers of Gujarat (Kuchimanchi et al. 2005).

The governments defined the ‘project-affected’ only as those who were affected by primary displacement; they were destined to get meagre compensation, ‘if any’. The people affected by secondary displacement were not even eligible for any compensation or rehabilitation. Even before construction of the dam started, it was in public cognisance that the mega-dam project of SSP would cause massive displacement. Apart from the usual ‘primary (or direct)

\textsuperscript{102} This would cause displacement on the same scale as the SSP.

\textsuperscript{103} 1 MAF or Million Acre Feet is 1.234 billion cubic metres.
displacements’, the ‘secondary (or indirect) displacements’ would happen due to ‘catchment area treatment programmes’ that were equally large in magnitude. The colony for engineers that was built in Kevadia (Gujarat), the helipad constructed for the prime minister to land for the inauguration of the project and the numerous canals that spread like arteries resulted in another bout of displacements. Ironically, the animal sanctuary that was built and the compensatory afforestation programme that was run to mitigate the environmental impacts of the dam came at the cost of a series of further displacements in MP, Maharashtra and Gujarat. Further, there were ‘livelihood displacements’ of several kinds—the farmers would lose their fields and orchards, the fishermen their rights to fish in the dam, the petty shopkeepers would lose their business and the informal economy of migrant labourers, landless labourers and sharecroppers was gone forever, for which the government had no records. This would be a gigantic loss of infrastructure: networks of roads, local markets, telephone connections and wires, schools, colleges, post offices, railway stations, bus stops, shops, showrooms and the industrial set-up were going to be lost104.

This huge displacement was cultural genocide as well—there were to be an enormous loss of religious diversity, language diversity, kinship ties and natural resources of the village ‘commons’, such as the patches of forest, stretches of pasture, common water tanks and village chaupals (a place for discussion and chatting). In the mountains, several villages lie above the submergence zone, but their access routes to surrounding villages and the valley were to be submerged, making them isolated tapu (islands). The dam brought enormous chaos to the

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104 Interview with Medha Patker (12 June 2011, Delhi), Interview with Vasudha Dagamvar 9 September 2011 (Pune)
Narmada Valley. There was a ‘lull’, a silence before a storm of mobilisation would arise and engulf the valley in the decades to come\textsuperscript{105}.

In the next section I discuss how World Bank became involved with the SSP from the very beginning.

**The World Bank and its Involvement in the SSP**

1

*Washington me Vishva Bank Banaya,*

*Police Khada Kar Bainkar ko bithaya,*

*Tax Na Deke, Tankha Leke, Hanste Harami Log, Humko Lutan ko Agaye!!*

*Desh Desh ka Kanoon Todke Khate Harami Log!! Humko Lootan ko a Gaye....*

2

*Nadiyon me Bade Bandh Banaye,*

*Bade Bade Sapne Duniya ko Dikhaye*

*Vikas Ka Bada Dhong Rachaye, Harami log*

*Humko Lutan Ko Agaye!!*

3

*Adivasi\textsuperscript{106} hum, Jangal Wasi Hum*

*Humko Lutan Ko a Gaye Harami Log, Humko Lutan Ko Agaye!!*

-Narmada Bachao Andolan rally song lyrics: Choga Lal

\textsuperscript{105} Interview with Suniti Suru 9 September 2011 (Pune)

\textsuperscript{106} There are various terms to depict tribes in India, such as Avatika, Vanavasi and Girijan. However, the contentious term Adivasi has gained popularity for political reasons. It means ‘original settlers’, autochthones or indigenous people. The term is popular among activists, NGOs and in identity politics. It conveys the position of exclusion of the indigenous tribes and their empowerment through protest and struggle based on identity.
Translation-
(In Washington they made the World Bank,
They employed the bankers and the police!
They have ever-grinning faces!
They take tax-free salaries and they break country laws!
That is their business.
They make big dams on rivers.
They show us big ‘dreams of development’.
They are the rogues!!
Now they have come to rob us!!
We are the Adivasis;
We are the inhabitants of the jungles,
Now the rogues have come to rob us!!
Oh! They have come to rob us!)
(Kuchimanchi et al. 2005: 75)

In this section I discuss how the World Bank was involved in this project from the very beginning thus making it an international one. Therefore the social struggle against SSP was global in scale from its commencement.

In 1978 the World Bank started to show an interest in the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP). They sent their reconnaissance mission to explore the possibilities of extending a loan to the project. The bank emissaries approached some NGOs in Gujarat and together they lobbied in the Gujarat government to accept the loan and the associated conditions regarding resettlement of the
displaced. The Bank suggested creating a high-level expert committee of independent experts, called the Narmada Planning Group (NPG), to oversee the project. The bank immediately extended a loan of US$10 million to Gujarat irrigation department to formulate the project (Sangvai 2000: 20).

In 1983, the Government of India established a new Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF). The MoEF formulated rules for river valley development projects for the states and the union government. They did not give clearance to the Sardar Sarovar projects until 1987, and made it clear that the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of the project would take another 2–3 years.

The Secretary to the MoEF, T.N. Seshan, who was an acerbic personality, did not allow the project to proceed without EIA clearance from the MoEF. The Gujarat government and bureaucrats in the Union Water Resource Ministry were alarmed, and pushed for an ‘urgency decision’ that would allow the project to be ‘sanctioned conditionally’ since a large sum of money had already been spent on a project that served ‘larger benefits’ and the ‘national interest’. Political pressure started building on the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, who was forced to clear the project and in 1987 the MoEF gave conditional clearance to the project (Sangvai 2000: 21).

Even before the MoEF gave its conditional clearance, the World Bank had gone ahead to sanction a loan of US$450 million to the project, based on its Staff Appraisal Report of 1985. In this loan, US$300 million came from the International Bank of Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and US$150 million from the International Development Agency (IDA), a window that provides soft loans from the Bank. This loan became a major legitimising factor of the project, which helped attract other minor and major aid. The loan agreement of the bank had provisions
for land for the landless and ‘encroachers’, which the NWDT award did not have. The Bank also made a separate agreement for a rehabilitation fund; it included a clause that if the conditions for rehabilitation environmental care were not fulfilled, the loan would be withheld. Following the steps of the MoEF, the Planning Commission of India also cleared the project in 1988, with the addition of two more conditions: maintaining a cost-benefit ratio and timely completion of the dam (Sangvai 2000: 24-25).

By that time displacement due to the SSP had already started. The Government of Gujarat (GoG) and Government of Maharashtra (GoM) with the help of NGOs such as Arch-Vahini had already started shifting people out of the affected villages. The GoG did intermittent construction on the SSP from 1985 onward. With World Bank involvement, the scale of the social struggle against the SSP was international from the start (Ibid 39).

In the next section I analyse the first mobilisation that emerged against the SSP.

*The Nimar Bachao Andolan (Save Nimar Movement): ‘Politics of Opportunism and Opprobrium’*

In this section I present the first political agitation that was organised against SSP. The agitation was a failure for multiple reasons, but it was a starting point from where a full-fledged movement emerged later.

Almost immediately after the ruling on the creation of the SSP, it was made public that it would submerge some premium land areas of Nimar district that belonged to prosperous farmers. These farmers started social mobilisations to stop the dam. This mobilisation proved to be a vehicle of political prominence for some future political leaders in India.
A Nimar Bachao Sangharsh Samiti (NBSS; Save Nimar Action Committee) was formed in 1978. In the first phase of this mobilisation, hundreds of farmers who would be affected gathered around the Madhya Pradesh Vidhansabha (state legislative assembly) and courted arrest on August 28, 1978. On the same day, the opposition party, Congress, disrupted the Assembly, demanding that the ruling Janata Party make a statement against the NWDT award (Khagram 2004: 84).

As the tempo of mobilisation increased, in fear of losing political support, the Janata Party was forced to petition against the NWDT award to lower the height of the SSP to 436 feet to minimise submergence in the Nimar region. An even larger rally was organised on September 7 when a massive procession of NBSS members marched through Bhopal (the capital of MP) and assembled around Parliament to press their demands. As they tried to forcibly enter the Vidhan Sabha with elephants and horses, chaos ensued and the police manhandled the people, fired tear gas shells and drove them back with wooden batons. The police detained about 1,000 people for disturbing public safety and arrested another 365. Among the arrested were Shankar Dayal Sharma, the future president of India, V.C. Shukla, the future Union Minister of water resources, and Arjun Singh, the future chief minister of MP. All of them were leaders in the opposition party Congress (I), in MP. They manoeuvred this opportunity to gain public support and increase the vote bank for their party (Ibid 85).

Despite these protests and the MP government’s petition, the NWDT refused to reconsider the award in its 1979 final declaration. It stated that reopening the award would be against the rules given in the Inter-State Dispute Act of 1956, which only allows clarification of the award but no legal dispute or further judgement. Partly due to the Janata Party’s failure to reopen the tribunal,
it lost the MP state elections in 1980 and the Congress (I) with Arjun Singh as the chief minister came to power.

Earlier, Arjun Singh and his party had been extremely critical of the NWDT award. Therefore, the NBSS withdrew the explicit agitations, hoping that Arjun Singh and the Congress (I) would carry on the legacy of opposing the award. However, it was a clear case of the politics of opportunism. To the dismay of the NBSS, immediately after coming to power Arjun Singh agreed to a political conciliation and signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Gujarat Chief Minister, Madhav Singh Solanki, who also belonged to the Congress (I). The MoU stated that as long as both the states of MP and Gujarat took care of the displaced people, the NWDT award should be implemented. Singh and the other Congress (I) leaders placated the people from Nimar and the NBSS with the promise of fair compensation and the resistance ended (Ibid, Sangvai 2000: 44).

The ‘Anarchist Terrains’ of the tribes of Vindhya and Satpura Highlands

![Figure 5.4. Bhilala and Bhil Adivasis protesting with an NBA flag. Source: http://www.frontline.in/](http://www.frontline.in/)
Figure 5.5. An NBA banner with a warning to government officials to not survey the valley for the purpose of rehabilitation. Source: [http://dharmanext.blogspot.sg/2012/05/medha-patkars-perjury-in-supreme-court.html](http://dharmanext.blogspot.sg/2012/05/medha-patkars-perjury-in-supreme-court.html)

Figure 5.6. Bhilala Adivasis of Narmada Valley organising a dance in their protest movement. Source: [http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/tp-economy/silver_jubilee/article1007405.ece](http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/tp-economy/silver_jubilee/article1007405.ece)
Adivasi Kohe re Amko!

Adivasi Kohe!

Amu boida me renyara, amu Adivasi!!

Amu horana Pila re, Amu Adivasi

Amu dungra me renyara

Amu Adivasi!!

(They call us Adivasi, ho they call us Adivasi

We are forest dwellers, we are Adivasi

We are tiger cubs, we are Adivasi

We live in hills, we are Adivasi)

-Adivasi song, sung in Pavri (Kuchimanchi et al. 2005: 75–76)

In this section I present a glimpse of the social, economic and political lives of the Adivasis in Narmada Valley and their day to day interactions with the state and the farming elite classes in MP. These Adivasis eventually emerged as the central, movement participants around whose ‘identity’ the struggles against large dams were organised in MP.

The NBSS was mainly organised by farmers. The most marginalised groups of the Nimar region, i.e., the indigenous tribes were mainly Bhils and Bhilalas and other rural proletariat classes of landless labourers, poor peasants and sharecroppers, did not form part of this mobilisation. The SSP dam brought about an immense cultural and ecological erasure of the ‘life-world’ of these tribes living around Vindhya and Satpura in Jhabua and Nimar districts of MP as well as in Nandurbar and Dhule districts in Maharashtra (Kala 2001; Routledge 2003).
Although these areas come under the Panchayat Extension of Scheduled Area (PESA) Act of 1996, which constitutionally mandates the rights of indigenous people, none of the rules are followed here during the construction of SSP. By PESA law the deployment of any development project has to take prior permission from the displaced community and has to seek their participatory involvement in decision-making. The construction of the SSP blatantly disregarded this law and, thus, the SSP by law is an ‘illegal’ construction. The indigenous tribes of Bhils living there were never asked along the lines of the PESA Act for their permission in the ‘development’ of their area. None of them were asked whether or not they wanted the dam or about the choice of resettlements, even to make a stance of so-called ‘participatory involvement’ or for the sake of ‘democratic inclusion’. Instead, the state went beyond its constitutional mandate to support the SSP.

The Adivasis call outsiders Bazaariyas—or the market people, who were turning their world upside down. The discourse of the SSP is embedded within the larger discourse of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (Harvey 2005), which is not facilitated by the ‘market’, but enabled by state-led coercion to overcome the barriers of resistance (Levien 2011). Through development,

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107 The 73rd amendment was made in the constitution to enable the Gram Sabha (Panchayat) or Village Assembly to make key decisions about life and resources. This was a decision taken to promote decentralised village democracy. However, this law did not cover ‘scheduled areas’ where the tribes resided. The Panchayat Extension of Scheduled Area (PESA) Act, 1996 covers the tribal-dominated areas in the states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh. This Act gives power and control to the tribal communities to conserve their traditional rights and natural resources. PESA recognises the rights of tribes over local natural resources. It also recognises customary law and social and religious practices. It directs the state government not to make any law that is inconsistent with it.

108 PESA came up much after the commencement of the construction of SSP. In spite of that, SSP still violates the postulates of PESA since SSP’s construction superseded it. So even after the formulation of PESA, the construction of SSP continued to violate its laws.

109 This concept has been applied by Whitehead (2007) and Nilsen (2010) before in the context of their study of Narmada Bachao Andolan.
communitarian and concrete ‘places’ of these ‘subaltern terrains’ are being continuously transformed into ‘abstract spaces’ of capitalist investment instituted by the state (Lefebvre 1991: 285). Moreover, these marginalised communities are being disposed of and their history of ‘embodied space’ and the life-world of the localised community are being transmogrified and purged by the history of expanding national and global capital (Chakrabarty 2000).

The Bhils and Bhilalas are mostly subsistence peasants in their livelihood, who cultivate the fringe areas of the district lands near the Satpura and Vindhya foothills in MP and Maharashtra. Scott (2009) argues that the anarchist state fencing zones of the Zomiya110 highlands of Southeast Asia extends to these mountain ranges of northern and western India. The tribes residing in Vindhya and Satpura historically have shown anarchistic tendencies to fend off states and valley civilisations. However, they should not be understood as unsullied noble savages as they were never completely ‘autonomous’ communities and they have, to different degrees, always interacted with the valley civilisations through agriculture, trade, cooperation and conflict from pre-colonial times (Guha 1999, Kela 2012).

In colonial and postcolonial times, most of these tribes started practising agriculture. However, the lands that they cultivate are mostly poor quality fallow land. They produced mainly coarse local crops such as tuvari (Cajan Cajan; pulses), dumkha (Hibiscus Saffradifa) juwar (sorghum vulgare) and bajri (Pennisetum Typhoides). They also cultivate more popular leguminous crops, such as chaula (Vigna Unguiculata; cowpea), urdi (Phaseolus Mungo; type of pulses), chana (Cicer Arietinum; chickpeas) and kultha (Macrotyloma biflora; type of pulses) and a variety of

110 These highlands, christened the Zomia (by William Van Schendel), mirror a completely different account of social political and economic life as opposed to the state-centric histories of the modern world. Zomia have been considered the ‘shatter zone’ or refuge zones, where the power of the state ends precisely because of the inaccessibility of the highland terrains. The so-called uncivilised barbarian highlanders are the denizens of this Zomia.
coarse crops, such as badi (Setaria Italia Beauv; fox-tail millet) and san (Crotalaria Juncea; sun hemp) (Baviskar 1999: 135).

A section of these tribes did swidden cultivation in the hills, which was substituted with minor hunting and gathering of jungle products such as resin, lac and mahuia (Madhuka Longifolia; a type of flower). Most of these Adivasis, however, have no legal rights to cultivate these lands. Rather, the ‘instruments of legality’ have been used to dispossess them, first by the colonial state and then by the postcolonial state. Although they are the original inhabitants of this land, most Adivasis do not have a Zameen ka patta\footnote{A cardboard-like document given by the Indian government in recognition of registered land as ‘property’ is called ‘patta’ because of its structure.} (document of registered land). Legal language is incomprehensible to most of the illiterate Adivasis. They manage their lives through everyday encounters with state emissaries, who are mainly police and lower rank bureaucracy. So, their livelihood, which depends on ‘unauthorised’ clearing of forests and cultivating nevad (encroached) land, is at the mercy of the forest and environment bureaucracy. They are labelled ‘encroachers’ of government land (Ibid 136-137).

The Adivasis lead a precarious existence in the ‘interstices’ of the river valley and jungle where they bribe lower-rank police officials and bureaucrats so that their meagre existence is not jeopardised. They try to manage their lives through everyday politics with a mix of negotiation, deference, and open defiance when things become unbearable or unmanageable. Taking advantage of this ‘existential liminality’ of these autochthones, government officials and police unleash extreme violence and rent-seeking in these areas. They often demand money, hens, liquor and even women. Police beating, custodial torture and rapes are not uncommon here (Banerjee 2008).
The postcolonial ‘developmental’ state has not actively tried to bring these tribes into the fold of the propertied classes for good reason. The Malwa region of MP has been a ‘resource frontier’, an ‘extraction zone’ (Tsing 2005) of timber and water that can be supplied to other industrial ‘production zones’ within the state and in the country. The Adivasi existence and identity is territorial and intertwined with the ecology and landscape of the region. They ‘sit on’ the most lucrative natural resources of the state, such as jungles, rivers and mines that the state needs for industrialisation and ‘development’. On the other hand, these people have been the most resilient and rebellious elements of the Nimar region. In addition, the states that have been traditionally formed by upper caste and class elites have a visceral hatred for the ‘ugly’, ‘violent, dirty and uncivilised’ Adivasis. They think Adivasis ‘have no concept of work’ or ‘hard-workingness’, their life is merely leisure: ‘eat, drink, and be merry’. Yet, those who have seen Adivasi women walking 20 km everyday to bring water from the river and cook food and the men going to gather forest timber, meat, roots, mushrooms and shoots to cook a humble meal will know the intensity of this daily work.

The Adivasi anarchist lifestyle, with a nature of work that does not produce much surplus and their lack of market orientation, is not suitable for the political economy of the postcolonial Indian state. The Adivasis have just enough for their needs and almost nothing can be appropriated from them by the ‘mechanism of market’ penetration or through the coercive state apparatus. The state merely wants these custodians of the forests, water and land to either ‘vanish’ or to be converted into labour for the industries and to produce saleable ‘work’ through which surplus can be generated for the state and the capitalist classes. Once these people move

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112 Interview with Rahul Banerjee, chief co-ordinator of the KMCS on October 20, 2011.
113 Interview with a bureaucrat in MP on October 22, 2011.
from their land, their resources can be appropriated for the ‘national interest’ and ‘public purpose’.

The most fertile land near the River Narmada was cultivated by relatively prosperous *Patidar* peasantry who belonged to the Other Backward Castes (OBCs). This Patidar community of peasants was brought into Malwa by the local Rajput and Maratha rulers to ‘peasantise’ this region in different phases between the 15th and 18th centuries. Settled cultivation as a part of pre-colonial state-making was promoted for revenue generation. The local populace of tribes was not interested in this and, therefore, the local rulers had to lure peasants from Gujarat and Maharashtra to come in and till the fertile black soil of the Narmada valley. Several *Adivasis* during periods of scarcity and drought come down from the Satpura and Vindhya hills to work in the fields of *Patidar* peasants as farm labourers in the Nimar region. There, they face similar exploitation (Bates 2005).

When the SSP dam started being built, the *Patidar* peasants who tilled the most fertile land around Narmada valley were the ones who were most terrified. They were *Pattadars*, i.e., they owned significant properties in land that would be submerged when the dam water rose. They had the highest stake in losing cotton fields, fruit orchards and chilli crops. They were by no means rich, but they were much richer than the *Adivasis*. The *Adivasis* had almost no stake in the dam. They had been pushed, pulled and shoved for centuries by the state; they were mobile and had no official property in land. They had the usufruct common property of the forest and the river through which they derived their livelihood. When the dam water rose, they would simply dismantle their rag-tag villages and either move further up in the hills or migrate out of the place. There was nothing new in it. So, they faced the problem of submergence with nonplussed
stoicism. However, the *Adivasis* were by no means apolitical or ‘pre-political’. They were simply not interested in the movement against large dams, since they had almost no stake. Rather, they were interested in protecting their forests\(^\text{115}\).

They were intensely politicised even in their daily life. Their subaltern terrain had seen currents of movements, mobilisations and intense violent and non-violent conflicts of ‘endogenous’, ‘exogenous’ and hybrid varieties for about a century. In fact, eastern Nimar was ruled by *Adivi* Gond, Bhil and Bhilala kings before their terrain was captured by Rajputs, Marathas and the British. In the anti-colonial struggle, *Adivasis* participated under their leaders: Khajya Naik, Neemla Naik, Bheema Naik and Tantiya Bheel and many unsung heroes, whose fables and myths still echo in the Narmada valley. Exogenous socialist leadership also had its influence among the Bhils of Jhabua. During Independence and until the 1960s, the Bhil *Adavis* in Jhabua were mobilised by socialist leaders, such as Mama Baleswar Dayal Dikshit, who led the *‘Lal Topi Andolan’* (Red Cap Movement) here. Dikshit later became a Member of Parliament from Jhabua. The Bhils revered him and called him *‘Mama’* (maternal uncle) (Banerjee 2005).

In 1980s some ‘exogenous’ activists came to Alirajpur *tehsil* of Jhabua district (Alirajpur was split from Jhabua District on May 17, 2008 into a separate district) from the social work and research centre at Tilonia in Rajasthan to form an organisation dedicated to work among the *Adivasis* and named it *Khedoot Mazdoor Chetna Sangath* (KMCS; Peasants’ and Workers’ Consciousness Union). They organised and mobilised the *Adivasis* to fight against the oppression of the state and dispossession by the market. They started making rights-based demands on forest land for *nevad* cultivation and the collection of minor forest products. Through the help of the KMCS, the *Adivasis* started interacting with the state bureaucracy using a more liberal ‘rights-

\(^{115}\) Interview with Rahul Banerjee, chief co-ordinator of the KMCS on October 20, 2011.
based’ demand and negotiation approach (Baviskar 1995). The KMCS facilitated the participation of these tribes in movements against large dams as the dam water started rising and submerging the subaltern terrain of ‘forest’ and mountains, the habitations of the tribes.

Emerging Alliances of Mobilisations against large Dams in Madhya Pradesh

Figure 5.7: Medha Patkar giving a speech at the Narmada Bachao Andolan rally. Source: http://www.kamat.com/database/pictures/16345.htm

“Does the Government have enough land, for all of us in the villages on the Banks of Narmada including our Keeda-Mungi (ants and insects) and Dev-Devani (gods and demons)?”

-Ranyabhau (Sangvai 2000: 41)
“Who am I to ‘give away’ land? And who is the government to ‘take it’ from me?
When neither I, nor the government have created it. Can the government
manufacture land in Karkhana (industry)?”

-Bhatu Patil (Ibid 41)

“If you don’t move out now…. when the water will rise, you will all run like rats from
their holes.”

-An India bureaucrat to the Adivasis (Ibid 39)

In this section I present how after Nimar Bachao Andolan various smaller mobilisations sparked
off in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat and how all those smaller movements came
together to form a large solidarity based organisation of Narmada Bachao Andolan or Save
Narmada Movement.

Although the Nimar Bachao Andolan was a failure in most senses, it had brought together issues
related to the hydropower project on the Narmada—mainly the submergence of fertile land,
displacement and the loss of natural resources and cultural and archaeological heritage. The first
villages affected by the SSP dam were in Dhule district of Maharashtra (Ibid 10-11). In the initial
period of 1980 to 1983, families from Sinduri and Manibeli were asked to leave the village for
the resettlement sites in Kaledia and Parveta. Here, the Bhil Adivasis were the first to offer
resistance to the dam. In 1985 in Akkalkuva and Akrani tehsils, they mounted organised
resistance (Ibid 139). The process of displacement was carried out through the suppression of
information and disinformation. Nobody knew anything about the extent and magnitude of the
submergence or displacement, or even the whereabouts of the dam. Government officials
assisted by the police wreaked ‘everyday tyranny’ (Nilsen 2012) in the Adivasi ‘life-world’. In a
transmogrification of their culture, their lifestyle was criminalised, where shifting cultivation became illegal and *nevad* cultivation became ‘encroachments’ on forest land.

Medha Patkar, who later emerged as the chief leader of the NBA, started organising protest movements here along with Bhil *Adivasi* leaders, such as Jatarbhai Vasave and Vitthalbhai Tadve, who through their everyday struggles emerged as ‘organic intellectuals’ among the Bhils. Medha Patkar was a graduate student of social work at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), and as part of her study she came to the Narmada valley in early 80’s. She was genuinely moved by the condition of people there and started getting involved in their struggle. Medha’s family had a long history of activism. Her parents took active part in the anti-colonial struggle in India and were involved as socialist trade union activists, as disciples of Sane Guruji, in Maharashtra.

On February 16, 1986, a mobilisation front called the *Narmada Dharangrasta Samiti* (NDS; Narmada Dam Affected Organisation) was formed in Maharashtra. The NDS participants, chiefly Bhils, started making more fundamental demands to the government that went beyond mere resettlement policies. They questioned whether the government had enough resources to resettle all 33 villages in Maharashtra and why they had not been included in the decision-making process of their own resettlements. Although the government promised to allocate land, most of it was on paper and did not exist. When the Bhils confronted the government in 16

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116 Medha was an activist with an NGO called SETU in Ahmadabad (Gujarat) working with tribal groups in Sabarkantha, Dang and Banaskantha districts from 1983-84 onward before she formed NBA. (Sangvai 2000:38)

117 Pandurang Sadashiv Sane (1899-1950) or Sane Guruji was a Gandhian-socialist who participated in anti-colonial struggle from Maharashtra and was active in working class and anti-caste movements.

118 In an interview with Kusum Karnik and Anand Kapur dated October 16, 2011 in Malegaon, Pune (Maharashtra). Anand and Kusum are married and are close allies of Medha Patkar in movements against large dams and are the conveners of an NGO called Sashwat that works with people displaced by the Dimbhe dam.
resettlement sites and asked to be ‘shown’ the land that had been registered in their names, the Maharashtra bureaucracy had no answers (Ibid 40).

In 1986, a _Karbhari Samiti_ or executive committee was formed in 33 villages of Maharashtra led by activists, such as Medha Patkar, Arundhati Dhuru and Rohit Jain. They submitted several petitions and memorandums and held meetings with the dam bureaucracy at the district level. As citizens of the Indian nation, they demanded transparency in information dissemination. They demanded that all the people affected by dams should be declared ‘project-affected’. At a larger level, they started questioning and unbundling the notions of ‘greater common good’, ‘public purpose’ and ‘national interest’ that were invoked by the ‘develop-mentalist’ state. They asked: “Development for whom? Who gets the benefits of ‘development’? Whose interest is ‘national interest’? The millions getting displaced; are they not part of the ‘nation’? Whose nation is it? Which class owns the nation?” As these questions were raised, it became increasingly clear that the SSP was a case where gain was being privatised and loss was being socialised. The river water and the forest around it, which was the property of the ‘commons’, were being appropriated by creating ‘enclosures’ around them (Ibid 41).

The _Karbhari Samiti_ held _padyatras_ (long marches) and _magni parishads_ (demand conferences) in Maharashtra in November 1986 at Dhadgaon. They conducted a new ‘people’s survey’ to counter the incomplete surveys conducted by Maharashtra government (Ibid 41). In 1987 the NDS extended its alliance to the displaced tribal villages of MP situated in Alirajpur _tehsil_ of Jhabua district, which were mainly inhabited by Bhil and Bhilala tribes. Even before the NDS came to the area or the NBA was formed, the _Khedoot Mazdoor Chetna Sanghath_ (KMCS) was working in this area on issues of land alienation, identity and the livelihood of _Adivasis_ in this region (Ibid 41). The KMCS embraced the issue-based politics of dam and displacement as
‘strategic essentialism’, because it fit their larger politics that were related to _Jangal and Zameen_ (forest and land) for the _Adivasis. Jal_ (water) became an integral part of that. The KMCS\(^{119}\) had already politicised and mobilised the mass base of _Adivasis_, which was ready for NBA mobilisations in the Jhabua district of Alirajpur region (Nilsen 2006: 61-74).

The KMCS was led by activists such as Chitraroopa Palit, Shankar Tadvala, Khajan Singh, Bava Maharia, Amit Bhatnagar and Rahul Banerjee. Although the KMCS wanted larger structural changes in the region and hence maintained its identity and independence from the NBA, it provided full solidarity and support in its own way to the NDS.

Another parallel mobilisation against the SSP started emerging in the plains of the valley, i.e., in Nimar region of MP covering districts such as Barwani and east and west Nimar. The farmers of Nimar were united under the banner of the _Narmada Ghati Navnirman Samiti_ (NGNS) under the leadership of _Sarvodayis_, such as Kashinath Trivedi, Prabhakar Mandlik and Phulchnad Patel. They held a _Narmada Jan Jagaran Yatra_ (Narmada Peoples’ Awareness March) in October 1986 from Omkareshwar to Koteshwar in MP. They raised awareness about the dams and the idea of decentralised governance in villages, co-operation, equity, equality and self-help that was inspired by Gandhian traditions. Leaders of the earlier _Mitti Bachao Andolan_ also became active in this phase. There was a _Narmada Bachao Nimad Bachao_ (Save Narmada Save Nimar) group that was also active in the 1970s. People such as Anupam Mishra were working with Tawa-affected people; also, Ramesh Billroy and Satinath Sarangi were working with people affected by the Narmada Sagar Dam in 1988. An occasional journal called _Bandh Samachar_ (Dam News) was published that gave current news on people ousted by Tawa, Sukta and Kolar projects. All these smaller struggles created a background for the larger mass mobilisations in MP (Ibid 42).

\(^{119}\) Interview with Rahul Banerjee, the main activist of the KMCS on November 10, 2011.
In the middle of 1987, Medha Patkar established contact with an NGNS activist and organised a series of hurricane tours and meetings in the Nimar regions, mainly in Barwani and Khandwa districts. Initially farmers were not enthusiastic about any mass movements, given the fate of the *Nimad Bachao Andolan* that they had experienced. Nevertheless, the movement started gaining mass support from Nimari peasants from 1987 (Ibid 43).

In the latter half of 1987, the dam-affected people convened a meeting against large dams in Anandvan, Gujarat under the aegis of veteran Gandhian leader, Baba Amte, where several social movement organisations, journalist, activists and NGOs participated. The dam-affected population in Narmada valley also participated in the conference. Following this, the participants from Narmada Valley published a booklet, ‘Declaration Against Large Dams’, that connected multiple issues of the malefic effects of large dams that included social, environmental and cultural aspects and cost-benefit issues (Ibid 45).

Apart from Maharashtra and MP, there was a smaller movement emerging in Gujarat. From 1980 an NGO called ARCH-Vahini headed by Dr. Anil Patel had been working in this area, which took on the issues of resettlement of 19 villages that were affected by the SSP in Gujarat. They organised a rally in 1983. Although initially they were against the construction of the dam, by 1985–86 they were co-opted, largely changed their position and started promoting the view that the SSP was a *fait accompli*. After this, they started driving people from villages to the resettlements sites and purportedly helped them get good rehabilitation. Slowly they emerged as ardent supporters of the dam and the World Bank. They insisted that the involvement of the World Bank would ensure good rehabilitation (Ibid 46).

By 1988 a small group named the *Narmada Asargrasta Sangharsh Samiti* (NASS) was formed in Gujarat by people from the six villages that were affected by the construction of the SSP staff
colony. They, along with other activists working in this area, held a tempestuous 8-hour session with the resettlement and rehabilitation group of the Narmada Control Authority (NCA). They asked several questions and as usual the bureaucrats had no answers. The NASS gave the NCA two months to clarify their position and provide answers. When there was no response, in November 1988 there was a multi-pronged attack on the NCA and the SSP, as people spontaneously emerged in solidarity in three states—Dhule (Maharashtra), Kevadia (Gujarat) and Badwani (M.P.)—under the leadership of Medha Patkar and other activists. This was the first united struggle that was lodged by all the dam-affected population living in three states. The result of this struggle was that the NDS in Maharashtra, the NGNS in MP and NASS in Gujarat were united in a large canvas to open a new front of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA; Save Narmada Movement) (Ibid 47-48).

In the next section I present the NBA led mass mobilisation in detail.

A Larger Front: Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save Narmada Movement)

Figure 5.8. Medha Patkar speaking to farmers at a rally in the 1980s. Source: http://www.rightlivelihood.org/narmada.html
In this section I analyse the political background that helped the NBA to precipitate, and the political stances that NBA had to take as a movement organisation to tread through various prevailing ideas and interests in MP society.

Apart from Medha Patkar, independent activists such as Shripad Dharmadikari, Nandini Oza, and Himanshu Thakkar, also joined the movement. The movement had one remarkable aspect: all these activists were exogenous to the valley. They came as outsiders, who were highly empathetic to the dam affected people. They had mostly middle class origins, and in every sense they were ‘class renegades’. The NBA became an exogenous catalytic agent for the hotbed of dissent that was simmering in the Narmada Valley. The valley was filled with dissent, but they were of two different kinds, as I mentioned before. The tribes were interested in protecting their lands and forest; they were highly rebellious and resilient but a rag-tag army in front of the Indian ‘state capacity’, whereas the farmers were interested in protecting their agricultural lands from submergence.
Anupam Mishra (1987) in one of the first booklets written about the Narmada Valley hydropower projects says that “though everybody knew that the dam was coming up, yet when he arrived in the valley in the early 1980s there was a complete Sannata (silence) there”. The resilient Adivasis were silent against the dam, because in the 1960s and 1970s their Lal Topi Andolan (Red Cap Movement) was repressed violently by the state. So, on the one hand, the Adivasis were apprehensive about state-led tyranny. On the other hand, the Patidar migrant cultivators of Nimar had high stakes in losing their land to the dam, but with their rich peasant status and the failure of the early Nimad Bachao Andolan, they were not as fiercely resistant as the Adivasis. Not on only that, they were also openly hostile and denigrating towards the Adivasis (Nilsen 2010) and that mitigated any possibility of alliance formation between the two.

Medha and her activist associates actively endeavoured to emerge as radical interlocutors to bridge this gap in the social structure and to create an ‘ethic of reconciliation and alliance’ between the farmers and the Adivasis that was based on their ‘common fate’ of being displaced by the state. That is, the activists tried to suture the social fissures to create a ‘strategic essentialist’ position against the issue of large dams. This was a tricky issue and not easy to resolve, because of the burden of a century-long antagonism that prevailed between Adivasis and landowning Patidar peasants of this region. Creating a larger social mass base by uniting them was almost impossible. Therefore, from the beginning the NBA had an ambivalent crack in their movement discourse, which they tried to patch up and represent in a homogenous manner. That is not to say that they did not have large mass support; rather, their mass support was internally divided. On the other hand the mass support was also extensive, covering several kinds of constituencies of farmers, Adivasis, university students, NGOs and the middle class.

120 Titled Narmada, published in three volumes written in Hindi.
121 Interview with Rahul Banerjee, the main activist of the KMCS on November 10, 2011 and with Anupam Mishra (Gandhi peace Foundation) dated 11 November 2011 in
Since the gigantic SSP was coming up fast, there was no time to concentrate on larger ‘social structural transformation’ in a region that was affected by centuries of oppression and had not seen a large number of social mobilisations. Therefore, an issue-based approach was probably the only possible way for the NBA\textsuperscript{122}. To substitute for this ‘problematic’ mass mobilisation, they adopted various strategies at multiple levels and scales; for example, they successfully mobilised electronic, print and social media as a powerful communicative tool to stir the conscience of the middle class. They deployed symbolic communication through dramatic movement repertoires and focused on Adivasi life and culture to ‘frame’ the movement discourse. They started appealing to the conscience of the middle class and created a counter-expertise of heterodox scientists, engineers, journalists, jurists and geologists worldwide who would act as an ‘epistemic community’ (Haas 1992) to produce alternative knowledge bases and counter-discourses to fend off the state. They created extensive networks of transnational alliances of Civil Society Organisations (CSO) and social movements and they fought the state through legal-judicial procedures and Public Interest Litigations (PILs).

The CSOs in Bhopal were to some extent already vibrant during these times due to agitations against the Bhopal Gas Tragedy. These CSOs helped in setting strategic directions for the NBA\textsuperscript{123}. By the time the NBA was formed, the MP government had come up with a law on Madhya Pradesh Pariyojana Ke Karan Visathapit Vyakti Panasthapan Adhiniyam, 1985 (The Law for Resettlement of Project Displaced Persons in Madhya Pradesh). The law was enacted when Arjun Singh was the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh. Singh and some higher officials in the MP bureaucracy, such as Harsh Mander, were sympathetic to the subaltern struggles that had been going on in the region from the 1970s. Certainly the law was formed due to various

\textsuperscript{122} Interview with Vijay Paranjpe dated November 20, 2011 in Pune (Maharashtra).
\textsuperscript{123} Interview with Vijay Paranjpe dated November 20, 2011, Pune (Maharashtra).
struggles against large dams in which Arjun Singh also took part, but these events took place before the NBA was formed. Moreover, the Madhya Pradesh Law was also inspired by the law of resettlement enacted by Maharashtra government in 1976, though with a major difference. The Madhya Pradesh law merely uses the term “resettlement” (*Punasthapan*), whereas the Maharashtra law talked about “rehabilitation”.

Resettlement merely involves physical relocation to new sites, whereas rehabilitation means the restoration of former ranks, privileges and rights of the person concerned—that is the re-creation of a total life support system, which is almost equal to, if not better, than the previous living standards with the creation of essential physical infrastructure and social resources. It is not clear whether the framers of these two acts actually understood the difference. However, Madhya Pradesh is a state where making law is easy but implementation is difficult due to entrenched traditional relations of caste and feudal hierarchy in the state politics. Therefore from the beginning the *punasthapan* law was a non-starter and the state was not able to implement the law properly.

In the next section I cover various processes and events in the twenty years of mass mobilization led by NBA.

**Two Decades of Mass Mobilisation by the NBA**

In this section I cover various events and processes in the two decades of mass mobilisations that NBA did. We can clearly see the transforming subaltern subjectivity as various strikingly innovative movement repertoires, political practices and discourses that emerged from these

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124 Interview with Vijay Paranjpe dated November 20, 2011 in Pune (Maharashtra) and with Shripad Dharmadhikary

125 Interview with Harsh Mander on June 17, 2011 in New Delhi and interview with S. Parasuraman on June 22, 2011 in Mumbai.
mass mobilizations. Through these mobilizations NBA came in direct confrontation with the state and the World Bank. I will also present how the Indian state tried to subdue NBA, as NBA challenged their notion of ‘development’.

The first large rally that the NBA organised was the *Samvad Yatra* (dialogue march); there were series of *dharnas* in Barwani, Bhopal, Indore, Mumbai, Kevadia colony in Gujarat, Dhule and also several *Chulha Bandhs* (collective fasts) in the villages. The NBA took a two-front strategy; on the one hand, they opposed the dam and refused to co-operate with any related official activities. On the other hand, the villagers under the directions of NBA refused to move out of their villages. In a way, they symbolically disengaged from state policy and programmes and did a Gandhian *Asahayog* (non-cooperation) against the state that brought about a fervour akin to the anti-colonial movement and a sense of ‘solidarity’ and ‘community’ among the displaced who had already been disowned by the Indian state. In several ways the NBA was ‘state-resisting’ (Hung 2011). They tried to fend off the state from encroaching upon subaltern terrain. Their notion of civil society, however, was not limited to NGOs, which is the formalised, bureaucratised and contained section of civil society. Rather, their notion of civil society was of resilient autonomous village and anarchic ‘hill tribe’ communities. In ideology, the NBA can be termed *Gandhian-Anarcho-Environmentalist* (Banerjee 2008). They practiced an environmentalism of the poor or ‘shallow ecology’, which emphasises the judicial use of local resources by various communities (Guha and Martinez-Alier 1997).

This is unlike the American radical biocentrism of deep ecology movements that promote the conservation of ‘pristine, primitive and virgin nature’. The NBA’s idea of environmentalism was anthropocentric where they talked about community conservation and sustainable social use of natural resources. Following a Gandhian frame, they were distinctly non-violent in their idiom of
protest and simultaneously radical and confrontational in their approach. They extensively used Gandhian ideology and the cultural repertoires of contention, such as *Satyagraha* (truth-seeking), *Ahimsa* (non-violence) and *Swaraj* (self-rule). Along with this, the NBA framed the mobilisation along the ‘environmental movement’ line rather than as an issue of equity and redistribution. That is, although the NBA can be considered left-of-centre, they consciously avoided framing the movement in terms of Marxist ideology.

Randhia (2003) rightly proclaims the Indian state and the provincial state of Gujarat as a ‘cunning state’ that is opportunistic. They have no monolithic character of their own and change shades with politics, negotiation and pressure. The fight between the dominant orthodox discourses of the government of Gujarat and myriad recessive heterodox discourses were becoming increasingly ‘contentious’. The Gujarat government consistently built up its resistance from above against the NBA. In the late 1980s the pro-dam lobby operating within the Gujarat government and the Gujarati language press tried to malign the image of the NBA. At first they verbally abused NBA activists and labelled them ‘anti-national’ and ‘anti-development’, and accused them of propagating ‘eco/environmental terrorism’. Then in late 1988, in Ahmadabad a group of ‘unruly vandals’ attacked celebrities, such as Prurushottam Mavlankar and Mrinalini Sarabhai, for supporting the cause of the NBA. Gujarat politicians maintained that the Sardar Sarovar is the ‘lifeline of Gujarat’ (Sangvai 2000: 53).

On September 28, 1989, the NBA organised a large convention against destructive development at Harsud in Madhya Pradesh. A large rally was organised in which about 50,000 people from different organisations participated. At this convention, people raised the slogan ‘*Vikas Chahiye, Vinash Nahi*’ (We demand progress not destruction) and promoted the politics of alternative development. In a continued struggle, around 10,000 tribals and peasants blocked
the Bombay-Agra highway in Khalghat (MP) for 28 hours. The Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Sunder Lal Patwa, initially said that the state government would ask for a review of the dam from the centre, but later he withdrew himself. From various government decisions it was clear that the dam was going to displace the first village (from Maharashtra) during the monsoon of 1990. Villagers from this area started a dharna from March 28, 1990 in Mumbai under the leadership of activists, such as Rama Padvi, Mathur Mohan, Arundhati Dhuru and Medha Patkar. Faced with the increasing pressure of a dharna, on April 5 Sharad Pawar, the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, announced that until the displaced tribals were resettled according to the resettlement master plan approved by them the height of the dam would not be raised. From 1990 to 1992 the MP government started extreme repression in the villages and tried to crush the NBA. During April and May of 1992, thousands of police patrolled the villages, public transport was regularly checked and several villagers were beaten and jailed. Protestors in Badwani were brutally beaten on April 6, 1990 and police destroyed the houses and stored grain of the indigenous activists. The people, however, made their way to Chhoti Kasravad to visit Baba Amte and celebrate the anniversary of the Harsud Rally. On August 30, 1991, the people organised Manibeli Satyagraha in Manibeli of Maharashtra and tried to stop the construction of a bridge in Chhoti Kasravad. Again, there was huge state repression, as the police started picking up people from their homes in the middle of the night and torturing them; even the women were not spared (Ibid 54).

Against the rising repression of the state, a Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra (Peoples’ Development and Struggle March) was organised on December 25, 1990, where approximately 6,000 people from all over the country started walking towards the dam site from Rajghat in Badwani. They started singing bhajans (devotional songs) to the Mother goddess of the Narmada River and her
glory. As these people peacefully walked toward the dam site, the chief minister of Gujarat, Chimanbhai Patel, started depicting the march as ‘an aggression against Gujarat’ and its ‘unity’. He deployed police and Gandhian NGOs, such as Arch-Vahini and Anand Niketan, to keep vigil at the state borders so that no one could reach the dam site. To create the spectacle of a ‘war-like situation’, a huge police force was deployed at the MP, Maharashtra and Gujarat borders. Gujarati people were loaded in chartered and state transport buses and tractors to be carried to the borders. The rally was stopped for a few days at the village of Ferkuva, which lies on the border between Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. The village became a Sangharsh Gaon (village of struggle). The activists launched an indefinite hunger strike while the state unleashed the police force on them, which started rampant beating and arrests of the non-violent Satyagrahis. Since this resistance and hunger strike continued for a few days, the World Bank announced an independent review of the project. This was the first time in the history of the World Bank that an independent review of a project was done. This was a major victory for the NBA. The 22-day fast was called off and the villagers returned to their villages shouting slogans of victory “Shashan Walon Sunlo Aaj, Humare Gaon Me Hamara Raaj” (Rulers! hear our proclamation, in our village we will rule) (Ibid 56-59).
The next large resistance was organised in Manibeli in 1991. It was the first village that was displaced by the SSP in Maharashtra. On July 14, 1991 the NBA activists launched a *Satyagraha* in Manibeli, which continued for two months. There was country-wide support for this *Satyagraha* and people came from various organisations to participate in the movement. Against this, the ‘everyday tyranny’ of the Indian state continued unabated (Nilsen 2012).

The status of the displaced was made *Homo Sacer* by the sovereign state (Agamben 1998). As the state decided to displace them and rehabilitate them ‘legally’, the protest against the state was considered ‘illegal’; consequently, the entire ‘legal’ blanket to protect the rights of ‘citizens’ was no longer available to the displaced. Their lives were made ‘bare’ of the legal blanket and ‘naked’ to the monstrosities of the sovereign state. Their ‘bodies’ were made the centre of an
almost ritual enactment of state-led violence. As resistance started growing, on March 21, 1992, 400–500 people that included police, labourers and leaders of pro-dam NGOs forcibly entered Manibeli with bulldozers, trucks and guns. They arrested people at random and started to ‘rescue’ villagers who wanted to accept the government rehabilitation offer. About 18 houses were demolished and the police mercilessly arrested and tortured about 200 activists in the villages, and brutally raped two Adivasi women in the ravines. Further in January 1993, the police opened fire in Anjanwara, M.P. and destroyed the houses and grains of the protestors. On April 4 1993 an Adivasi woman, Budhiben of Antras (Gujarat), was gang-raped by the police.

In the meantime, agitations started intensifying against the World Bank at the global level. Periodically, through detailed data the NBA showed that the World Bank actually violated its own norms on resettlement and rehabilitation. The World Bank team was gheraoed (surrounded) by NBA activists and people and the Bank team was compelled to listen to their point of view. Their slogan was that the Bank should ‘Quit Narmada’ and ‘Quit India’. In October 1989, the US Senate sub-committee on agriculture and environment invited the NBA to present its case. Medha Patkar, Vijay Paranjpe and Girishbhai Patel made a presentation on behalf of the NBA and requested the donor countries not to fund the SSP project in India.
In June 1993 Medha Patkar and Devrambhai Kanera started an indefinite fast in Mumbai. Several prominent social activists, artists, poets and painters joined to show solidarity. A number
of demonstrations were held in several parts of India. The ministry of water resources sent its representatives to placate the activists. When the activists did not agree to their terms, the police forcibly took Medha Patkar to a hospital as her condition was deteriorating. The Government of India soon agreed to review all malefic aspects of the SSP. On June 30 a review team consisting of representatives from the NBA, Government of India, and state officials from Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra came for a meeting, while the Gujarat government boycotted it. After the meeting, the Gujarat government and bureaucracy increased its pressure on the Government of India (GoI), and soon the Government of India started delaying the review process. In protest, the NBA announced its decision on Jal Samarpan (sacrifice life in the water). This was a new strategy of the non-violent Satyagraha movement.

The idea of Samarpit Dal or the deployment of a dedicated squad that will sacrifice their lives in rising waters was an ‘extreme repertoire’ designed against the state. It originated in the summer of 1991 in a youth camp at Bamni. The NBA activists decided that they would sacrifice their lives on August 6, 1993 if an independent review of Narmada was not done in a timely manner. Several civil society organisations also simultaneously started pressurising the government to conduct the review. On August 5, 1993, the eve of the Jal Samarpan, the government agreed to review the SSP. The activists did stand in neck-deep water inside a hut as the water was rising. The Jal Samarpan was eventually withdrawn.

The review committee comprised five members, and is known as the Five-Member Group (FMG). The NBA made a presentation to the FMG. The Gujarat government, as before, boycotted the proceedings of the FMG. Political contentiousness was rising and some pro-dam activists filed a petition in the Gujarat high court to ban the report of the FMG. The case was moved to the Supreme Court of India. After another stretch of monsoon dharna in Mumbai in
1994 organised by the NBA, the Supreme Court summoned the FMG report in July 1994 as part of the hearing of a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) that the NBA had filed in May 1994. The FMG report pointed out the lack of a proper Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (E&SIA) and shoddy rehabilitation measures taken to resettle the dam oustees.

Meanwhile, the height of the dam was being continuously raised even as several committees and reviews were being set up. The state repression of indigenous Adivasis continued unabated; 15-year-old Rehma Puniya Vasave was killed in police firing on a peace march in Dhule. In another peaceful march the police injured 150 people.

There was a change in the MP government in December 1993. From 1994, under the chief minister, Digvijay Singh, there was an active effort to start a dialogue with various movements of the subalterns (Pai 2010). The MP government wanted to pursue a policy of social inclusiveness. Digvijay Singh appealed through a letter to the Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao to reduce the height of the dam from 455 feet to 436 feet to save fertile lands and minimise the problems of displacement in MP. In 1994 the NBA organised an indefinite dharna and hunger strike in Bhopal to stop further construction on the SSP. On December 13 several activists were forcibly removed from the site and sent to hospital. On the same day, the Supreme Court made the FMG report public and asked the state and the central governments to comment on it. The debate on the construction of the dam was already in the state legislative assembly and parliament (Rajya Sabha and Vidhan Sabha), where Digvijay Singh vociferously argued to stop the dam. While the dharna in Bhopal continued, two teams of Members of Parliament and legislators from MP toured the site in Gujarat where the oustees had been resettled. Both teams criticised the way the oustees had been manhandled by the state. The Narmada Control Authority (NCA) decided to suspend work on the dam in 1994. In this scenario of an expanding 'legal
The Court Case: Struggle against the State in the Legal Arena

In this section I present how the subalterns actually tried to defeat the state in the realm of judicial-legal arena or the ‘legal public sphere’ (Sivaramakrishnan 2011). It questioned the Indian state based on rights and legality of the displaced and demanded the rights of the marginalized people as the citizens of the nation. Despite placing their demands in liberal rights based discourses they failed to win their case in the court. It is only after they failed to stir the political conscience of the state and its judiciary did they involve fully in making transnational alliances.

A certain milieu of judicial activism prevailed in the Supreme Court in the 1990s. In the court the NBA claimed that in actuality there was no land available to resettle all the people displaced by the SSP. It was the ultimate and final move towards a ‘rights-based discourse’ in a democracy, where citizens challenge the state based on an independent judiciary. That was the last weapon available to the NBA in the face of increasing resistance from the state of Gujarat and the central government. Shanti Bhushan, the famous lawyer, was arguing the case for the NBA. Initially, the court head supported the case and upheld the ‘human rights’ of the marginalised. Meanwhile, construction work on the dam spillway was stopped in January 1995 at the request of the MP government after a fast-unto-death was organised by the NBA in December 1994. The Supreme Court supported the decision in May 1995. However, the Gujarat government unlawfully continued construction on the dam. In protest, the NBA organised a Nyay
Yatra (justice march) in the months of September and October 1995 in the Narmada Valley. From 1994 the MP government filed affidavits in the court to reduce the height of the SSP dam. In 1997 the court was reconsidering opening the NWDT award for a judicial debate and Shanti Bhushan made a strong plea to open the NWDT award for further discussion. However, by that time the bench had been shuffled as Justice Verma had retired. Now, it was constituted of J.S. Varma as Chief Justice and Justices Anand, Bharucha and Kirpal as the main bench. The scenario rapidly changed as the court started supporting anti-NBA views and trivialised the plight of thousands of displaced people. Not only did the bench start NBA-bashing while reading the rejoinders given by tribal oustees against their forced eviction, but the bench also said, “How can poor illiterate tribals write such rejoinders? This is written by the NBA”. In this way, they tried to detach the NBA from the people that they mobilised. The court further passed an interim order in February 18, 1999 for Gujarat to proceed with construction and increase the height of the dam. The Maharashtra government surprisingly supported Gujarat’s case and started submitting several affidavits in the Supreme Court stating that the GoM and GoG had adequate land and resources to rehabilitate all the people. However, the situation was the exact opposite at the ground level as the collector of Nandurbar districts in Maharashtra gave in writing to the Punarvasan Sangharsh Samiti that all 169 affidavits filed by the GoM and the claims that it made in courts were false as none of the oustees received any land for resettlement in Maharashtra. On March 15, 1999 hundreds of Adivasis in the villages of Maharashtra met the collector and resettlement officers in Nandurbar and asked to be shown their rehabilitation lands. The Deputy Collector had to confess that no such land was available, and that these lands existed only on paper. Some land was indeed available in MP but it was barren and uncultivable instead of the good land that the government had promised.
The NBA took out a *Manav Adhikar Yatra* (Human Rights March) from MP to Delhi against the destructive development paradigm of the state. A *Satyagraha* was also launched simultaneously in two places in June 1999, in Domkhedi (Maharashtra) and Jalsindhi (M.P.). As the dam height was being raised and consequently the water started rising, the people refused to move out of their villages and they proclaimed *doobenge, par hatenge nahin!* (We will drown, but we will not move!). In Domkhedi the *Samarpit Dal* (Dedicated Team) of *Satyagrahis* stood in water for 30 hours until the police forcibly removed them from the site.

On October 18, 2000, the Supreme Court delivered its final judgments. The verdict allowed construction of the dam and an increase in its height, which sealed the fate of all the displaced. The judgement was highly flawed and internally contradictory in several aspects. The so-called protective measures laid down by the court, i.e., the Grievance Redressal Authority (GRA), instead of assisting the displaced paved the way for further displacement in assisting the state. Thus Supreme Court ‘legally’ not only cleared, but also endorsed, the path for ‘development nationalism’ (Sangvai 2010: 72–93).

In the next section I present how NBA actively formed its transnational networks and alliances with various NGOs and social movement organisations.
Figure 5.13: A Poster of Narmada Bachao Andolan made by Robin Hewlett Source: http://www.justseeds.org/celebrate_peoples_history/02narmada.html
‘Transnational Alliance’ against the World Bank and the Creation of WCD

Keck and Sikkink (1998) define Transnational Advocacy Networks as (TANs) as “networks of activists, distinguishable largely by the centrality of principled ideas or values in motivating their formation”. These advocacy networks consist of research and advocacy groups, local social movements, foundations, the media, churches, unions, intergovernmental organizations, and parts of local governments. As these diverse groups communicate and share information and services, they circulate personnel’s, and exchange funds, they work together to influence policy. Keck and Sikkink (1998) proposes the concept of “boomerang effect”, which they define as -- when communication between domestic actors and the state are blocked, these actors can search out international partners who will exert pressure on the state from outside through TANs.

In the context of NBA movements we can see the example of TANs working across countries. NBA appealed to Japanese and US citizens through NGOs in these countries to some extent, which created a “boomerang effect” where by the World Bank was forced to revoke its funding from the SSP. However its effect on the Indian state was not very clear because the government continued to fund the dam and completed the project.

The NBA engaged with the ‘global civil society’ in “zones of awkward engagements” (Tsing 2005) that is in an abstract political space where different discourses engage with one another in awkwardly manner—and as a result either they remain incommensurable or get hybridized or remain ‘pure’ and engage in a strategic political solidarity for specific issues before parting away. As Tarrow (2005) points out: “no domestic claim is inherently interesting outside a country’s border unless it is framed to appeal to a broader audience”. Therefore NBA had to present its ideas framed in layers of various discourses in the international arena. In the process of translation and distillation of these discourses, the framing of the movement and its
presentability to global civil society was important. NBA used the idea culture, ecology, indigeneity and indigenous people discourses to appeal to the civil society organisations (CSOs) word-wide.

In the 1980s several dam-affected communities and NGOs had targeted World Bank-funded projects all over the world. The NBA’s stand against the World Bank-funded SSP was a central movement through which protests against the Bank were organised and articulated.

Meanwhile, during the Sangharsh Yatra phase the World Bank announced an independent review of the SSP. They sent a team chaired by Bradford Morse, the former chairman of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with the famous Canadian judge, Thomas Berger, on the team. The NBA accepted the review process. The Morse Committee submitted its report in June 1992 and to the consternation of the World Bank, dam builders and donor agencies concluded that the sub-national government and the state in India could not resettle and rehabilitate the people according to the laws and regulations of the country and the guidelines laid down by the World Bank. It also said that environmental laws and regulations had been seriously violated in the project and the projected benefits were based on flawed cost-benefit ratios. The World Bank had been confident that the report would support their claims about the SSP. The report initially stunned them but then they chose to ignore it and sent a second team headed by Pamela Cox in an attempt to undermine the earlier Morse report (Udall 1993).

In the meantime, the donor countries started exerting pressure on the Bank to revoke their funds from the project. In an attempt to save their image, the Bank laid down fundamental resettlement, rehabilitation and environmental aspects that the Gujarat government had to fulfill in the following six months, although it knew that it would be impossible to do so by March 1993. The SSP was slowly becoming a burden on the Bank and it was clear that they no longer wanted to
fund it. Sensing this funding fiasco the Indian government quickly withdrew from the loan agreement. By this time US$250 million had already been spent out of the US$450 million loan that the Bank had given. This was a major victory for social movements against dam-funded projects worldwide.

In 1994 to mark the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the World Bank, the International River Network (IRN) from Berkeley, California and the NBA jointly issued the Manibeli Declaration that called for suspension of World Bank funding for hydropower projects. A total of 326 groups forming alliances in 44 countries called for an independent and comprehensive review of all Bank-funded dam projects to give a programmatic statement on the actual social, environmental and economic effects of such projects. A paradigm shift was taking place in the arena of ‘development’. The activists firmly stated that they did not believe in the stated benefits of the 45,000 large dams that had been constructed and in fact these dams had caused massive social, environmental and cultural degradation all over the world. Their position was clearly against large dams and their viability.

By the end of 1994 the Operation and Evaluation Department (OED) of the World Bank agreed to conduct a review. The OED, which is supposed to be an independent body, is in fact a part of the Bank. Despite the fact that their opinion could be moulded by indirect pressure from the Bank, the IRN and its ally NGOs agreed to the proposal. They supplied data, information and suggestions to the OED throughout 1994. But to the surprise of the NGOs, the report generated by the OED was only circulated internally to the Bank’s executive directors and members in 1996 and was not made public. The OED review report was 67 pages, but only a 4-page summary was made available to invitees at the April 1997 World Bank/ World Conservation Union (IUCN) workshop that was held in Gland, Switzerland. This summary concluded that
about 37 large dams among all the dam projects ever funded by the Bank had no problems, i.e., 74 per cent of the dams that the Bank funded were acceptable and hence large dams per se were not a problem. This was the expected conclusion. The World Bank staff was not happy with the OED’s decision to review the dam projects funded by them. They kept a close eye on the report and often monitored it.

In the middle of 1996 the Bank offered that the IUCN would create a process of consultation and feedback from various civil society organisations to start the second phase of review of ongoing dam projects. The Bank and the IUCN decided to hold a workshop in Gland, Switzerland to discuss their report and planned to invite 30 Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), public dam-building agencies, private dam-building companies and people from academia. The Bank’s idea was to invite only organisations and experts that were known for their ‘moderate’ and ‘reasonable’ stand on dam-building issues, such as the IUCN, World Wildlife Fund and Conservation International. At the same time the Bank was willing to show transparency and accountability in its dealings with anti-dam movements. Surprisingly, the IUCN took a different stand and they suggested that if anti-dam activists and organisations were not invited, the Gland workshop would lose credibility as a public forum. The Bank agreed to the IUCN’s suggestions. Following that, the IUCN established contact with the IRN and asked it to suggest the names of six groups and activists who were known to be trenchant critics of large dams. The IRN consulted its allies all over the world and suggested the names of six groups: Save Narmada Movement (India), Berne Declaration (Switzerland), IRN (US), Movement of People Affected by Dams (Brazil), Sungi Fundation (Pakistan) and Sobrevivencia (Paraguay).

Parallel developments were taking place and immediately after this in mid-March 1997, the dam-evictee movement’s transnational alliance held a major conference: the First International
Meeting of the Dam Affected People in Curitiba of Brazil. There, the activists and affected people came up with a manifesto against dam builders and demanded a thorough and independent review of the dams funded by the Bank, as they did not trust the OED report. The IRN and a number of activists, particularly from the Save Narmada Movement, saw the Gland workshop as the ideal opportunity to convince the Bank to rethink its dam-building policies. Immediately after this, the IRN wrote to the World Bank President, James Wolfensohn, rejecting the OED report and appealed for an independent and unbiased review. The letter was endorsed by 44 NGOs and anti-dam movement groups all over the world and it criticised the methodology and bias of the OED review.

The Bank bureaucracy ambivalently agreed to the review because they were extremely confident through their experience of years of dam funding that dams are in fact ‘good’ for development. However, they knew that they had made some mistakes and they were not sure about the backlash they would face from anti-dam movements. The dam builders also agreed to participate, because private funding for dams was decreasing since dam-making is not a ‘cheap source of energy’. Contrary to belief, in reality it is expensive, takes a long time and has a record of cost overruns. Therefore, private funding for dams shrank at a time when public funding had already become low. The dam builders expected this workshop to be a place where they could regain trust and attract public funding for dams. Among the dam-builders, two of the most fundamentalist proponents participated in the workshop: Theo P.C. Van Robroeck, the president of the International Commission on Large Dams (ICOLD), and Aly Shady from Egypt, president of the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage (ICID). However, these figures did not have much influence at the workshop.
The IUCN and the World Bank issued a joint statement in which they agreed to review the dams funded by the World Bank. It was decided that the review would be carried out by a high-level international group, which would be established in six months and it would start work in November 1997. The participants of the Gland workshop created a ‘reference group’ (RG) that would oversee the review work, agree on the mandate and propose a list of commissioners. An ‘interim working group’ (IWG) was established to create the high-level review committee in discussion with the reference group. There was much contention between the RG and IWG in reaching decisions. The World Commission of Dams (WCD) was eventually created to review dams all over the world and submit its report in two years. The South African minister, Kader Asmal, was made the head of the IWG. Another set of disagreements emerged over the selection of 10 commissioners of the WCD, since initially the anti-dam activists as representatives of dam-affected people were not included. It seemed that the process of review would be a failure until the January 1998 meeting where Asmal agreed to include Medha Patkar, the chief activist of the NBA, which had produced the most devastating critique of dams. Further, the Indian economist, L.C. Jain, was made vice-chair and the WCD was formally launched on February 16, 1998. At the Gland workshop all the parties finally agreed to have a comprehensive review of dams worldwide and several anti-dam activists participated in the workshop. Along with Medha Patkar, Shripad Dharmadikari from the NBA and Himanshu Thakkar from the Centre for Science and Environment participated and their roles were crucial in disassociating the Bank from the project and the formation of the WCD (McCully 2001).

In the next section I conclude and sum up this chapter.
Conclusion

In the introduction I discussed the concept of ‘Subaltern Cosmopolitanism’. As I conclude I reiterate and analyse some crucial aspects of NBA politics and the emergence of this novel subaltern subjectivity.

In the case of the NBA and its struggle, a new form of subaltern political subjectivity, which I call subaltern cosmopolitanism, emerged in a dialectical interaction with the state. The NBA latched onto the idea of an indigenous rights-based approach and also fought the state in the legal public sphere on issues of citizenship ‘rights’. In their repertoires, they strictly avoided violence. They globalised local discourse. Their politics was ‘centrifugal’ to the state in nature, they practiced more of issue-based demands and they did not demand any revolutionary structural transformation of the society. They were ‘state-resisting’ (Hung 2011) and were trying to stop the encroachment of the state over the ‘subaltern terrain’.

The NBA struggle against the World Bank and consequently, forming the WCD was in a “zone of awkward engagements” (Tsing 2005), and, in the process of alliances with global civil society, some of the authenticity of the subaltern voice was already lost through ‘distillations and translations’ of discourses. Nevertheless, they reached an arena of unbound political exposure and alliances that made them more powerful. As they forced the World Bank to revoke funding for the SSP and participated in the making of the WCD, their activities created an arena of cosmopolitan political space and were able to ‘globalise a local discourse’ and shift the global discourse in a certain direction. They not only captured the global imagination but also manoeuvred a political space of dissent in it and made themselves visible. Different kinds of mediations and interlocutions took place in the process. The caveat is that in the process of framing their ideology, there was much translation, transcription and distillation of discourse that
took place to trim it and to fit it to liberal ‘rights’-based approach practiced by international organisations, such as the United Nations and the World Bank.

The NBA, which was never a formal civil society organisation, continued to operate as a people’s movement. This had certain advantages of non-bureaucratising an ever-changing terrain of movement so that it does not get repetitive and routinised. At the organisational level, the NBA functioned as a semi-informal network of loosely-linked ‘affinity’-based organisations (Day 2006) that collaborated and made alliances based on specific issues. The anarchist idea of ‘affinity’ emphasises the composition of self-organising activities, a non-authoritarian circulation of power through loose networks, and forms of non-hierarchical solidarity that do not seek to take state power. In these networks ideas travelled fast like forest fire. These organisations did not form any counter-hegemonic structured organisation of rule. There were some village communities and core group activists in the NBA, but majority of the office work depended on benevolent part-time workers who were students and mainly middle-class professionals who otherwise were highly dedicated, but were not dedicated full-time to the organisation.

The NBA stepped away from sporadic and intermittent exercise of violence. This should be understood on the one hand as their belief in Gandhian and socialist ethics and on the other hand in the context of the increasing coercion of the Indian state. The NBA decided to operate in the democratic space delineated by the Indian state. However, the NBA wanted to radicalise democracy further, but within the limits of democratic norms; they wanted to expand the boundaries of democratic practices and simultaneously delimit the state’s encroachment upon civil society. The NBA believed in a multi-pronged strategy of mobilisation, and their protest rallies were highly performative and dramaturgical. Fiery slogans, songs, poetry recitations and tribal dances accompanied those rallies. Vernacular languages, such as Hindi and Nimadi, and
indigenous languages, such as Bhili, were used extensively to write slogans and songs to depict the dogged resistance of the displaced. Since repertoires of contention are part of the culturally given semantics of a community, these tactics deployed by the NBA helped reinforce and reify the cultural markers of difference to make the movement participants conscious of their identity, autonomy and rights, and strengthened their solidarity and collective identity.

The NBA trenchantly critiqued the postcolonial state’s colonial legacy of ‘development’ and ‘improvement’ by radically questioning the notion of ‘progress’ and ‘development’ at the socioeconomic and environmental level. Their ‘anti-dam’ stance became a radical ‘environmental’ critique of the idea of ‘progress and development’. The environmental framing of the movement attracted worldwide media attention and civil society organisation (CSO) involvement. The NBA and its supporters used the Internet successfully. They continue to run websites and use the media to disseminate information about large dams and their malevolent effects. The NBA ran its international campaign through transnational advocacy groups, support systems formed by chains of NGOs, international lobbying tactics, demonstrations and rallies.

Although the NBA failed in making its material demands fulfilled, they became an ideational success on the national and global scale due to its challenge of the ‘development paradigm’ and its strategic use of media, the middle class and global civil society networks as part of movement repertoires. The carnivalesque repertoires represented the cultural genocide of the original inhabitants of the area and the permanent loss of their habitation. In a way, this helped garner the support of international civil society. In the long run, the NBA affected the structures of the Indian state through a slow and incremental process. Their effect on the Indian state was not immediately visible because of the intense socio-political milieu of antagonism prevailing at that moment of the struggles. However, later it was clearly visible when important leaders of the
NBA were included in the discussion for drafting the Land Acquisition and Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bills introduced in the Indian Lok Sabha in 2011.

In the next chapter 6, ‘Summary and Conclusion’, which is the last chapter, I conclude this thesis. I bring in all the threads of this thesis together to present my findings concisely.
Chapter 6

Summary and Conclusion

Summary

In the introduction I stated the central argument of this thesis-- ‘if we closely observe the history of the postcolonial state formation in India, we can see that the subalterns have contributed considerably towards the making of the democratic state in India’. It could be said that a causal vector of state-formation comes from the movements of the subalterns. The subalterns interacted with the state and expanded its political space through a continued dialectics, whereby they practiced a politics of claim making, confrontation, negotiation and disengagement in an attempt to transform the state. Through these political processes of interactions with the state, their ‘subalternity’ or ‘their subaltern political subjectivity’ transformed as well.

I trace the history of transformation of the state by assessing the changes in state policy, programmes and laws under the weight of the movements of the subalterns. I also follow the changing forms of ‘subalternity’ by observing and analyzing the changes in their protest discourses and practices such as repertoires, ideology, organisation and demands.

In this thesis I mainly considered two subaltern groups, the tribes (Adivasis) and the peasants. Here I considered the state and its discourses as the domain of ‘elite’ ideas and interests. By juxtaposing subalterns against the state (both provincial and the central states in India), I attempted to trace a relation of conflict, negotiation and transformation in their respective domains of consciousness, power and politics.

The historical context and narratives of these subaltern groups’ and their conflictual interaction with the state become visible while studying the movements against hydropower projects in India. I have considered two extended cases of movements against large dams in Madhya
Pradesh and Maharashtra. While both the movements in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra have many similarities, they have been compared historically (within certain limitations due to regional similarities and variations in these two states) to show the emergence of two different kinds of subaltern political subjectivities due to socio-political circumstances and state intervention.

In the context of Maharashtra, initial movements against hydropower projects started in 1920’s during the colonial phase. I argue that the first transition in subaltern movements occurred during this phase when a ‘counterpublic sphere’ of the subalterns emerged in Maharashtra, whereby subaltern groups became aware of their position and power vis a vis other groups in the society and the state. This awareness was enabled by slow processes of political activities, movements and heterodox historical traditions in Maharashtra. Later these movements were crucial in the emergence of the first law for resettlement and rehabilitation of project affected people, which was passed in the year 1976 in Maharashtra, thus changing the structure of the state.

During 1980’s a second transition occurred in the notion of subalternity in Maharashtra whereby a politics of ‘subaltern localism’ emerged in the ‘dam-evictees’ movements. The political activities of the subalterns became more oriented towards the provincial state and their long history of movements against hydropower projects led them to localize their grassroots politics. It could be observed that the movements that emerged were largely internal or ‘endogenous’ to the history and politics of the regions in Southern Maharashtra. Though these movements never strived to achieve state power, their political power within the state helped fulfil their material demands.
In Madhya Pradesh, early movements against dams occurred in 1960’s. Finally, a massive movement emerged in 1980’s under the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (NBA) which was largely formed by ‘exogenous activists’ mobilising the already agitating local groups. I argue that a variant of transition in subalternity occurred in Madhya Pradesh and in 1980’s, when a particular form of ‘subaltern cosmopolitanism’ emerged in this region. Here, the subalterns moved into the arena of global civil society organisations and established networks there because of certain kinds of intervention from the national and provincial states. They resisted the state and their politics was significantly ‘globalised’. They were unable to fulfil their material demands successfully due to the avoidance of state oriented politics; however they achieved significant ideational successes as the forced the World Bank to revoke its funding from SSP in Gujarat and were instrumental in forming the WCD, an independent organisation for assessment of dams throughout the world.

**Revisiting the Thesis in Phases**

In this section I analyse the thesis elaborately according to the chapters I wrote. Here I will analyse the theoretical and political implications of state formation and transformation of subaltern political subjectivity.

In Chapter 1, ‘Introduction’, I present my central arguments whereby I forward the notion of conflict and interaction between the subalterns and the state and how they transform each other in that process. The subaltern and the state in this case are causal and constitutive to each others’ transformation. Here I introduce the cases of movements against hydropower projects around the world and in India which illustrate my central argument of subaltern- state interaction. Here I also introduce the two states of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra where movements against hydropower projects emerged that I specifically study in my thesis. I state my comparative
historical small-n methodology and the prospects and limitations of framing my cases in those lines. I also introduce the places I visited for my fieldwork. In the theoretical positioning of this thesis, I briefly begin with a criticism of the subaltern studies historiography project while forwarding my notion of the state not as a monolithic entity, but a hub of powerful discourses which could be transformed. I discuss my notion of ‘culture as resistance’ to these dominant and elite development discourses of the state and the role of these ‘cultures’ in resisting and negotiating the state forms in different ways by infusing them into the political economy. In the end I briefly explain the organisation of chapters in my thesis.

In Chapter 2, ‘Mulshi Satyagraha: Subaltern Counterpublicity and Movements against Hydropower Project in Bombay Presidency, 1920-2004’, I trace the ‘first transition’ in subaltern politics, that is, when the subalterns emerged as ‘subaltern counterpublic’ in Maharashtra. At the onset I present a brief discussion of hydropower projects in India. Following this, I present the case of the first movement against large dams in the world, the Mulshi Satyagraha, which took place from 1920 to 1924. The Mulshi Satyagraha was organized against a dam built by the Tata Company in Mulshi region of Southern Maharashtra. Here, I demonstrate how the Mulshi Satyagraha was the podium through which the nationalist elites’ tried to mobilize the resentment of the subalterns in Mulshi against the dam into an anti-colonial nationalist struggle. The ‘elites’ introduced the Gandhian concept of Satyagraha which was tested by Gandhi in the non-cooperation movements in the anti-colonial struggle in India, as a repertoire in the movement against dams. Satyagraha is a peaceful way of protest to seek justice and truth. The subalterns in this way were brought into a more ‘non-violent’ field of protest borrowed from the elites. The intervention of the elites further made them aware of their position and status as a ‘counterpublic’ in the Maharashtrian society. Though the notion of Satyagraha was introduced
by the elite classes, they withdrew from it due to various political reasons while the subalterns decided to pursue the Satyagraha.

Later, the subalterns left their characteristic imprint of violent ‘inversion’ as they with their leader Bapat moulded the idea of Satyagraha into ‘Shuddha Satyagraha’ and Sama Satyagraha’, Satyagraha with violence and Satyagraha without violence respectively. Thus, they introduced a new set of concepts and repertoire in the movement. In the end, violence was pursued by some participants of the movement and Gandhi along with the INC revoked their support for the movement. Nevertheless, Mulshi Satyagraha brought about a transition in subalternity. The subalterns in their brush with the colonial state through the intervention of the national elites learnt the art of protest through civil disobedience and ‘non-violence’. The subaltern movement repudiated violence and embraced Satyagraha as an ideology to deal with the state. This was a significant change in subaltern consciousness and political subjectivity, that is, it started changing its repertoires and strategizing them to negotiate with the state. Though the movement ultimately broke into violence, the subalterns here already gained ‘counterpublicity’ to confront and negotiate the state with its own language.

Though the transformation of the state did not take place immediately as a result of this movement, it raised important debates in the state legislature about the rights of displaced people which led to normative changes occurring slowly in the state discourses. Moreover the movement also challenged the colonial state on the issue of land acquisition (by challenging the Land Acquisition Act 1894 in court).

In Chapter 3 ‘Subaltern heterodoxy under the ‘Developmental State’: Mobilisations against Hydropower Projects in Postcolonial India, 1947–1980’, I theoretically analyse the project taken by the postcolonial ‘Developmental State’ in India to develop and improve its society. The
developmental project had a legacy in colonial ‘modernity’. Development was the key around which the state tried to gain legitimacy and maintain hegemony over the population that it governed. As the Indian state started making large scale infrastructural projects such as hydropower plants in terrains where the subalterns live, mainly the fringes of the state such as hilly regions and forests, the state came in direct conflict with them.

Here I compare the initial phase (1947 to 1980) of the two cases of movements against hydropower projects in the state of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. The subaltern movements were in a period of disarray under the postcolonial developmental state due to sudden changes brought about by democratic politics. Moreover due to the initial euphoria of independence the developmental state had a certain level of ‘legitimacy’ because of which the subaltern movements took time to challenge and change the state that occurred very slowly and incrementally. Therefore during the development state phase the transformations within the state and the strategies of subaltern movement’s were piecemeal.

In Maharashtra the movements against hydropower projects continued after Mulshi Satyagraha, which was the first spark that ultimately forced the state to pass the first law that deals with the resettlements and rehabilitation of the project affected people in 1976. On the other hand the first movement against dams in Madhya Pradesh, the Mitti Bachao Abhiyan (Save the Soil Campaign), emerged only in 1970s against the Tawa dam in Hoshangabad. This campaign was not against the displacement caused by the dam, but against problems of water-logging that the dam caused. While the movements in Maharashtra were steadily changing the structure of state-form by forcing the state to pass new laws and implementing them, the changes in Madhya Pradesh were slow till then. However, Save the Soil Campaign brought about some awareness against the hydropower projects in Madhya Pradesh.
In Chapter 4, ‘Vignettes of ‘Subaltern Localism’: The Movement by ‘Dam Evictees’ in Maharashtra, 1981–2004’, I chart the ‘second transition’ in subaltern politics in Maharashtra. Here I argue that through a process of constant subaltern conflict with the state in Maharashtra, not only was the structure of the state drastically democratized but a novel form of subalternity called ‘subaltern localism’ emerged in this case. I characterize subaltern localism as a trend in subaltern politics where more and more ‘local’ and ‘contextualized’ issues are raised as opposed to ‘general’ global issues. Here a global discourse is localised in a ‘culturally’ sensitive manner to give rise to ‘hybrid and subversive discourses’ to mobilize people. The development of subaltern localism is ‘endogenous’ to the socio-political legacy of the region, which endows it with strong grassroots political base. It provides a strong historical legacy of heterodox traditions to the politics of the subalterns, which in turn makes their politics ‘centripetal’ or state-centric, whereby their demands and claim making are directly oriented towards the provincial state. Due to this focus on demands and negotiations they are usually materially successful.

Here I follow the phase of movements against hydropower projects in Maharashtra from 1981 to 2004 which was the peak phase of conflict and transformation. I analyse a number of cases such as the case of constructing an alternative peasant built small dam, the Bali Raja memorial dam, whereby the peasants fought the state bureaucracy to construct a dam. Further they demanded property rights in water and forced the state to change its plan of two lift irrigation (the Takari and Tembhu) schemes. The 1976 resettlement and rehabilitation law was further replaced in 1986 and changed in 1999 because of these movements. These movements brought about unlikely alliances, first between the peasants and the workers and later between the dam-affected and drought affected population by ‘localizing’ Marxism and blending a hybrid discourse from Phule’s and Ambedkar’s ideas selectively. SMD, a neo-Marxist organisation was
at the helm of these mobilizations in Maharashtra. SMD used conflict, demand, negotiation, pressurization and disengagement as main strategies to deal with the state.

In chapter 5, ‘Emerging facets of ‘Subaltern Cosmopolitanism’: The ‘anti-dam’ movements in Madhya Pradesh, 1980–2004’ I trace the first major transition of subaltern politics in Madhya Pradesh. Here I argue that in the case of movements against hydropower projects in Madhya Pradesh, a new kind of subaltern politics transpired, which I call ‘subaltern cosmopolitanism’.

The notion of cosmopolitan subaltern sociality has been used before by scholars and my deployment of the term is similar; however I define it with much specificity. In this case the subaltern cosmopolitans ‘globalize’ a local discourse and make connections through international lobby networks of social movement organisations and NGOs to disseminate ideas worldwide.

The development of subaltern cosmopolitanism comes often through the involvement of people and groups that are ‘exogenous’ to the socio-political setup of a region in focus. The subaltern cosmopolitans usually practice a ‘centrifugal’ politics of fending off the state and indirectly putting pressure on the state through international pressure. Due to their international and ‘extensive’ focus, their ‘local’ movement base may often dwindle. However they are usually successful ‘ideationally’ but not so much ‘materially’.

In this chapter, I analyse the social history of movements against hydropower projects in Madhya Pradesh from 1981 to 2004. The movement here was started mainly by the group *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (NBA; Save Narmada Movement) which was led by Medha Patker. I begin the chapter by stating how the contentious issue of the construction of Sardar Sarovar Project got crystallized to precipitate the NBA. Following this, I illustrate the life and politics of the adivasis in Narmada valley who were mobilised along with the farmers. The mobilizations from the beginning were not only against the Indian state but also against the World Bank who
was funding the SSP dam in Gujarat. In the beginning, NBA started with a position that promoted resettlement and rehabilitation but then quickly moved on to their ‘anti-dam’ or ‘no-dam position as they realized that proper rehabilitation of the oustees was not possible. They fought the Indian state in the legal arena of the Supreme Court of India, but their case was defeated. They moved on to make connections through transnational networks of social movements and NGOs deploying which they forced the world bank to revoke its funds from SSP, conduct an independent review of all the hydropower projects that they fund world-wide, and additionally was instrumental in the creation of the World Commission of Dams (WCD).

Diagrammatic Representation of the Transition in ‘State-form’ and ‘Subalternity’

Figure 6.1 Overall Transformations of state form and subalternity

Subaltern → Subaltern Counterpublic
(Maharashtra)

Subaltern Localism
(Maharashtra)

Subaltern Cosmopolitanism
(Madhya Pradesh)
Figure 6.2 Transformations of state form and subalternity in Maharashtra

(Under Colonial Indian State)  (Under liberal/ Neo-liberal Indian State)

1. Bombay 3. State of
Presidenty  Maharashtra  (R & R law replaced and
changed in 1986 and 1999)

Subaltern  Subaltern Counterpublic  Subaltern Localism

1920’s 1980’s

Subaltern

1920’s to 1979 (First law of R & R passed in 1976)

2. State of
Maharashtra

(Continuing historical legacy from 1920’s and slow transformation under
postcolonial developmental state in India)
Similarities and Differences between SMD (Maharashtra) and NBA (Madhya Pradesh) led mobilisations:

In this section I sum up the similarities and differences between the mobilisations led by Shramik Mukti Dal (SMD; Labour Liberation Party) in Maharashtra and Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA; Save Narmada Movement) in Madhya Pradesh.

**Similarities between SMD and NBA**

1. Both are not interested in taking over state power.
2. Both are concerned about the people affected by dams.
3. Both are being led by leaders from Maharashtra.
4. Both groups try to actively engage in mass mobilization.

5. Both groups employ a wide range of very similar movement repertoires.

**Differences between SMD and NBA**

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<tr>
<th>Serial Number</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>SMD</th>
<th>NBA</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| 1.            | **Social Movement
Organization** | Hierarchical organisation with a large group of dedicated mass based cadres who are salaried. | Loose organizational structure with participation from ‘free floating’ volunteers. |
<p>| 2.            | <strong>Ideology</strong>              | Neo-Marxists, who creatively blended Marxian ideas with the ideas of Maharashtrian intellectuals such as Jyoti Rao Phule. | Gandhian-Anarcho-Environmentalism (and socialism) which is mainly inspired by Gandhism and an anarchist notion of environmentalism. |
| 3.            | <strong>Leadership</strong>            | Decentralized leadership and Centralized charismatic leadership     |                                                                      |</p>
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<tr>
<th><strong>4.</strong></th>
<th><strong>Type of Environmental Ideas Promoted</strong></th>
<th>decision making mainly under Bharat Patanker as the chief of SMD and many district and village level leaders. Movement leadership comes mainly from the so called lower ‘caste’ groups.</th>
<th>of Medha Patker and a core group of activists makes all the decisions. Leadership comes mainly from the ‘so called’ higher caste groups.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>5.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Training</strong></td>
<td>Tries to actively train the people through training camps for taking over future leadership positions. Therefore many Leaders emerged through movements. But no formal training camps are organised for leadership position to emerge. Therefore An equal mix of anthropocentric and bio-centric politics. Human and nature symbiosis.</td>
<td>An equal mix of anthropocentric and bio-centric politics. Human and nature symbiosis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Pressure tactics used on state</strong></td>
<td>Peasants and <em>Adivasi’s</em> are in key leadership positions.</td>
<td>Not many peasants and <em>Adivasis</em> are in key leadership positions.</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td><strong>Movement Participants</strong></td>
<td>Mainly through a series of demands SMD put pressure on the state of Maharashtra.</td>
<td>Raised chain of demands but once not fulfilled took the route of international networks to put pressure on the World Bank and the national and sub-national states.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mainly Maratha peasantry and the other so called backward and lower castes. <em>Adivasis</em> also participated in significant numbers.</td>
<td>Mainly tribes (the indigenous people or <em>Adivasis</em>) and the so called backward Patidar farmers. Middle class part-time activists such as student and urban intelligentsia also</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nature of Politics</td>
<td>Alternative Political Power</td>
<td>Movement Repertoires deployed</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Form a central support of the movements.</td>
<td>Largely radical non-negotiable politics of ‘incommensurability’ of different value systems.</td>
<td>SMD deploys a pragmatic set of repertoires of dharna, petition, Chavni Andolan etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Nature of Politics</td>
<td>Alternative Political Power</td>
<td>Movement Repertoires deployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pragmatic politics of ever rising demand and negotiation.</td>
<td>Marxist ‘Counter-hegemonic’ politics in nature, making alternative power centre.</td>
<td>SMD deploys a pragmatic set of repertoires of dharna, petition, Chavni Andolan etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Largely radical non-negotiable politics of ‘incommensurability’ of different value systems.</td>
<td>Anarchist ‘Affinity politics’ of circulating heterodox ideas through loosely connected networks of social movements and NGOs.</td>
<td>Repertoires are similar but employs much more spectacular, innovative and extreme repertoire such as fast until</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Position Vis as Vis dam building</td>
<td>Large dams are ominous, but may be necessary in some places. Small dams are definitely necessary. Large dams can be constructed provided the best resettlement and rehabilitation and other civic amenities can be provided. SMD positions them as ‘dam evictees’ movements. They demand various concessions for the marginalized and the displaced of the state. Dams are ominous and hence they cannot be allowed. NBAs position is mainly ‘anti-dam’ as they offer a radical environmental critique of large projects centric development paradigm. However they also negotiate for good resettlement and rehabilitation package now.</td>
<td>death, and Jal Samarpan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Mobilization of Media</td>
<td>SMD used local print</td>
<td>NBA used print</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
media mainly for the dissemination of information; a) they organize local press conferences and c) the key leaders regularly write articles in newspapers and journals. They are known in Southern Maharashtra widely but not known outside of Maharashtra because of the vernacular nature of their work.

Medha Patker travelled to universities abroad to mobilize volunteers and money. There are number of documentary films made on NBA. This successful mobilization of English and other international media made them a widely known name all over the world.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Subaltern Transition</th>
<th>Subaltern Localism emerged here.</th>
<th>Subaltern Cosmopolitanism emerged here.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Two ‘types’ of Subaltern Politics: Similarities and Differences

In this section I summarise the similarities and differences between two kinds of subaltern politics, ‘subaltern localism’ and ‘subaltern cosmopolitanism’ that emerged in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh respectively.

**Similarities between ‘Subaltern Localism’ and ‘Subaltern Cosmopolitanism’:**

1. Both of these politics significantly moved away from ‘violence’ (subaltern inversion) and practiced, what I term, ‘strategic non-violence’ (that is, practiced either in the name of ideology such as Gandhism or as a pragmatic measure to negotiate with the state, which has increasing coercive capacity).
2. The role of ‘organised’ protests increased within both of these politics.
3. Both these politics are implicated within the ‘global’ politics (both are local and global at the same time).
4. Both of these politics deploy the ‘rights based’ claim-making framework to frame their ever emerging innovative demands, such as ‘water rights’ and ‘rights of the indigenous people’.
5. Both these ‘political trajectories’ of the subalterns, which emerged in these two states were not the result of deliberate conscious decision making, pre-guided by a plan or ideology, but were contingent and ‘emergent’ in nature. These trajectories transpired in ‘relational field’ where the movements interacted with the state and through various events and processes of continuous conflict ‘strategized’ their actions.

Differences between ‘Subaltern Localism’ and ‘Subaltern Cosmopolitanism’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serial No.</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Subaltern Localism</th>
<th>Subaltern Cosmopolitanism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Scale of Discourses</td>
<td>Localizes ‘global discourses’ that is the directionality of politics is from global to local.</td>
<td>Globalizes ‘local discourses’ that is the directionality of politics is from local to global.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Direction of Politics vis a vis the state</td>
<td>Practices a state-engaging --‘centripetal politics’.</td>
<td>Practices a state-resisting and global civil society engaging --‘centrifugal politics’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Importance of History</td>
<td>Historical legacy is more important for this politics. The slow and</td>
<td>Historical legacy is less important for this politics. There are sudden</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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incremental development of socio-political mobilisations are ‘endogenous’ to the political, social and economical factors inherent to a particular region.

influences of exogenous persons and groups in the socio-political mobilisations of a particular region.

| 4. | **Nature of Transformation** | Change is brought about by slow incremental processes of ‘tipping point’ and various ‘events’ acted as critical junctures in that. | Change is brought about by sudden rupture created by persons and organisation ‘exogenous’ to the region. |
| 5. | **Movement Outcome** | More ‘material success’ and less ‘ideational success’. | More ‘ideational success’ and less ‘material success’. |
Concluding Remarks

Though this thesis is comparative and historical in nature it compares movements against hydropower projects in two provinces of India, therefore the theoretical implication of this work is somewhat limited. However, this thesis is also an endeavour in the direction of developing a ‘mid range theory’ of transforming subaltern political subjectivity, its changing relation with the state and the kinds of politics that emerge due to their interaction. The two types of political trajectories of ‘subaltern cosmopolitanism’ and ‘subaltern localism’ that I study in this thesis are two typical examples. They are only specific examples and there are other kinds of subaltern political trajectories might be emerging in various parts of the world. The question is, whether these two cases that I deal with in this thesis are unique cases, which make the impact of this study ‘Indian-centric’ or ‘South Asia centric’. If there are similar cases all over the world, we can actually conjure an idea of similar kinds of politics worldwide by comparing these cases and developing two ideal typical concepts of subaltern politics.

I would suggest that the kinds of political trajectories I talk about in this thesis have emerged elsewhere in the world as well. The historical processes and events through which they emerged might certainly be different and specific to those histories, but the two broad ‘tendencies’ of cosmopolitanism and localism that we see in the cases of subaltern politics in India can probably be seen in other places of the world also. There can be many such examples but I conclude with a quick congruence here. The Via Campesina movements of the peasants that have spread in a significant part of the developing world, form global networks just like the NBA and with its head office in Indonesia it resembles almost all the aspects of ‘subaltern cosmopolitanism’. Most of the secessionist movements, which use both violent and non-violent strategies to form a
separate district, state or nation such as the movements in North-East India and Burma, display many of the characteristics of ‘subaltern localism’.

Moreover, there are movements which reflect both these strategies (of cosmopolitanism and localism) by creating intensely localized movement bases and simultaneously forming loose global networks of organisations. There are evolving multi-scale political practices cosmopolitanism, where place-based localized struggles might concurrently be seen as multi-scale and network-oriented subaltern strategies of localization. The social movement of black communities of the Pacific rainforest region of Colombia can be such an example (Escobar 2001).
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