

CHAPTER II

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REACTION AGAINST ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE

Since prehistory the interaction between man and nature has remained one of the central themes of literature. This interaction gave birth to a rich array of fictional and nonfictional writings that portrayed many moods and shades of Mother Nature vis-a-vis human beings' relationship with nature. However, in the aftermath of the devastating Second World War, when the nations refocused on economic development and undertook mega projects, soon there was growing concern over the ruination of the natural environment. The rapid industrialization and the gigantic projects not only dislocated people from their land and stripped them of their livelihood but also created mayhem in the natural world. The rainforests were cut down, rivers were dammed, vast stretches of land were acquired and contextually worth mentioning are some other hazardous steps like harnessing of fossil fuel, exhaustive mining, detonation of nuclear weapons – all these have brought nature to the brink of ecological disaster.

Under the given circumstances there arose a new theory of reading and interpreting nature writing, that emphasizes on 'eco-consciousness' i.e. a better understanding of nature in its wider significance, called eco-criticism. Since the 1990s it has become a worldwide emergent movement that came into existence as a reaction against man's plundering of nature. In the words of Cheryll Glotfelty¹ :

Eco-criticism is the study of relationship between literature and physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist

criticism brings an awareness of models of production and economic class to its reading of text, eco-criticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies. (Glotfelty xviii)

Instead of glorifying man's anthropocentric attitude towards nature eco-criticism rather hinges on the point that the present eco-crisis is largely due to this ego-consciousness of human beings. The eco-degradation is indeed a bi-product of human culture. Eco-critics firmly believe that :

Arts of imagination and the study there of – by virtue of their grasp of the power of word, story, and image to reinforce, enliven, and direct environmental concern – can contribute significantly to the understanding of environmental problems : the multiple forms of ecodegradation that afflict planet Earth today. (Buell, Heise and Thornber)

The rising awareness of the writers from different arenas has, therefore, made eco-criticism an umbrella term where there is the convergence of the other branches of the environmental studies ranging from anthropology, sociology, humanistic geography, ethics, history etc.

Rejecting the concept of human supremacy eco-critical texts argue that our global environmental crisis stems not from the normal ecological functioning rather it is because of the flawed developmental policies we are pursuing. It is to be noted at this point that a number of critics like Laura Pulido², Pablo Mukherjee³, Graham Huggan⁴, Helen Tiffin⁵, Ramchandra Guha⁶ – have pointed out the intersections between postcolonialism and postcolonial eco-criticism because the major task for both of them is to 'contest western ideologies of development' (Huggan and Tiffin

27) for they believe environmental exploitation and degradation are happening largely due to the pursuance of neocolonial commercial, industrial and unsustainable development projects. Post Colonial eco-criticism from this vantage point ‘emerges as an economic and ecological response’ (Chae 520) to polyvalent manufacturing, mining, commercial and neo-colonial activities of the modern world.

Author-activist Arundhati Roy, a piercing critic of the pandemic forces of neo-imperialism has always been vocal against the terrible injustices meted out upon the Indian people and its environment as a result of globalization. She has utilized both the mediums of fiction and non-fiction to expose the violence and inhumanity of ‘globalization’ and ‘development’ – the two seemingly benign terms. The eco-critical reading of her texts underlines the fact that she has explored her art and activism to not only bring the civil and terrestrial injustices to light but also to narrativize the methods to combat the oppressive all-consuming forces of globalization by contesting and reshaping the ‘western ideologies of development’ (Huggan and Tiffin 27).

One of the basic themes of Roy’s seminal novel, *The God of Small Things*, is no doubt the exploitation of nature; however, it is her non-fiction where she has debated at length the issues of environmental degradation. The first non-fictional endeavour where Roy has expressed her environmental concern is “The End of Imagination”. Though the essay was published long past - in the year 1998 and has probably lost its relevance - nevertheless the essay is quite important because it shows Roy’s maneuvering of herself, her transformation from a novelist to an author-activist, a political analyst and commentator who is committed to bring into

the realm of common human understanding the real picture of the rhetoric of ‘development’ lying beneath the apparent benevolent gestures of growth.

The context of the essay is the controlled nuclear detonation of India in the sandy region of Pokhran, Rajasthan on 11 and 13 May 1998. Notably in 1974 India administered her first ever nuclear detonation under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s leadership. Since then there has been no further detonation. However, in 1995 Prime Minister Narashima Rao decided to conduct further tests. But this time the government has to roll back its decision under international pressure because the secret surveillance mechanism of US detected Indian activity at Pokhran Test Range in Rajasthan.⁷

It was this time when the Atal Behari Vajpayee led BJP government came into power with a distinct public mandate. This *Hindutava*-based political party had a clear intention to induct nuclear warheads into its arsenal for they believed that India should emerge as an openly nuclear enabled nation to garner the approbation and reverence that India deserved at the international arena. Moreover, BJP looks upon Pakistan as a security threat and their stance against arch-rival Pakistan as a potential security menacing is ‘entangled with its commitment to Hindu nationalism’ (Datta, *Beyond Realism* 56). And eventually the nuclear detonation for the second time was conducted in May 1998 at the Indian Army’s Pokhran Test Range. This time the nuclear test was constituted of five explosions. Among the controlled detonations ‘the first was a fusion bomb and the remaining four were fission bombs’ (India Releases Pictures). On 11 May 1998 three tests were conducted and after one day, on May 13 further two tests were conducted. And later on Atal Behari

Vajpayee, the then Prime Minister of India, in a press meet, proclaimed India to be a 'full-fledged nuclear state' (The Nuclear Politics).

Roy, however, nullifying the concept of nuclear deterrence as propagated by BJP and its ally VHP, upheld this test as a macho symbol of militarism and the ultimate expression of Hindu manliness. Roy also cautions us about the terrible consequences of nuclear holocaust if the lethal explosives fall into the hands of some maniacs or terrorists or suicide bombers. A suicide-bomber is not at all afraid of or concerned about nuclear deterrence. That Roy is correct is corroborated from the gruesome Mumbai attack⁸ on November 2008 by some Pakistani terrorists. Uri-attack⁹ on September 2016 is another grim reminder of the fact that, in spite of nuclear weapons, India has not been able to rein in Pakistan-sponsored cross-border terrorism.

On the other hand, from the point of view of human cost, Roy blatantly argues that these are convincingly sheer wastage of public money. Possessing nuclear weapons instead of being a matter of pride becomes a matter of shame when the bitter reality is exposed :

We are a nation of a billion people. In development terms we rank No. 138 out of the 175 countries listed in the UNDP's 1997 Human Development Index. More than 400 million of our people are illiterate and live in absolute poverty, over 600 million lack even basic sanitation and over 200 million have no drinking water. (Roy, *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* 26)

From environmental or ecological point of view for its catastrophic effect nuclear weapon is the single biggest threat to the existence of mankind. Will anyone

ever forget the nuclear holocaust of Hiroshima and Nagasaki?¹⁰ The two dates - August 6 and 9 in 1945 will remain ever etched in the conscience of the people as they remind us of 'the colossal, epochal immorality of nuclear weapons' (Bidwal). Roy, therefore, justly states that :

If there is a nuclear war, our foes will not be China or America or even each other. Our foe will be the earth herself. The very elements – the sky, the air, the land, the wind and water – will all turn against us. Their wrath will be terrible. (Roy, *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* 5-6)

So the race of nuclear weapons is ultimately a race of death, a journey towards doomsday.

While tracing the origin of the current crisis Roy affirms that it is capitalism along with its unbridled greed that has led the world to the brink of nuclear apocalypse. Hegemonic interest or the untamed greed to exploit laymen's 'share of the planet's precious resources' (Shiva, *India Divided* 68) has created this death race. Eroding the basic principles of democracy, capitalism has emerged as a mechanism of breeding disparity, inequity and economic instability. Instead of all-inclusive growth and equal distribution of wealth, it has centralized power and wealth in the hands of a few plutocrats and tycoons. These people for their dominance over the hegemony and for their own supremacy have always been in favour of deadly weapons. Indeed the progress of civilization ironically coincides with the development of deadlier weapons that can kill and destroy human beings in great numbers at a single go.

In the post Second World War period, UK being on the wane, the US and the USSR became the two major global contenders and that resulted in the emergence of a two-dimensional power dynamics in intercontinental proceedings, commonly known to as the Cold War. China and France also soon joined in the race. They were designated as permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. All these major forces have procured their nuclear weapons in no time.

As far as India is concerned it has a very precarious terrestrial location – between the devil and the deep sea. There is China on the north-east and Pakistan on the north-west. It has a history of painful servility for nearly two hundred years; it has a history of murky partition. Not only this, India had been dragged into war by both the neighbouring countries – four times with Pakistan and once with China. Moreover, China had already procured its nuclear weapons. Pakistan has also its coveted nuclear mission. The secret surveillance agencies of the US government got substantial proof indicating surreptitious ‘Chinese nuclear cooperation, to the point of facilitating a nuclear weapons capability’ (Burr). Contextually, it is to be noted that after her Independence India wanted to maintain its neutrality on the international arena under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru’s leadership. He wanted to ‘maintain India’s moral standing as a peace-loving nation, hence against weapons-grade nuclear buildup, or building the bomb’ (Datta, *Beyond Realism* 50). He also tried to maintain good relationship with China. However, China’s attack in 1962 posed a severe blow to Nehru’s endeavour. The surrounding security apprehensions made it ‘imperative for the government to take a harder, closer look at India’s nuclear programme’ (Datta, *Beyond Realism* 52).

Under such circumstances conducting nuclear test and induction of nuclear warheads in the arsenal have become a necessary evil for India. Probably this has been the way of the world for India.

Besides the novel, however, what brought Roy into the limelight is her much debated treatise “The Greater Common Good.” The essay is a critique, a serious thesis, that grows out of her on-the-ground involvement, her swedge and struggle against the construction of the Narmada River Reservoirs and specifically, the estimated 138.68 meter high Sardar Sarovar Reservoir. It must be noted at this point that Roy’s interest and concern in the environment are not superficial; rather it is one such issue that she speaks and writes about with intensity and gravity, for her conviction emanates from the first-hand experience, from her knowledge of facts and figures and that prove her arguments.

The context of the essay is the building of the controversial Sardar Sarovar mega reservoir on the Narmada river and the final verdict of the Supreme Court of India on October 2000 on the Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed by the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) against the Central government and the governments of the three party states namely, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh.

It is to be noted that the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) since its very inception has been one of the most controversial development projects triggering hot debate both in India and at the international arena. Indeed, for its much discussion it has ‘acquired a symbolic status in development debates’ (Cullet 1). This is largely due to the intricacy and convolution of such gigantic multi-purpose projects and the manifold positive and adverse ramifications related to the construction of mega reservoirs.

However, for a holistic understanding we need to travel back to the days of early independence when the political leadership and the intellectual minds i.e. the policy makers of independent India, being enamoured by the western ideas of modern development, were keen on building big dams because they were then viewed as possible answers to a range of issues. Multi-purpose mega dams could, for instance, provide water for farming and drinking; supply water for industrial and domestic use; conserve and preserve water for use in dry seasons like summer and winter or to channelise to drought-prone zones; and also prevention of flood by storing up water.

And now Narmada, the river under discussion, the so-called 'life-line of Madhya Pradesh' is one of the largest rivers of Indian peninsula. Originating from the Narmada Kund of Amar Kantal it travels across three states – Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat and finally falls into the gulf of Khambhat into the Arabian sea. The Narmada basin, encircled by the Satpura and Vindya ranges, spans over an approximate area of 98,796 square km. The basin covers vast stretches of land in the states of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat being nearly 81% and 12% respectively; however, relatively small areas in case of Maharashtra (4%), Chattisgarh (2%) and Andhra Pradesh (1%).

The river carries with it an abundance amount of water as much as '33,210,000 acre feet' (NCA Home Page). This huge potential before taking up the initiative was almost wasted as, without any effective utilization, the water ran into the gulf of Khambhat. The inhabitants of the arid zone, both in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat, were, therefore, denied the much needed succor. This was the rationale for building dam/s on Narmada for the proper utilization of water for various purposes.

Thus in many ways the push for the construction of big dam was a national goal for national progress. They were viewed as ‘the temples of modern India’ (Sharma 42). The then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru’s remark, which he made before the villagers who were going to be dislodged for the construction of Hirakud dam, is a testimony to it : ‘If you suffer, you should suffer in the interest of the country’ (Roy, *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* 47).

However, there were also foreign or external factors that helped the policy makers or the political leadership push forward the construction of big dams. International Monetary Fund (IMF), The World Bank – which are but the tools of neo-imperialism were ready to provide financial assistance to carry out this project. Roy’s oblique comment regarding the role of World Bank is worth quoting here:

The Bank was ready with its chequebook *before* any costs were computed, *before* any studies had been done, *before* anybody had any idea of what the human cost or the environmental impact of the dam would be! The \$450 million loan for the Sardar Sarovar Projects was sanctioned and in place in 1985. The Ministry of Environment clearance for the project came only in 1987! Talk about enthusiasm. It fairly borders on evangelism. Can anybody care so much? (Roy, *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* 76)

Some foreign companies like Enron¹¹ were also interested in building dams because that would fill their coffers. This iniquitous framework can be categorized as crony capitalism.

Under such circumstances initiative was taken for the feasibility report from Central Waterways, Irrigation and Navigation Commission (CWINC). Among the

several proposals of CWINC, the Khosla Committee prioritized Tawa, Bargi, Punasa and Bharuch projects¹² for further investigation. The details were ready by 1963. Gujarat being the chief beneficiary, the proposals of Khosla Committee were broadly endorsed by it; but Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh opposed it because it would submerge not only vast stretches of land but also cost them the submergence of potential hydropower sites. The Central government, therefore, appointed a high level committee in September 1964 to dispose the matter off. But there was no amicable solution to it. Under the given circumstances Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal (NWDT) was set up by the Indira Gandhi led government under the Interstate River Water Disputes Act 1956, in the year 1969 to resolve the discord pertaining to splitting up of the Narmada river water. The tribunal gave its Adjudication at the end of 1979. The gazette notification¹³ shows the allocation as:

Table 1 : Allocated share of Water

Party States	Allocated share of water	% share of power
Madhya Pradesh	18,250,000 acre feet (22.51 km ³)	57
Gujarat	9000,00 acre feet (11 km ³)	16
Maharashtra	250,000 acre feet (0.31 km ³)	27
Rajasthan	500,000 acre feet (0.62 km ³)	NIL
Total	28,000,000 acre feet (35 km³)	100

The speciality of this decision is that Rajasthan, a non-littoral territory, has been allotted a percentage of Narmada water for fulfilling its water requirement. The

NWDT also set out a comprehensive plan for the Narmada Valley Project. This macro project aimed to ‘construct 30 major dams, some 135 medium dams and 3,000 minor dams’ (Peterson 7). Among the 30 large-sized reservoirs two will be multipurpose mega dams. They are the Narmada Sagar Project (NSP) and Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat respectively. The NSP would irrigate .14 million hectare of dry land and produce 1,000 megawatts of power. It must be stated at this point that the SSP, without the completion of NSP, would be unable to attain its preconceived irrigation and power generating capability as it is in downstream; it, therefore, needed modulated water supply from upstream. The SSP is meant to provide drinking water to Saurashtra, Kutch and other arid zones of Gujarat. The dam will store water in a 138.68 meter (455 ft.) high reservoir. This 133-mile-long reservoir is thought to provide water for the purpose of irrigation to ‘5 million acres of land, generate 1,450 megawatts of power and supply water to 8,000 villages and 135 towns through the Mahi pipeline in Gujarat’ (Jensen and Chatterji). The dam will inundate ‘91,000 acres of land, 28,000 acres of which are forest. The canal network requires another 200,000 acres’ (Jensen and Chatterji). As millions of people are going to be displaced so the tribunal also laid down norms regarding resettlement and rehabilitation (R&R) of the Project Affected Families (PAFs).

The NWDT Award thus paved the way for the actual beginning of the project. The ambitious project also got authenticated in the year 1985 when World Bank came up with \$450 million to sponsor SSP¹⁴. The loan, sanctioned by the World Bank, was crucial in many ways as with this authentication other transnational actors such as the Sumitomo Corporation of Japan came forward for providing turbines for the project.

Thus after much delay the full-scale work began in about 1987, although the work officially began on 5 April 1961 when the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru inaugurated the project by laying the corner stone for the Bharuch project in Gujarat. However, soon there was growing resentment among the people who were going to be displaced. It must be noted at this point that the previous experiences of the people who were displaced to give room for the big projects were terrible. So when this Narmada damming was taking place an uncanny feeling gripped them. Several NGOs like *Lok Adhikar Sangh* (Association for People's Authority), Action Research in Community Health and Development (ARCHD), *Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini* (Student Youth Struggle Force), Centre for Social Knowledge and Action etc. soon became active and vocal for articulating the plight of these unfortunate people.

Medha Patkar, who was then pursuing her doctoral degree from Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Bombay 'sought to find out how the proposed dams on the Narmada would affect the lives of these people' (D'Souza 14). She realised that these dams would simply damn their lives. She soon channelised all her might and effort to make the ill-fated people unite to voice their demands for their rights. Thus came into being the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA). NBA understood that the hollow promises to resettle and rehabilitate the tens of thousands of uprooted men would never be fulfilled. Thus declaring its clear intention of opposing the entire project, throughout 1990-91, the NBA, with a series of protest and agitation, was able to draw international attention.

Under continuous coercion the World Bank which was financing the project was forced to buckle. It constituted an independent review committee, the Morse

Commission. It is interesting to note that this was going to be the first unconstrained scrutiny of any of the World Bank-mediated project.

What the Independent Review revealed, in Roy's words, was simply 'scandalous' (Roy, *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* 95). The 1992 Morse report stated that:

We think the Sardar Sarovar Projects as they stand are flawed, that resettlement and rehabilitation of all those displaced by the Projects is not possible under prevailing circumstances, and that environmental impacts of the Projects have not been properly considered or adequately addressed. Moreover, we believe that the Bank shares responsibility with the borrower for the situation that has developed ... it seems clear that engineering and economic imperatives have driven the Projects to the exclusion of human and environmental concerns ... India and the states involved ... have spent a great deal of money. No one wants to see this money wasted. But we caution that it may be more wasteful to proceed without full knowledge of the human and environmental costs... As a result, we think that the wisest course would be for the Bank to step back from the Projects and consider them afresh... (Roy, *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* 95-6)

Though the report was a tremendous blow to the ongoing project - yet neither the government of India nor the World Bank was ready to roll back. However, eventually 'on 30 March 1993 the World Bank officially pulled out of the SSP' (Roy, *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* 97). This was a moral victory for the poor people. But the euphoria was momentary as it was decided by the central

government to pursue the completion of the project with domestic resources. NBA was also adamant in their protest. Succumbing to the stiff opposition the Ministry of Water Resources appointed an advisory committee named as the Five Member Group (FMG) to look into the matter.¹⁵ The deadlock seems to be continuing, NBA in May 1994 once again moved to the Supreme Court and filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) quizzing the validity and viability of the entire project and thereby petitioning for a roll back of the governmental decision.¹⁶

After a great deal of dilly-dallying, the Supreme Court finally ratified the NWDT Award and directed the government to begin the construction-related work as expeditiously as possible. The Court directed to construct it in successive phases and that each phase should only be undertaken after all oustees were effectively resettled (the *pari passu* condition). The Court also directed to form Grievance Redressal Authorities (GRA) in each of the affected states to monitor the progress of R&R.¹⁷ Further; it also allowed the reservoir to be constructed up to its initially designed height of 138.68 meters. These directions have been issued from the highest apex body in spite of crucial unsettled matters relating to relocation and compensation of the displaced people, environmental degradation and the cost-benefit assessment of the project.

It must be noted that the Judgement of the Supreme Court was not unanimous in nature as one of the three judges of the bench had difference of opinion. The three judges were Justice A.S. Anand, Justice B.N. Kripal and Justice S.P. Bharucha (Roy, *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* 138). Justice S.P. Bharucha disapproved the project by clearly stating that:

Considering the magnitude of rehabilitation, involving a large percentage of tribals, loss of extensive forest area rich in biological diversity, enormous environmental cost of the project and considering the fact that the basic data on vital aspects are still not available there could be but one conclusion, that the project(s) are not ready for approval...¹⁸

This very verdict was the context of the essay. However, it must be noted that controversy did not end there. Further petitions were filed by individual oustees of Madhya Pradesh and by the NBA showing the gross violation or non-compliance of the Court's order regarding R&R.

Another major confrontation occurred in the year 2006 when the concerned authority of the project resolved to heighten the reservoir for an additional 10 metres i.e. up to 121.92 metres.

Once again there was bitter protest. Amid intense hostility the central government deputed three ministers, Prof. Saifuddin Soz, Minister of Water Resources; Smt. Meira Kumar, Minister of Social Justice & Empowerment; and Shri Prithviraj Chavan, MoS in the PMO – to assess the state of R&R. Their confidential report only highlighted the plight of the displaced people underlying the gap between the paper and the reality.¹⁹ Later on another Rajya Sabha member, Sarala Maheswari also visited the core area of the project. The devastating nature of the project along with the sheer apathy of the government towards these hapless people compelled her to express her shock and indignation in the following words : ‘My visit to the resettlement sites was a shocking experience’ (Bavadam).

The situation was so grave that even UN Human Rights Experts expressed their concern in a press release on 13 April 2006. The report stated that :

We are concerned about the recent decision of the Narmada Control Authority (NCA) to further raise the height of the Sardar Sarovar Dam on the Narmada River from the present 110.64 metres to 121.92 metres and reports indicating that this will result in the submergence of villages and displacement of over 35,000 families...We are concerned about information indicating that in Madhya Pradesh rehabilitation sites are still not ready and none of the sites have sufficient house plots for affected families and that this may leave people homeless when affected villages are submerged. Furthermore, alternative agricultural land is reportedly not being provided, and where land has been allotted as in Maharashtra and Gujarat, it is uncultivable and inadequate!...In view of the above, we urge the Government of India to release the report of the findings of the three Union Ministers who visited the Narmada Valley on 7 April to assess the status of resettlement and rehabilitation, ... We also urge the Government of India and appropriate authorities to take immediate steps to ensure that any further raising of the dam height will not result in the violation of the human rights of those affected, ...Until the human rights of those affected can be guaranteed we recommend that the construction of the dam is halted... (United Nations Press Release).

i) Human cost of the SSP

The Narmada Valley Project is a gigantic project that proposes to complete 30 major reservoirs, 135 moderate-sized reservoirs and 3,000 small reservoirs. Among the 30 substantial reservoirs, the contentious ones are the Narmada (Indra) Sagar Project (NSP) and the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat respectively.

It is interesting to note that the Indian Institute of Public Administration carried out a detailed research on 54 dams of considerable size in India. The study revealed astonishing facts and figures. The 'average' number of inhabitants dislodged by a 'Large Dam' in India is 44,182' (Roy, *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* 60). India has so far built around 3,300 dams. All the dams, however, are not big. So what Roy argues if the number of ousted people is lowered to 10,000 per dam then the total number of supplanted people is $3,300 \times 10,000 = 33,000,000$. In other words at least thirty-three million people so far have been dispossessed in India for the construction of dams!

Another study-report, published by the University of Bielefeld, Germany, points out the astonishing fact that in the last few decades 'around 50 million people' (Salve) have been evicted from their habitat to give room for the mega projects. Another research-report shows that 'among the displaced people tribal people constitute 40% to 50%' (Salve).

In this case too a high percentage of the supplanted people are Adivasis. To be precise '57.6% in the case of Sardar Sarovar Dam' (Roy, *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* 62). One must be aware of the fact that 'Adivasis account for only 8%

percent and Dalits another 15% of India's population' (Roy, *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* 62).

The whole essay thus talks about the plight of a large number of hapless people, the deserted and the destitute, whose share of the natural resources are being appropriated and exploited to subsidize the urban elites. The fruits of all the developmental benefits and the basic amenities of life are provided to the affluent people at the cost of the deprived, exploited and down-trodden rural people.

What is even more painful is the sheer apathy of the government or the urban elites regarding the issues of R&R of these uprooted people. Not only the local people but also NGOs, NBA, even the Supreme Court and the Human Rights Experts of United Nations, time and again, expressed their concern over R&R. The Group of Ministers (GoM), who submitted a confidential report called, *A Brief Note on the Assessment of Resettlement and Rehabilitation (R&R) Sites and Submergence of Villages of the Sardar Sarovar Project* to the central government, pointed out in unambiguous term that the objections and grievances from various sections regarding the Rehabilitation and Resettlement of the Project Affected Families (PAFs) of Sardar Sarovar Dam are true in nature as work has not carried out as per the guidelines, stipulated by the highest apex body of Indian judiciary.²⁰ And quite naturally when this mega project would be completed it would displace another set of millions of people. Under the present scenario they would have to fade away simply. India being a densely populated country, it is next to impossible to resettle and rehabilitate the tens of thousands of oustees appropriately. Thus the massive construction is leading the country towards the biggest humanitarian crisis the country has ever witnessed since independence!

ii) **Impact on Nature**

The valley of Narmada is famous for its fecundity, nature's abundance and bountiful crops. The valley is also considered one of India's best heterogeneous eco-regions. Interestingly India's best hardwood and teak are grown in the forested areas of the Narmada river basin. The eco-region of this valley is also home to several species of mammals and endangered bird species. The valley is also spanned by some important national parks and wild life sanctuaries. Kanha National Park, Dindori National Fossils Park, Satpura National Park, Bori and Panchmarhi Sanctuaries etc. to name some of them are the places of visitor's attraction.

And now the Narmada Valley Project that proposes to complete 30 substantial reservoirs, 135 moderate-sized reservoirs and 3,000 small reservoirs is going to be the largest irrigation enterprise ever envisaged and administered as an exclusive unit anywhere in the world.²¹ Among the major dams the controversial SSP alone would inundate 37,000 hectares of land. It will also deflect an estimated amount of approximate 9.5 million acres feet (MAF) of water for the purpose of irrigation through channels. The aggregate stretch of the supply chain will be 75,000 kms and will need 150,000 hectares of ground area, which is about four-fold of the land inundated by the dam.²²

Thus the environmental costs of such a gigantic project are colossal. Besides devastating human lives, the project would also destroy the rich variety of animal and plant life by submerging several hundred thousand acres of forested areas and farming land. Moreover, these reservoirs would affect the normal water flow in both upstream and downstream and that would, consequently, metamorphose the majestic Narmada river into a series of stagnant water bodies. It is a threat to the endangered

Marsh Crocodile species. Once again, it would foil the high-yielding Hilsa Fishery in India along with the king-sized fresh water prawn.

From another angle these dams are nothing but undesirable human intervention in the spontaneity of nature. They involve ‘low probability – high consequence’ (Myers 47) risks. In the words of Slavoj Zizek they are:

...‘manufactured risks’, which is to say that they are the products of human intervention in the natural world. Furthermore, they are such substantial interventions that we can no longer allow nature to correct itself and so solve the problem for us because each risk involves the derailment of nature itself. (Myers 49)

The noted German sociologist Ulrich Beck also cautions us about the dangerous consequences of this irresponsible techno-economic model leading to ‘risk society’ (Puleo 28).

Storing up of huge quantity of water in an artificial manner also increases seismic activity. In case the dam collapses due to an earthquake or for a mishap the devastation will be unimaginable, the consequence would be simply apocalyptic. That is why for Roy big dams are no better than nuclear weapons.

It is also to be noted that the reservoirs have their particular life. Because of siltation the dams would automatically lose their water storage capacity after 40 or 50 years. At present ‘the estimate for the SSP is US\$9 billion’ (Singh). So, one can easily understand the wastage of huge amount of public exchequer.

In another essay, ‘‘The Road to Harsud’’, which in many ways a sequel to ‘‘The Greater Common Good’’, Roy has once again highlighted the adverse consequences of building mega dams. The speciality of the essay, however, lies in

the fact that while “The Greater Common Good” deals with the Sardar Sarovar Dam, “The Road to Harsud” then deals with the Narmada Sagar Dam which is also known as Indra Sagar Dam.

Like the SSP here too Roy has meticulously discussed the positive and negative impacts of building mega dams and has shown clearly that of all the high reservoirs, planned to be constructed on the river Narmada, ‘the Narmada Sagar would be the most destructive’ (Roy, *An Ordinary Person’s Guide to Empire* 244). That Roy’s concern is true becomes evident when one goes through the note prepared in 1993 by the Ministry of Environment and Forests for the Review Committee of this project. The note states that the estimated value of the forest that would be submerged is 33,923 crore.²³ Another report states that in order to provide water for the purpose of irrigation to 123,000 hectares of farming land, this dam would inundate 91,000 hectares.²⁴

Again the installed capacity of the Narmada Sagar Dam was stated as 1000 megawatts.²⁵ But the Detailed Project Report (DPR) puts the actual firm power at 212 megawatts, coming down to 147 megawatts when the irrigation canals become operational.²⁶ And what is the worst of all is that not a single hapless family has been relocated in accordance with the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal Award (NWDTA) or the Madhya Pradesh rehabilitation policy.²⁷ The irony lies in the fact that government is pursuing the project by breaking its own commitment.

Roy’s genuine concern is also echoed by Vandana Shiva, another major voice of dissent of the present time. Shiva while interrogating this ‘brazen business’ of commodification of the basic human rights has succinctly pointed out :

Water privatization projects are a major World Bank-mediated political and financial scam, locking public utilities and citizens into a system where the public pays a global corporation super-high tariffs for water that has been provided through the services to our public utilities. First, the World Bank uses its loans as a conditionality for privatization. Second, it reduces the universal access system of public utilities to a privileged access to industry and 24 x 7 supply to rich urban areas. Third, it diverts limited and scarce groundwater from rural areas to urban areas ... Fourth, it is forcing governments and public utilities to increase water tariffs and to commodify water, subverting people's fundamental right to water as part of the right to life. Fifth, since World Bank Projects are based on non-sustainable water use, they are failing, as is clear in the case of the Sonia Vihar plant in Delhi and the Veeranam project in Tamil Nadu. World Bank loans are failing to bring water to people; they are successful only in guaranteeing contracts and profits for water corporations like Suez, Vivendi, Bechtel. (Shiva, *Making Peace* 83-84)

It must be kept in mind contextually that even noted Jawaharlal Nehru who was one of the staunch supporters of building big dams got disillusioned with this ideology in his later life. In a speech, given before the members of the Central Board of Irrigation and Power, Nehru admitted :

For some time past, however, I have been beginning to think that we are suffering from what we may call "the disease of gigantism". We want to show that we can build big dams and do big things. This is a

dangerous outlook developing in India ... And 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 half-a-dozen big projects in half-a-dozen places. (Sharma 52)

A deeper insight into the controversial SSP and NSP reveals that people are not against the development project rather they are against the humanitarian crisis they are led into due to the sheer apathy of the government to rehabilitate and resettle them. The displaced people are simply displaced without any proper resettlement plan. There lies the deep rooted crisis. Roy has dealt with this particular issue in “Ahimsa”. Though the essay highlights particularly the protest of thousand odd Adivasi families, forcibly evicted by the Madhya Pradesh government for the erection of the Maan reservoir, one of the 30 large-sized reservoirs proposed in the Narmada Valley Project – it at once becomes a microcosmic representation of the macrocosm. The hapless people of the core area have neither been recompensed nor relocated in accordance with the norms of R&R as specified by the highest apex body though the stipulated guideline clearly defines that the affected people must have to be settled up with reasonable area of land.

Furthermore, in case of implementing the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) and the Narmada Sargar Project (NSP) the R&R was quite impossible for the displaced people. Various reports have shown that there is no such vast stretch of vacant land to R&R the displaced people. Even Mr. Patrick McCully, Secretary of International Rivers Network, in his letter, dated 10 November 2000, to Mr. James Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank, clearly stated that ‘there is no land available for resettlement in Madhya Pradesh or Maharashtra’ (International Rivers Network).

But here in this case of Maan Dam land is there for R&R; but the Madhya Pradesh government is not at all willing to resettle them as :

... it would set a precedent for the hundreds of thousands of people, most of them Dalits and Adivasis, who are slated to be submerged (without rehabilitation) by the twenty-nine other Big Dams planned in the Narmada Valley. And the state government's commitment to these projects remains absolute, regardless of the social and environmental costs. (Roy, *An Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire* 5)

This sheer apathy of the mainstream for the marginal people is in no way an isolated issue in view of the distressful displacement of 'more than 50 million people' (Salve) of India during the last 50 years in the name of so-called 'national' interest. And it is needless to mention that the most affected are the Adivasis, the tribals, the dalits – the subalterns of our society.

Indeed the government's track record in the sphere of development has placed the tribals, the dalits, the Adivasis, the poor peasants under severe threat. Large scale industrialization, commercialization, privatization in the name of 'development' have emerged as the biggest threat to these people. The big development projects have :

displaced countless peoples, prompted cultural annihilation, generated appalling working conditions, unequal distribution of livelihood assets, struggles over resources, and prompted the progressive and irrevocable depletion of the country's natural resource base, and the degradation of forests, agricultural lands, ecosystems, rivers and seas, animal life and mountains. (Chatterji)

The other vital thing which is being over-looked in the process is that these people of the earth know the secrets of sustainable living. It is these people who have so far been able to safeguard the lion's share of the indigenous ecological diversity by 'protecting the polyvalent, precolonial, biodiversity friendly Indian identity from bio-cultural pathogens' (Bijoy 6). It is these people who can hear the soft murmurings of nature, can recognize and identify the various species of flora and fauna, and can thrive off the forests without enjoying the basic amenities of the so-called modern civilization. But when these people are displaced, culturally annihilated – these secrets of life and nature will be lost forever. The tragedy lies in there.

It is to be noted that this brazen business of building mega dams is contested and resisted not only in India but also in other countries too. Sanjeev Khagram²⁸ in his book, *Dams and Development : Transnational struggles for water and power* (2004) has made an extensive study on the anti-dam movement in four countries namely – Brazil, South Africa, Indonesia and India. His analysis revealed that anti-dam movement was much more fruitful in Brazil and South Africa because of a more democratic environment than in India and Indonesia. He has also pointed out that such kind of anti-dam movements not only contested and reshaped the state-endorsed scientific knowledge but also enabled the disempowered laymen to reorient policy and planning of the government. Sabrina McCormick²⁹ of Michigan State University in her research article, *The Brazilian Anti-Dam Movement : Knowledge Contestation as Communicative Action* has discussed at length how 'Habermas's conceptualization of the life world and the system is useful in determining the difference between lay knowledge of environmental degradation and abstracted scientific information created by corporate or governmental sources'

(McCormick 325). It is true that the governmental policy frameworks are often based on expert knowledge given by the Western educated experts and technophiles who are ignorant of the indigenous system. And in many nations:

...corporate interests are translated into policy making through scientization. Private sources provide the predominance of financial resources for scientific study and often influence the outcomes of the study that they support. This is a subtle way that industry is able to move policy in the direction that enhances profit.' (McCormick 327)

A great number of social, political and green movements all over the world have shown how corporate financing of science and technology has paved the way for environmental degradation and destruction.

So what Roy, Chomsky, D'Souza, Dreze, Sen, Shiva and a host of other conscious citizens are suggesting that instead of plundering nature, instead of depleting the natural resources we should use them in a judicious way for an all-inclusive growth. Instead of championing the 'big' things we should turn to the small things, the local wisdom that goes into caring for the planet to carry out the development projects. We need a holistic thinking, a shift from greed, violence, exploitation and appropriation to homogenous, earth-centred, human-centred development and growth. We need to harmonise ourselves with nature as Rabindranath Tagore reminds us:

The language of Nature is the eternal language of creation. It penetrates reality to reach the deepest layers of our consciousness, it draws upon a language that has survived thousands of years with the human ... it is the musical instrument of nature; it replicates the

rhythm inherent in life itself. If we listen carefully we will be able to trace within it the murmurs of eternity where the spirit of liberation, peace and beauty lurk, it reminds us of the sea that is *santam*, *shivan*, *advaitam*... it reminds us of our bond with the world. If we can accept this music of the wild within us, we can perceive the great music of oneness... (Tagore 87)