

LAND AND PEOPLE

A PRIA News letter on Land Ownership and Alienation

No. 3

July - September 1988

A Major Victory

After a 30 years struggle, indiscriminate limestone quarrying in Dehradun - Mussoorie belt of U.P. Himalayas has come to an end. A major victory for environmental activist.

On August 30, 1988, the Supreme Court in a historic judgement directed that all except three limestone mines in the mine-ravaged Doon Valley should be closed down, finally and forever. The judgement came in response to a writ petition filed by the Rural Litigation and Entitlement Kendra, Dehradun, Uttar Pradesh in 1983 pleading that the limestone mining in the hills of Mussoorie is causing untold miseries to people, animals and ecology of the area.

There will be no appeals against this decision and any stay orders obtained by mine-owners in other courts have been declared null and void. The three remaining mines will work till their leases expire. After the expiry of their respective leases they will not be entitled to the mining operations. No application for renewal of

their leases would be entertained, the court directed.

"There is no dispute that continuance of mining operations affect environment and ecology adversely and at the same time creates a prejudicial situation against conservation of forests. It is therefore, necessary that each of these working mines shall have to work with an undertaking that all care and attention shall be bestowed to preserve ecological and environmental balance while carrying on mining operation", the court observed.

The court also directed the setting up of a monitoring committee which shall have powers to close down any of the working mines, if they don't take the necessary precautions related to afforestation, controlled mining and proper disposal of debris. In addition, the court has directed that 25 percent of the gross profit of these three mines be credited to the fund for the monitoring committee. Recently this committee has recommended massive re-afforestation in the valley and decided to hand

over 1,800 hectares of mined area to U.P. forest department which, in turn, would earmark smaller regions to organisations interested in afforestation work.

While the litigation which went on for five years, the Kendra organised annual camps of volunteers to plant saplings in the affected areas. Many times, the citizens fighting this battle were threatened and attacked by the mine-owners. But, people carried out their struggle with little money and experience in order to preserve the ecological balance of the said area.

The judgement has not only caused ripples in mining industries but also reinforced the view that the courts could be vigilant on environmental issues.

With one battle gloriously won, many more need to follow. Nevertheless, this judgement has given a ray of hope to those environmentalists and activists who are carrying out similar struggles against mindless quarrying in other parts of the country.

SOCIETY FOR PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH IN ASIA



Just Another Policy ?

India is fortunate to have been endowed with vast water resources. The total annual precipitation is enough to place the entire land surface under water to a depth of over one meter. And yet, there is no single year when we do not experience both drought and floods in different parts of the country. Although droughts and floods are contrary phenomena, their results are common — loss of crops, drinking water crises, epidemics and starvation.

The year 1987 witnessed the century's worst drought in almost three-fourths of the country, along with floods in eastern India. Even, in Kerala, which used to receive rainfall for ten months in a year and is endowed with 44 rivers and hundreds of lakes, the rivers dried up. Besides, three cyclones in the month of November badly affected Andhra Pradesh. On the other hand, many parts of the country like Bihar, Assam and West Bengal faced severe floods.

The year 1987 also witnessed the declaration of the draft of the National Water Policy by the National Water Resource Council (NWRC). In March 1983, the NWRC was set up by the Government of India as an apex body to evolve national policies for development and use of water resources in conformity with the highest national interest. After long deliberations, the draft of the National Water Policy was adopted unanimously by the council. However, a close scrutiny of the policy document would reveal that the underlying principles of water resource planning and development are totally misconceived in Indian context.

Perhaps the only substantive statements made in the policy are: i) drinking water will receive the highest priority; ii) water is a national resource and the non-river basin states also have an interest in the inter-state rivers; and lastly iii) the river resource

planning will be for hydrological units not on the basis of state-wise territories.

Although the policy gives high priority to drinking water, any emphasis on the quality of drinking water is lacking. According to the policy, adequate drinking water facilities would be provided to the entire population both in urban and rural areas by 1991. Our policy makers are not aware that water contaminated by nitrates or pesticide residues or industrial wastes does not deserve to be called drinking water. On the eve of the Seventh Five Year Plan, 2.27 lakh villages were without potable water. These villages have no assured water supply within a distance of 1.6 km. Even in those areas where drinking water is available, it is saline or contains fluoride and toxic elements. If the present-day process of development involving heavy industries, indiscriminate mining and modern agricultural technology (The Green Revolution) with its reliance on chemical fertilisers and pesticides is not reversed, drinking water in the coming years will be increasingly contaminated with poisonous elements. Therefore, the need of the hour is to change the present day process of development. But the policy does not call for a change or even a modification of the developmental process. Thus, providing safe drinking water to the entire population by the end of the decade is a pipe dream.

The policy document envisages the river basin as a unit of planning. This is nothing but blind imitation of the United States of America's craze for inter-basin transfer of water. By adopting it, the government has opened new doors to a highly expensive and ecologically disastrous plan of action. The policy makers have consciously or unconsciously ignored the fact that the water of

each river has distinctive biological and chemical properties which are determined by the specifics of mineral and other nutrients in every river basin. This, in turn, decides the type of flora and fauna of a particular river. Therefore, inter-basin transfer of water will lead to the destruction of various species of flora and fauna. Furthermore, a national water grid will be more difficult than a national power grid. A particular river which has surplus water in a particular year may be deficit in the next year due to deficient rainfall. As the beds of our rivers are situated on different levels, it is impossible to inter-link two rivers in a two-flow manner. While the water from the river in the higher level can easily flow to the terrain below by gravity, the former cannot get water in its time of need. Our technocrats are in favour of linking the Ganga and the Cauvery. Perhaps, they are not aware that the Gangotri Glacier, the source of river Ganga, is receding at a rate of 18 metres every year. As a result, the Ganga-Cauvery link scheme will be a failure.

The water policy has laid stress on the conjunctive use of surface and ground water resources i.e. the combined operation of both surface and groundwater. But in practice, the decisions related to selection and amount of water use are taken without assessing the impacts of these uses on soil and environment. As a result, problems of waterlogging and soil salinity occur.

The policy also believes that there is enough groundwater available in the country. It is well recognised that groundwater levels are rapidly declining in the country resulting in a severe water crisis in about 54,310 villages spread over 15 states. (If properly replenished, India's groundwater would come up to 10 times the annual precipitation which is received). Rapid groundwater depletion

is the result of government policy which encourages sinking of more and more tubewells without any scheme of recharging groundwater. The tubewell reduce groundwater level drastically. It is only the rich farmers who benefit from the massive tubewell programmes. They keep digging deeper and deeper to sink their tubewells. As a result, the shallow dug wells of the small and marginal farmers go dry. But our Government continuously supports such activities. Recently, the Minister for Agriculture has declared that the government of India is planning to install 1 lakh tubewells in the country. But in Maharashtra, for example, seventy per cent of all water from state irrigation schemes is provided to rich farmers growing water intensive crops like sugarcane. This is true in other states as well and it is always the small and marginal farmers who have to pay the price.

Our planners provide a grandiose engineering solution (which involves billions of rupees) by injecting surface water through vertical drainage for artificial recharge of groundwater. The technological test raises many questions. Firstly, are we capable of spending this much on recharging groundwater? Secondly, are we ready to accept the possibility of groundwater contamination in such operations?

On the other hand, there are natural and inexpensive solutions for recharging groundwater in our country. Simple measures like tank excavations, building of bunds and terracing would cost much less. In Madhya Pradesh, A.P., Karnataka and parts of T.N., there are thousands of percolation tanks and there is vast scope for thousands of such tanks in these states. If each elevation of a tank is afforested, it can store water and with the natural technique of inducing percolation, it can effectively the problem of drought. To our dismay, the water policy does not even recognise the potential of percolation tanks. Another advantages of water tanks in the villages is that the poor and landless villages are also beneficiaries. For instance,

the famous Sukhomajri project in Ambala district of Haryana has a 'haqbandi' system under which the water collected in the tanks is equally distributed among all the villagers irrespective of their land holdings. The landless can sell their share of water to anyone who needs more water. To our policy makers, such a system of equitable distribution of water does not deserve any mention in the policy document, while the Seventh Five Year Plan document well recognises it.

Besides, the relationship between water and public health has not been understood by the policy makers yet. Well-known diseases like malaria, filaria and diarrhoea are all water-borne diseases. These diseases are largely attributed to the construction of big dams and canals. In India, lakhs of man-days are lost every year from water-borne diseases. But the policy document does not mention a single word on these diseases, leave alone their control and treatment.

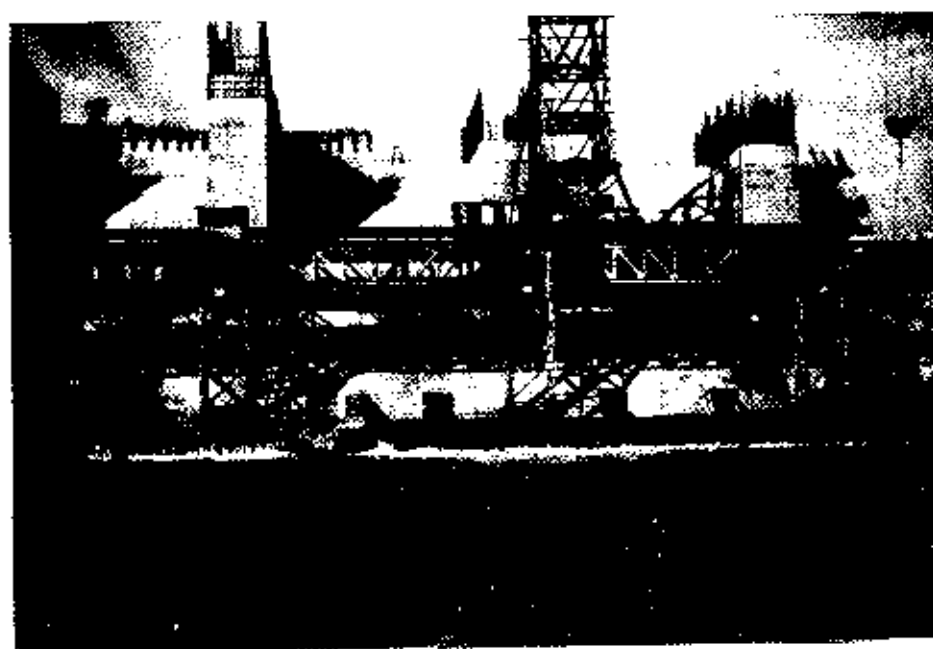
Similarly by omitting arid and semi arid regions from the policy document, the policy makers have created the impression that water utilisation

and management is only for irrigated areas. What kind of national integration does it want to promote?

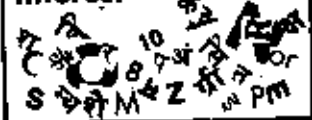
The water policy does not oppose major irrigation schemes like big dams and canals. Not only is major irrigation very expensive and time-consuming (the cost of creating fresh potential under major irrigation is Rs. 40,000 per hectare) it also leads to a centralised delivery system. Besides, big dams also create many social and environmental problems. But, the construction of big dams suits the technocrats-politicians-contractors lobby because it involves lot of commissions, kick-backs and winding up charges.

Finally, the holistic approach to understanding the issue of water utilisation and conservation in relation with forests, land use pattern, food and energy requirements is totally missing in the water policy.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the benefit of the new water policy will flow to the already powerful sections of the society and the weaker sections of the society will be further marginalised.



Development or Destruction
The Chandil Dam (Subarnarekha Project)
under construction.



Follow-up of Anandwan Meeting

As a follow-up of Anandwan meeting held during July 1-3, 1988, following activities were organised in different parts of the country :

1. On September 2, 1988, a 24 hours sit-in-demonstration against the gigantic Rs. 25,000 crore Normada Valley Project was held at Churchgate, Bombay. Nearly 200 activists belonging to various trade unions, environmental action groups, and civil liberties groups took part in the demonstration. An exhaustive action plan has been formulated during the demonstration.

For further details, contact :
Ms. Kiran More, C/o 92, Mistry Park, B.D. Road, Bombay-400 036.

2. On October 2, 1988, a one-day fast was organised at Kevadia Colony, the dam-site of the Sardar Sarovar Project. The fast was jointly organised by Narmada Dhamgrust Samiti, Maharashtra, Narmada Ghati Navnirman Samiti, Madhya Pradesh and Narmada Asargrust Sangharsh Samiti, Gujarat. Hundreds of people mainly oustees of the Sardar Sarovar Project took part in the fast.

For further details contact :
Ms. Medha Patkar, Narmada Dhrangrasi Samiti, Post Box No. 52, Dhule, Maharashtra.

3. On October 16, 1988, the forum for People - Oriented Water Utilisation (POWU) organised a one-day meeting at Bombay against the Narmada Valley Project. Apart from the discussions on proposed

programme of action, issues like economic appraisal of the NVP, its ecological and social costs and alternatives were widely discussed.

For further details, contact :
Ms. Kiran More, C/o 92, Mistry Park, B. Desai Road, Bombay-400 036

4. During September 10-11, 1988, a national meeting was organised at Chaibasa, Bihar to protest against the construction of Rs. 1,200 crore Subarnarekha Multipurpose Project in Bihar. Environmentalists and activists from nine states took part in the meeting. Nearly 500 participants mainly oustees took active part in the meeting. On the final day, a large public meeting was held.

For further details, contact :
Dr. Vikas Amte, C/o Maharogi Seva Samiti, Anandwan - 442 914, Via Warora, Dist. Chandpur, Maharashtra.

Jal Andolan

For the past few years, the North Bihar has witnessed wrath of nature in the form of floods, extensive water logging, water pollution and scarcity of drinking water. To raise public opinion and consciousness on such issues, a four day march was organised from Joha to Katihar by Sampooran Kranti March during October 30 - November 3, 1988.

For further details, contact :
Mr. Raghupati, Shyam Press, Poorvi Lohanipur, Patna - 800 003, Bihar.

International Seminar on Sustainable Water Development

The first conference of the International Rivers Network was held in San Francisco, California from June

7-11, 1988. It brought together 60 activists from 25 nations to coordinate campaigns for saving the world's rivers and promoting sustainable development. The conference endorsed the San Francisco Declaration, which calls for a moratorium on large dams that are environmentally or socially destructive. The conference adopted a list of 20 key dam projects, which includes Narmada and Tehri projects, that will represent the focus of future international campaigns.

Seminar on Floods

During August 27-28, 1988, a two day seminar on the problems of floods in North Bihar was organised by Samta Gram Sewa Sansthan at Patna. Many grass-roots organisations and people's organisation took active part in the seminar. Various phenomenon relating to the occurrence of floods were widely discussed in the seminar.

For further details, contact :
Mr. Ravindra, Samta Gram Sewa Sansthan, Shyam Press, Poorvi Lohanipur, Patna - 800 003

Save Rainforest Campaign

A group of citizens, along with the members of Gandhi-in-Action and the Energy and Environment Group, staged a silent demonstration outside the Malaysian High Commission on October 11 to protest against the indiscriminate felling of rainforests in Malaysia. The Protest was a part of the 'Save Rainforest Campaign' to arouse public consciousness against the cutting of rain-forests.

For further details, contact :
Mr. A.B. Bhardwaj, Save Rainforests Campaign, 3, Lajpat Bhawan, New Delhi - 110 024.



Wet Deserts

Irrigated land in India is yielding 1.7 tonnes of foodgrains per hectare whereas the actual production should have been at least 5 tonnes", according to a report titled 'Wet Deserts', published by Energy and Environment Group. The report argues that the situation is much too similar in most parts of the world. The report focusses on the plight of the irrigated land in the country and argues for the reclamation of degraded land. The report also proposes solutions for the reclamation of saline soils. The report is priced at Rs. 20 (\$ 15 outside India) and is available from :

Energy and Environment Group, Post Bag No. 4, New Delhi - 110 066.

Sardar Sarovar Oustees in Madhya Pradesh: What Do They Know?

A Delhi-based research group, Multiple Action Research Group, is conducting surveys of villages of Madhya Pradesh that will be displaced by the Sardar Sarovar Project. The group has, so far, published four reports which carry details related to the extent of information on dam, displacement and rehabilitation communicated to the people of would-be affected villages by the Government of Madhya Pradesh.

For further details, contact :-

Dr. Vasudha Dhagamwar, Multiple Action Research Group, B-2/104 B, Safdurjung Enclave, New Delhi - 110 029.

What's Environment all about?

This is a simple, reading book focussing on larger issues of environment in the country. The book

include issues like dams, forests, water, health, etc with equal emphasis on local problems and regional variations. The book will be worthwhile not only to students and teachers but also to lay public interested in such issues.

The book can be obtained from : Centre for Environment Concerns, 14, Jyoti Cooperative Housing Society, Trimulghery Post, Secunderabad - 500 015, Andhra Pradesh.

Peepal

A Hindi bi-monthly report named 'peepal' is brought out by the Energy and Environment Group to create public awareness on the indiscriminate destruction of rainforests in the world. The annual subscription to the report is Rs. 30.

For further details, contact :

Mr. Sudhirendra Sharma, Energy and Environment Group, Post Box - 4, New Delhi - 110 066.

Appen Action Alert

The Asia-Pacific Environment Network (APPEN) is a coalition of over 300 groups in the Asia-Pacific region. The Appen in collaboration with Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) has launched a global campaign for conservation of natural resources in the Asia - Pacific region. It regularly brings out an action alert on these issues.

For further details :

S.M. Mohd Idris, C/o APPEN, 37, Lorong Birch, 10250 Penang, West Malaysia.

Baandh Samachar

This is a monthly newsletter in Hindi, published by Narmada Sagar Sangarsh Samiti, Harsud, Madhya Pradesh focussing on the current environmental and social issues related to Narmada Sagar dam (now called as Indira Sagar dam) in Madhya Pradesh. It carries articles based on first-hand information collected from submerging villages. The annual subscription to the newsletter is Rs. 24. Donations are also welcome.

For further details, contact :

Mr. Ramesh Billorey, Narmada Sagar Sangarsh Samiti, Harsud, Dist. Khandwa, Madhya Pradesh.

Sardar Sarovar Dam and Oustees

For the past several years, the Chattra Yuva Sangarsh Vahini, Gujarat is tirelessly working among the oustees from the Sardar Sarovar dam. The Vahini faced many hardship in providing proper rehabilitation to the oustees of Gujarat. The experience of Vahini is well documented in a recent booklet published by the same. Written in a simple and lucid language, the booklet contains the history of struggle carried out by the Vahini. The booklet is written in Hindi and priced at Rs. 1.

For further details, contact :

Chattru Yuva Sangharsh Vahini, Mangrol, Rajpipla, Dist. Bharuch, Gujarat - 393 150.



Land Reforms : How Real ?

The most important task before our country is the removal of hunger and poverty. While action on several fronts is needed for this, land reform is the most important front. To remove hunger it is not enough that food production must increase, it is also important that it should grow on the farms of smaller and weaker sections of peasantry, having proper ownership rights over the land they cultivate. This can only be ensured by radical land reforms. In fact, in a country like ours where after 40 years of Independence, 70 percent of the population still depends on agriculture, one cannot think of an overall development of the economy without implementing proper land reforms.

The Government has always expressed its commitment to enact land reform laws and implement them but somehow this has not led to the desired results. For instance, Agricultural cases data of 1981 an opera-

tional holdings tells us that 74.5 percent of the small holdings (of less than 2 hectares) have only a 26.3 percent share of the total operated area while 11.5% of the big holdings have a 52.5% share in the total operated area. Thus, despite the land reforms of various kinds significant inequalities continue to exist.

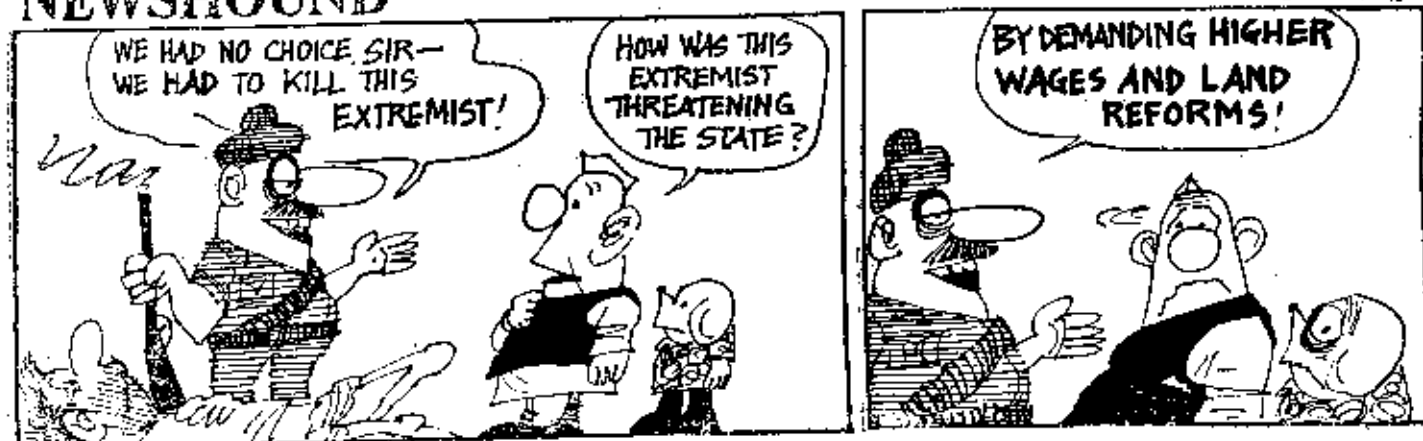
As for tenancy reform while very reliable estimates of the extent of tenancy are not available, to some extent the very basis of tenancy reforms has come into question. Tenancy reforms were based on the assumption of rich land lords from whom poor tenants had to be protected. In recent years, the phenomenon of 'reverse tenancy' has been noticed in some areas, especially in developed areas. Many of those who lease out land are poor, mainly due to small and uneconomic land holdings. This phenomenon had been witnessed during the drought periods.

While, some may be rich, some widows may lease out land, some who have employment in nearby town may lease out land for a variety of reasons. Therefore the laws enacted may not do full justice to more varied group of lessors of kind existing today. However, the old view of big landlords depriving poor sharecroppers still continue to valid in many parts of the country.

With modern machinery, tractors, combine harvestors and other agricultural implements, the slogan of "Land to the Tiller" may prove costly if it is not defined in precise terms. With the expansion of capitalist mode of production, it is possible for a rich landowner with the help of his family members to cultivate a huge stretch of land. Should this 'tiller' be allowed to own such lands? While, a poor widow may not be able to cultivate her own land. Should this "non-tiller" be allowed to pay the price?

Whither Land Reforms

NEWSHOUND



courtesy : The Statesman



โครงการฟื้นฟูชีวิตและธรรมชาติ
PROJECT FOR ECOLOGICAL RECOVERY

เลขที่ ก. พธทว.๔ กตจกพ.๑ เลขที่ โทร. ๒๕๓-๘๙๔๐
1705 Rama 4 Road, Bangkok 10500, Thailand Tel. 282-6940

April 15, 1988

Dear Friends,

We are writing to offer our warm thanks for your efforts opposing Thailand's Nam Choan dam project.

Your work, as well as that of Kanchanaburi residents, Bangkok professionals and students, non-governmental organizations, civil servants, scientists, the media, and other environmentalists from around the world, finally bore fruit on March 18 when a committee appointed by the government unanimously voted to shelve the project.

The alliance that brought this about could not have succeeded without the active participation and cooperation of all of us. If Kanchanaburi people had not been vigilant, the dedicated efforts of conservationist organizations would have come to nothing; if students had not put their heads together with scientists and the media, plans for the dam would be going ahead today. And without the support of concerned organizations and individuals abroad, the movement to preserve the Thungyai and Huay Kha Khaeng sanctuaries could never have achieved the critical mass it has today.

The Nam Choan victory has encouraged us to press forward in our support for other movements showing promise of being able to unite broad sections of society behind programs for a sustainable future.

One of the most important of these movements in Thailand involves villagers all across the poor Northeast who are rallying to defend long-used community forest and agricultural lands from invasion by businesses, government and international bodies bent on establishing eucalyptus plantations.

In this battle, as in similar battles being waged by villagers in the North who are trying to stop local loggers from denuding the upland forested watersheds which feed their fields, livelihood and environmental concerns are essentially one.

We are also planning to join the protest over the recent granting of permission to logging companies to cut trees in Thai wildlife sanctuaries, as well as the fight to save the country's remaining mangrove forests.

In all of this we are heartened by what we perceive as a new possibility of linking local people engaged in environmental struggles on the grassroots level with middle-class academics and activist groups around the world. We feel that grassroots movements have many theoretical, political and tactical lessons to teach world environmental groups, and that world environmental groups in turn have a great many indispensable resources and action opportunities to offer grassroots movements which have not yet been tapped. We are sustained by the hope that concrete work on further issues in many countries will give us the collective opportunity to expand and deepen the understanding, connections, and democratic processes we need to ensure a future for all of us.

Sincerely,

Sincerely,

Wife, P.P. Chow

Wiloon Permpongsacharoen



Studies in Ecology and Sustainable Development—1

EVALUATING THE TEHRI DAM

An extended Cost-Benefit Appraisal

by
Vijay Paranjpye

June 1988

INDIAN NATIONAL TRUST FOR ART AND
CULTURAL HERITAGE

Evaluating the Tehri Dam: An extended cost benefit Appraisal. By Vijay Paranjpye, INTACH, 71, Lodhi Estate, New Delhi - 110 003 (Price not stated)

In recent years, the Tehri dam has generated more controversy than proposed electricity and irrigation. Conceived in 1949, the Tehri dam is rock-filled 260, high construction on the hills of Garhwal Himalayas of Uttar Pradesh and expected to generate 1000 mw of electricity and irrigate an area of 2.7 lakh hectares of plains of Uttar Pradesh. On the other hand, many controversies ranging from seismicity to economic viability surround the dam project.

A team of interdisciplinary researchers headed by Mr. Vijay Paranjpye from Wadia College, Pune, under the auspices of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) has come out with a number of startling facts and figures which justify the fears expressed by the social activists and environmentalists that the project is ill-conceived. The study clearly indicates that the return to the investment from this dam would be very

poor, the displaced population will suffer enormous losses and the environmental risks cannot be compensated by the benefits in terms of power generation and irrigation.

"The project authorities had been able to get the sanction of this project by the Planning Commission by overstating benefits and underestimating the costs immensely", says the study. For instance, the net benefits due to increase in agricultural production claimed by the authorities was around Rs. 157 crore while the study proved it to be around Rs. 65 crore per annum. Similarly, the values calculated by Mr. Paranjpye are at variance with those calculated by the dam authorities. The former put cost of power at 75 paise per unit, the latter at 35 paise. The authorities put the useful life of the dam at 100 years, the study at 62 years. The latter estimate is based on the annual measurements of heavy loads of silt carried by the river Bhagirathi in the last two decades.

The study puts the final cost-benefit ratio at 1: 0.56 which means that for every rupee invested in the project, return will be worth just 56 paise. While, the Planning Commission approve only those projects which have a cost-benefit ratio of 1:1.5.

The study also says that the dam site was a major drawback. Situated barely 100 km. away from the Chinese border, it would be the first target in the event of a war with China. The reservoir will cause an increase in the length of the road between Rishikesh and the border pickets which will lengthen the first strike response time of the Indian Army, which can have adverse consequences, according to the study.

Other findings of the study are summarised below:—

— The B/C ratio for irrigation will be

1.28/1, and not 3.49/1, as estimated by the dam authorities.

- The rehabilitation record of the project authorities has been dismal and the sufferings to oustees has been under-estimated.
- 85,600 people are going to be uprooted due to the Tehri dam, and not 46,000 as estimated by the authorities.
- There are feasible alternatives to the present Tehri dam.
- Due to the modifications suggested by the Soviet experts, the project cost will escalate 15 times, to Rs. 2,930 crore.

Being one of the first few cost-benefit appraisal of major dams in India carried by a non-governmental organisation, the study will not only strengthen the heads of opponents of large dams but also provide deeper insights on what mean sustainable development.

No doubt, there has been a growing consciousness and increase in literature on environmental problems and solutions. Unlike this study, they lack interdisciplinary approach. Such interdisciplinary studies are very much needed today to question the viability and feasibility of large dams in the country and abroad.



**Society for Participatory
Research in Asia**

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