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***For 6th sem. (Major), paper-6.6.***

Topic:

Narmada Bachao Andolan:

The Narmada River Valley Project is one of the largest water projects in the world. The idea of building dams in the Narmada river basin predates independent India. In 1946, India’s Central Waterways, Irrigation, and Navigation Commission constituted a committee to study the feasibility of such a project.Fifteen years later, on the basis of the committee report, PM Nehru inaugurated the Narmada Valley Development Project. The Narmada Project’s costs have been both human and environmental though the most important issue remains the displacement of the Narmada basin’s inhabitants.

The Narmada basin is almost 100,000 square kilometers in size and is home to 21 million people.The Sardar Sarovar Dam’s impounding of water in a 455–foot–high reservoir would ultimately submerge 37,000 hectares of land in Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh, and divert 9.5 million acre feet of water into a canal and irrigation system.According to an unofficial estimate, the Sardar Sarovar Dam alone has displaced 320,000 people.Added to these human costs is the considerable environmental damage to a valley that was once blossoming with plant and animal life.The Government of Indian has not revealed the official statistics on the number of displaced individuals,reflecting a level of disregard for the seriousness of the problem that continues to date.

**Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal:** The Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal was set up in 1969 to resolve the river water sharing dispute between Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Maharashtra. Additionally, the Narmada Tribunal aimed to set out conditions regarding the resettlement and rehabilitation of those displaced by the Dams.It was chaired by then-sitting Supreme Court Justice V. Ramaswami.

In 1978, the Narmada Tribunal approved the Narmada Project and final planning.With regard to the treatment of the displaced population, the Narmada Tribunal made it mandatory for the state of Gujarat, as the primary beneficiary of the project provide ‘land for land’ to those displaced by the Sardar Sarovar Dam. While the Narmada Tribunal’s final verdict aimed to alleviate displacement, but commentators have criticised both its judgment and implementation by the Gujarat government.

In December 1979, the Narmada Tribunal’s final award came into effectand finally in 1987 construction began on the Sardar Sarovar Dam.Problems soon emerged with Gujarat’s resettlement policy, which formally sought to award each eligible family settling there at least five irrigable acres, housing, and various entitlements to facilities.In reality, there was not enough land available for distribution; amenities were substandard and settlers had difficulty integrating with host communities. As a result, though 196 families had accepted the resettlement offer, many settlers ended up returning to their homes, which were already partially submerged, because of the waters from the river flooding the banks.

**Involvement of the World Bank:** The World Bank provided financial assistance for the massive Sardar Sarovar Dam projects. Once the Narmada Tribunal’s final order was issued, the bank prepared the first stage project by 1979-1983, without laying any emphasis on the social and environmental issues. In 1985 the Bank lent the three state governments a total of $200 million and gave them $250 million in credits to finance the Sardar Sarovar Dam.

**Genesis of the Movement:** Since the early 1980s, the Narmada Project has faced mounting opposition from a variety of sources. Protest groups formed in all three affected states and included or were supported by individuals facing displacement, students, social activists, Indian environmental NGOs, international NGOs.In Gujarat, 19 villages, whose submersion the Sardar Sarovar Dam ensured, formed the Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini, a youth protest group. The group engaged in protests and initiated court actions, ultimately forcing the government of Gujarat to offer a more generous resettlement packages.

 In contrast, groups in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra opposed the Dams altogether. Two such groups, the ‘Narmada Ghati Navnirman Samiti’ in Madhya Pradesh and the ‘Narmada Ghati Dharan-grastha Samiti’ in Maharashtra, subsequently merged to form the Narmada Bachao Andolan in 1989, under the leadership of the principal figure associated with the movement, Medha Patkar.

**Leadership of the Movement:** The reason behind the success of the NBA was the excellent leaderships. It is a participatory movement, flourished under the leadership of visionary environmentalist. One of India’s most vibrant and best known living activists,Medha Patkarhas led the Narmada Bachao Andolan. Her uncompromising stance against government apathy towards the human and social costs of Dam construction turned NBA into one of the most dynamic social environmental movement. She has endured police beatings and jail terms in her quest to secure the right to life and right to livelihood for the over 20 million people whose lives would be adversely affected by the Narmada Project.

 Alongside Medha Patkar, social activist Baba Amte provided moral leadership to the cause to preserve the Narmada River. Though renowned for his work against leprosy, beginning in the early 1980s, he involved himself in the struggle against mega dams

Other women have also played central roles in the campaign. The Narmada Bachao Angolan’s struggle against the Maheshwar Dam in Madhya Pradesh, for instance, has been led by the Narmada Shakti Dal, a separate women’s organization within the NBA that was set up on March 8, 1988, is comprised of female villagers from Maheshwar.

Most recently Arunduty Roy and bollywood film actor Amir Khan also involved with the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

**Methods adopted in Narmada Bachao Andolan:** The Narmada Bachao Andolan adopted innovative strategies of resistance that operated simultaneously at the grassroots, national, and international level. As such, the campaign’s significance as a social environmental movement extends far beyond India’s national borders.

While the Narmada Bachao Andolan originally employed Gandhian methods such as peaceful marches, protests, public meetings, rallies, demonstrations, fasts, dharnas and satyagrahas and non-cooperation movementin the Narmada valley. Moreover, the movement campaigned against the payment of taxes and sought to deny entry to the villages to all government officials, except teachers and doctors.Subsequently, supporters began to consider litigation as an additional option. In addition, other disadvantaged groups had successfully moved the Supreme Court,inspiring the NBA to do the same.

**Direct Action of the Narmada Bachao Andolan:** BothMedha Patkar and Baba Amte together let a series of protests, some of which failed while the others achieved success. In September 1989, Amte leda 60,000-person anti-dam NBA rally in Harsud—a town of 20,000 peoplein Madhya Pradesh that faced submersion.In May 1990, a massiveNarmada Bachao Andolan five-day dharna in front of PM Mr. P. Singh’sresidence in New Delhi forced the PM to agree to reconsiderthe project.

In December 1990, Baba Amte, along with 5,000 protestors,started the ‘Narmada Jan Vikas Sangharsh Yatra’, marching over a hundred kilometers fromAmte’s headquarters near Barwani in Madhya Pradesh to Ferkuva onthe Madhya Pradesh–Gujarat border. The government reacted by deployingthe Gujarati police force. Following the government’s announcement that rising waters from the dam would begin to submerge villages, domestic protest intensified and with it the resulting backlash from the state. On January 5, 1991, Amte began a ‘dharna unto death.’ The most popular slogans of the NBA were ‘*Vikas Chahiye, vinash nahin’* (‘we want development, not destruction’)and ‘*Koi nahi hatega, bandh nahi banega’* (‘No one will move, the dam will not be built’).

Thus, The Narmada Bachao Andolan is the people’s movement, first started as a protest for not providing proper rehabilitation for the people who have been displaced by the construction of Sardar Sarovar Dam. Later on, the movement turned its focus on the preservation of environment and the eco-systems of the valley. The withdrawal of the World Bank from the project was considered to be a major victory for the anti-dam activists.

In October 2000, the Supreme Court gave a judgment approving the construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam. The court decided that the height of the dam be raised to 90 m. This height is much higher than the 88 m which anti-dam activists demanded, but it is definitely lower than the proposed height of 130 m.

After the Supreme Court judg­ment, the Gujarat Government has taken up the construction of the Dam. As the World Bank withdrew its financing in 1993 the project is now largely financed by the state governments and market borrowings and is expected to be com­pleted by 2025.

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