

# Narmada Bachao Andolan

Narmada Bachao Andolan was an Indian social movement against constructing various dams across the Narmada River under the Narmada Dam Project.

Save the Narmada movement, or the Narmada Bachao Andolan began in 1985. The Andolan was led by the local tribes, environmentalists, farmers, and activists that aimed to protest against the lack of proper rehabilitation and resettlement of the people dependent on the river for their living and livelihood after the construction and development of the Narmada Dam Project

## Narmada River

Narmada River is the Indian peninsular's largest west-flowing river that flows through Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Madhya Pradesh. The river has a course of 1312 km and ends up in the Arabian sea after moving through rocky gorges, agricultural regions, hills, and lush forests. This River System in India has 41 tributaries, and these tributaries are surrounded by the mountain ranges of Maikal, Vindhya, and Satpura on three sides, while the fourth side merges into the Arabian Sea.

Along the Narmada river, more than 81% area of the surrounding includes villages and tribal populations consisting of Baigas, Gonds, Bhils, and people belonging to the primary occupation (agriculture) as the river is highly rich in natural resources.

## Narmada Bachao Andolan- Origin

Narmada Dam was constructed over the Narmada river, resulting in submerging the villagers' land. In this project, 3000 small and big dams were built. One of the major dams, Sardar Sarovar Dam, was supposed to displace more than 25000 people. Seeing the effects, the most powerful mass movement, Narmada Bachao Andolan, was started by Medha Patkar and her colleagues against the construction of the huge dams over the river in 1985 for rehabilitation or resettlement of the affected people.

## Features of Narmada Bachao Andolan

The key features of the Narmada Bachao Andolan are as follows-

- Narmada, also called the Reva, is India's 5th longest river. After independence, the government called for the construction and development of large, medium, and small dams on the river to aid local and national development.
- It was proposed that two dams, Narmada Sagar and Sardar Sarovar, should be constructed.
- The Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal approved the Narmada Valley Development. The project included 3000 small dams, 135 medium dams, and 30 large dams. Also, it was suggested that the height of the Sardar Sarovar dam should be increased.

- After the project's approval in 1985, Medha Patkar and her colleagues decided to visit the site. She noticed that the work for the project was being checked on orders of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India.
- The construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam began in 1987. However, no information was conducted about the people supposed to be affected by the dam's construction. Perhaps, they were offered rehabilitation.
- Seeing the condition of the people, the Narmada Bachao Andolan was organized in May 1990 by 2000 people. It was a five-day sit-in at PM's residence in New Delhi. As a result of this movement, PM reconsidered the Narmada Valley Development Project.
- Also, 6000 women and men collectively began the Narmada People's Progress Struggle March in Dec 1990. In this Yatra, people marched over 100 KMs.
- In January 1991, Baba Amte and his seven-member team started a 22-day-long hunger strike.
- At last, in 1999, the construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam started again. Its construction continued till 2006 and was inaugurated in 2017. The height of the project was increased to 163m.

## Role of World Bank in Narmada Bachao Andolan

Narmada Project is one of the most significant multipurpose river valley projects in India. The government requires funding for the construction of the dams. So, Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal gave clearance to the World Bank to begin construction on the Narmada Project. As a result, the World Bank, in 1985, agreed to finance the project.

- It contributed \$450 million to the construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam.
- The protest led by Medha Patkar testified to the role of the World Bank in Washington, D.C, which increased pressure on the bank to withdraw itself from the project.
- Later, World Bank, announced that it would give an independent review of the project.
- It resulted in the Morse Commission's establishment for human displacement, environmental cost, and construction of the dam in 1991.
- In 1993, the participation of the World Bank was canceled.

Also, in 1991, Medha Patkar and Baba Amte, the leading spokesperson of the Narmada Bachao Movement, received the Right Livelihood Award. This campaign includes support from notable film and art personalities, rallies, hunger strikes, and court actions. The movement was joined by various NGOs, activists, and local people. The primary supporting committee's were-

- Maharashtra-Based Narmada Dharangrashtra Samiti.
- Madhya Pradesh-based Narmada Ghati Nav Nirman Samiti.
- Gujarat-based Narmada Asargrashtra Samiti.

## Success of Narmada Bachao Andolan

Narmada Bachao Andolan aimed to bring justice to society. The Andolan won the Right Livelihood Award for its consistent non-violent struggle. The major highlights of the Narmada Bachao Andolan's success are as follows-

- 1993 - Removal of the World bank from the Sardar Sarovar project.
- 1994-99 - Halt of Sardar Sarovar construction.
- 1999-2001 - Foreign investors' withdrawal from the Maheshwar dam.