

NBA faced a lot of state
depression — This is an
important archive of depression
on NBA in 1991.

From,
Narmada Bachao Andolan,
58, Mahatma Gandhi Road,
Badwani, (Madhya Pradesh)

Badwani

6-6-91

To,
The Chief Secretary,
Government of Madhya Pradesh,
BHOPAL.

Dear Sir,

A note on an incident that occurred at Nisarapur on the 18th April 1991, giving details of the police atrocities that were committed while unlawfully arresting the undersigned and two of our workers and activists, named Alok Agarwal and Mohanbhai Patidar is enclosed for your kind perusal.

At the time when we were being beaten up by the police the collector of Dhar Mr. Sharma, SIM of Kukshi Mr. Dafaria, The Superintendent of Police Mr. Upadhyaya and the Sub Inspector of Police Mr. Tiwari were present. In fact the Collector of Dhar had ordered to beat us up. The police behaved in an atrocious ~~man~~ manner when none of us had resisted arrest, even though the arrest itself was illegal as none of us had committed any crime. In view thereof, We propose to lodge a criminal complaint against all the above mentioned four officers as all of them are responsible officers of the State and they ~~had~~ were duty bound to stop the beatings forthwith and prevent hand cuffings of the two of the activists. We request you to give us permission to lodge the complaints and proceed against them under the law of the land.

We are awaiting your reply at the earliest granting us the ~~necessary~~ permission as sought by us.

Thanking You,

Yours Faithfully,
For and on behalf of Narmada Ghati
Navnirman Samiti. Badwani.
(Narmada Bachao Andolan)

Nandini Oza.

State Violence To Crush Narmada Bachao Andolan

Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) is a non-violent movement going on in the Narmada valley for the past five years. This movement has raised enough doubts in the minds of the people about the controversial Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP), a dam the government is determined to build.

Though the Andolan, with ~~the~~ thousands of ~~the~~ oustees, has approached all governments, including the Centre and the state, several times, with the issues of displacement, environment etc., the governments on each occasion ^{has} turned ^a deaf ear. The ^{most} recent ~~most~~ example being the 36 days' long 'dharna' (demonstration) by 5,000 people on the Gujarat-Madhya Pradesh ~~HH~~ border, with 7 of our people going on an indefinite hunger strike to draw the attention of the governments over an issue that will determine the fate of lakhs of tribals and peasants to be displaced from their land they have been living on for generations now. Though the fast of the seven people lasted for 22 days, there was no response from the government what so ever. The people decided not to loose the precious lives of those on ~~the~~ fast over an unconcerned Centre and state governments and returned to their villages with a stronger determination to fight for their ~~HHVHH~~ rights.

Though the movement is peaceful, the government has not only turned a deaf ear to the Andolan, but in the past one year has turned violent to crush the people and their voice. The lathi charge on hundreds ^(in Badwani & Mirzapur) of peaceful demonstrators on 6th April, 1990 and 25th January, 1991 are some of the incidents that have hit the headlines.

On one side the people are being beaten up and jailed and ~~HHH~~ on the other hand the government has been staging a show (to gain publicity) of being concerned about the problem of displacement. Several times, the government officials, the Narmada Valley Development Authority (NVDA), the World Bank and the Sardar Sarovar Narmada Nigam (SSNLI) representatives have passed through the submergence villages without meeting the people to hold meetings in the Circuit House of Badwani (MP) - in the absence of the people's representatives - only to advertise in the newspapers later that the government is working towards the solution to the problem of displacement. This is a routine, a fraud by the government to gain public opinion in their favour even when the government has not been able to have a uniform rehabilitation policy for the people of the three states ^{M-P Maharashtra &} to ¹ Gujarat.

The people of our valley were, therefore, not surprised on 17th April, 1991, when one more attempt to gain the publicity was made by the state. But this time, things were different; for, no ordinary officers were arriving. C.C. Patel, the Chairman of SSNNL, the Chief Secretary of Gujarat, S.C. Jain, the Chief of NVDA were coming to Badwani to hold talks with the local officers. Once again, the people to be affected by the dam were left out of the picture. But, as always, radio and newspapers carried the stories that these people were going to visit the submergence area and meet people. The truth was that, none of the villagers were informed about their programme nor was any visit planned to any of the to be affected villages. The ~~peop~~ people did not find this behaviour of the government unnatural. People understood that the representatives of the state do not wish to meet them; firstly, because they are not concerned and secondly because they do not want to face defeat and humiliation by not being able to give answers to people's questions.

The people decided not to ignore their visit, for, they felt that they had a fundamental right to know as to what is their fate; and who else can give better answers than S.C. Jain and C.C. Patle? Therefore, on 18th April, the day of their visit, hundreds of villagers assembled ^{on} route the officers were expected to take. People, including women and children, waited patiently for their arrival. All those who had assembled politely stopped the Collector of Dhar (MP), one Mr. Sharma, and he was requested to announce the ~~the~~ programme of ^{these, arriving} their arrival. To the utter amazement of the people, the Collector replied that he was unaware of any such visit by any officers and rudely told the people that they should contact newspaper reporters if they have received information from the newspapers. The people have grown ^{not} ~~not~~ to trust the government officers and so, they decided to continue to wait.

It turned out to be a long wait for the people.... The Collector after reaching his destination (Kukshi) decided to take the top officials from a different and longer route to Badwani as they did not care to meet the hundreds of people waiting on the roads since morning under the hot sun of April. The longer route, ^{Allowed them to} though could avoid a lot of people, passed through two of the submergence villages - Narmadanagar and Chikhalda. Hundreds of people had assembled at both these places too.

At Narmadanagar, as soon as the people saw the cars of the officers, police jeeps, vans etc., arriving, few people moved forward and requested them to stop. The cars stopped. The

Collector got down from his vehicle and without a moment's hesitation ordered the police to ^{start a} lathi-charge. The police immediately cracked down on ~~the~~ people mercilessly, without any warning at all. Police went berserk. Women were beaten by ~~the~~ male police, several of them ^{were} seriously injured and later hospitalized. Amba Lal, a crippled boy of 20, was pulled down from his ~~HHHHH~~ wheelchair and was beaten till he bled. Bhura Lal was beaten to an extent that he had to have stitches on his head. Nandu Bai, an old lady of 80 years was not left out. She was ruthlessly beaten and had to be hospitalized. All this while, the collector and all the top officers watched the plight of the people and they were totally unmoved while defenceless women were crying out of pain due to the blows of lathis ~~HM~~ by male police.

After dispersing all those assembled at Narmadanagar, the officers and the police force moved towards Chikhda where more people ~~HH~~ were waiting to talk to C.C. Patel and Sharad Chand Jain. At Chikhda too, without prior warning, the police took to lathi-charge and several were injured. Some of them, like Sadashivji Patwari (70), Shobharamji Jat (62), Akhilesh (18) and six others were badly beaten and taken to jail.

The only crime of the people was - they wanted to talk to C.C. Patel and Sharad Chand Jain who are going to decide their fate and fate of their generations to come.

Worse still ^{was} ~~has~~ to follow. On hearing the news of the lathicharge and arrests, the activists of the Andolan, Nandini Oza, Alok Agarwal and Mohanbhai Patidar were returning ~~back~~ to Badwani from a village named Bhavanriya (where they earlier in the day had waited for the officials to come). They were suddenly stopped at Nisarpur by 3-4 police jeeps and were arrested on the grounds that they were a cause of breach of peace. Though all the three did not resist their arrest at all, they were severely beaten up.

Nandini Oza was beaten brutally with lathis by male police. The Collector of Dhar, Mr. Sharma, the SP, Mr. Upadhyaya, the SDM of Kukshi Mr. Dafariya and the sub Inspector of Kukshi Mr. Tiwari were all present at the site while she was being beaten up by male police. Though she repeatedly told these officers that no male police can ever touch ^a woman, her pleas were totally ignored. She also drew the attention of the Collector to the breach of the law by police in his presence, but he refused to do anything about it. Nandini was then taken to Kukshi police station where she was badly ^{man} handled by the

women police under the order of the Collector - her only crime was to ask the Collector for the medical aid. She was taken to the hospital only at 2 a.m. in the night, after all the three arrested gave up food and drink in the protest.

The behaviour of the police towards Alok and Mohanbhai too was atrocious. At Kukshi police station, the Collector abused them and even offered bribe to Alok by saying that he would be immediately released if he promised to leave the Andolan. When the Collector's offer~~HH~~ was turned down, the Collector threatened to jail them for 4 years or more. Later, an act that no law of our land allows was performed in the presence of the Collector and the SP. Alok and Mohanbhai were ordered to remove their clothes! They were then locked up in their underwears only!!

The unlawful behaviour of the administration and the police did not stop here. At 1 a.m., when all the three arrested were produced before the SDM, Alok and Mohanbhai were ~~chained~~^{handcuffed}. They had handcuffs on even when they were later taken to Dhar jail, and Alok~~HH~~ was produced before the SDM, Kukshi on 24th April, once again, with handcuffs on. Each time, Alok brought to the notice of the SDM that there is a Supreme Court directive against handcuffing - but he ignored it. The SDM even said that he cannot abide by every judgement given by the courts.

All the three arrested were jailed under section 151, 116(3) and 107. Mohanbhai was released on 20th April itself whereas Alok and Nandini were kept behind the bars till 24/4/91 though they were arrested under the same sections.

The lawlessness ~~HHH~~ of the administration and the police crossed its limit on 19th April, 1991 when one of the Andolankaris Mohammad Aspal went to Kukshi police station to know the whereabouts of those arrested. Mohame~~s~~ was beaten up by the ~~police~~ police and was put in the lock-up for two days and later in the jail for two more days. Some of his belongings were also taken away by the police. He was not even produced before the SDM within 24 hours of his arrest. His only crime was - he wanted to know the whereabouts of those arrested by the police the previous day.

We, the people of Narmada Bachao Andolan, seek justice against the totally unlawful and atrocious behaviour of the state to crush our peaceful movement and stop people from demanding their fundamental rights.

• Nandini Oza
• Alok Agarwal.