

**The Narmada** (the name means “one who endows with bliss”) is the longest river in India, sacred to the villagers who live along her banks. They carry on their daily existence under the long shadow of the Sardar Sarovar dam being constructed – synonymous with all that is wrong with big development. In the 1980s, the World Bank funded the Indian government to build 30 big dams, 135 medium and 3,000 small dams along the Narmada Valley, threatening to turn the entire river into a series of lakes which will submerge the villages and displace between 100,000 to 1,000,000 people.

Since 1986, the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA – Save Narmada Movement) has spread across the villagers in the Valley, against the dam, against submergence, in favour of people’s rights to the natural resources they depend upon to survive. The villagers have sworn to stay and drown with their children, preferring death to the inadequate resettlement programme or a life in the slums – for them, another kind of death. They have fasted, sat-in, occupied the dam-site, faced baton charges by police, gone to court and to jail. Time and time again as the monsoon arrives, they have stood up to their necks in the rising, swirling waters.

The dam will not bring the water promised to the drought-prone areas of Gujarat, but to the industrial zones where, already, huge sugar-processing plants are being built in anticipation. Gujarat’s minister has declared that the villagers should smile while making the ‘small sacrifice’ of giving up their homes for the greater common good.

Since then, the fight against the Narmada dams has been led by Medha Patkar and the NBA, which is part of the National Association of Peoples’ Movements, which unites untold millions of the unrepresented across India. These are her words as she carried a banner through the streets of Prague with the pink and silver group during the September 26 protests against the World Bank and IMF.

## A River Comes to Prague

by Medha Patkar

This day [S26] is not about Northern protest, but about the solidarity all around the world. It’s not about the First and Third World, North and South. There is a section of the population that is just as present in the US, and in England – the homeless, unemployed people, on the streets of London – which is also there in the indigenous communities, villages, and farmers of India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Mexico, Brazil. All those who face the backlash of this kind of economics are coming together to create a newer, people-centred world order.

We’re here because our movement is the movement of the people from the Valley of Narmada fighting big dams, which the World Bank was originally involved in. But our movement successfully forced them to withdraw.

We battle for the true kind of development which is equitable and sustainable, and believe very strongly that the World Bank, IMF, the WTO, and the multinational corporations are taking society in exactly the opposite direction. That is, towards an inequitable, non-sustainable, and unjust world. We feel that the corporations and their tentacles have now taken over, not just markets, but the lives of the people. The people have to resist. The people have to say no, not just to imports, but to impositions. Imposition of culture, imposition of consumerism, imposition of a new kind of money and market-based economics and related politics.

And we know that we cannot fight this alone in our

corner of the world and in an isolated way. It is necessary to build alliances among the women's movement, the fish workers' movement, the farmers' movement, the tribal and indigenous peoples' movement – all those who live on the natural resource-base and their own labour are being evicted and being impoverished.

And then we have to gather together all the sensitive and sensible people of the world to reject the corporate sector and this kind of lending and the export credit guarantees. And these will be replaced by ordinary people's ways of exchange, of knowledge, ideas, of technology – that will be the real empowerment of the people.

**Interview by Notes from Nowhere/Katharine Ainger**  
**Medha Patkar is at the forefront of the NBA, using Gandhian methods of nonviolent struggle or satyagraha. She is a leading inspiration in challenging capitalist globalization and fascistic nationalism in India.**

**Resources:** » Friends of River Narmada (not *Narmada Bachao Andolan* but a support site) [www.narmada.org](http://www.narmada.org)

» *Drowned Out*, a film on Narmada Bachao Andolan by [www.spannerfilms.net](http://www.spannerfilms.net)

banquet at the Hilton. Several delegates' presentations end up being canceled, including Bill Gates', because of the overwhelming protester presence.

>> **September 26** >> Global Day of Action, Prague.

>> **October 1** >> Thousands march to the US naval base on the island of Vieques, Puerto Rico, and 65 people cut the surrounding fence and trespass onto the base, for which they are arrested. The US Navy

controls about 70 per cent of the island and uses it to conduct military exercises which have stunted the island's economy, displaced many people, and decimated the environment.

>> **October 19 - 20** >> Twenty thousand workers and students erupt onto the streets of Seoul, South Korea against the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) which is sealed off by 30,000 riot and plain clothes police officers and

an exclusion zone. "We Oppose Neoliberalization and Globalization!" shouts a banner, as the march heads towards the conference centre.

>> **November 16-18** >> In Cincinnati, US, thousands protest the meeting of the Trans-Atlantic Business Dialogue (TABD); 500 picket at a supermarket which refuses to support striking farm workers; an "End Corporate Rule" banner is hung during a symphony for



A woman prays next to a half submerged temple. Narmada River, India