



Yindabad

2007 • Running time 58 minutes • Directed by Roi Guitián and Mariano Agudo • Distributed by Documentary Educational Resources

The Narmada Valley Development Project was created during the late 1960s to construct 30 large-scale dams, 135 medium-sized dams, and more than 3,000 small-sized dams in the Narmada River. More than 2.5 million people have been displaced by the flooding of forests, cultivatable land, and villages. The affected people, the local Adivasi, have struggled against this project for more than 30 years, fighting for fair compensation and the relocation of their homes. Adivasi women have emerged as leaders and main characters in this unequal fight. *Yindabad* shows this struggle from their viewpoint.



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Rajashree Ghosh
Resident scholar,
Women's Studies
Research Center and
lecturer, Environmental
Studies program,
Brandeis University

WHY I SELECTED THIS FILM

Yindabad is a poignant chronicle of the dynamic struggles of the displaced indigenous peoples living by the Narmada River in India. This unique film presents compelling facts and lived experiences of people displaced by large development projects. Furthermore, it provides opportunities for debates on gender and displacement and impoverishment in the light of globalization and market forces. Most of all, the film is a potential teaching tool for developing a lens on alternative and emerging people's movements and scholarship on environmental and social justice.

A NOTE ON THE TITLE



This documentary, filmed in India, was produced by a Spanish crew. *Yindabad* is a Spanish rendering of *Jindabad* or *Zindabad*, which is a shout of encouragement in Urdu, Hindi, and Bengali. *Zindabad* is understood in political struggles as “may [person or idea] live forever.”

SUGGESTED SUBJECT AREAS

Agriculture and Ethics
Cultural Anthropology
Economics
Environmental Justice
and Sustainability Studies
Environmental Studies
Gender Studies
Geography

Global Studies
History
Legal Studies
Political Science
Population Studies
Public Policy
Sociology (rural and urban)



SYNOPSIS

The Narmada River, the fifth-largest river in India, flows through three states—Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Gujarat—on its way to the Gulf of Cambay. The total length of the river from source to sea is 1,312 kilometers (815 miles). The film captures the essence of the lives and culture of the indigenous Adivasi who live by the river, showing their inextricable connection with their environment, including the pristine waters of the Narmada.

The construction of the planned 30 large dams, 135 medium, and 3,000 small dams on the river has wreaked havoc on the ecosystem and on the 2.5 million people, mostly indigenous Adivasi, who live by the river. Their land, homes, and livelihood have been submerged underwater. As compensation, many Adivasi, now dispossessed of their ancestral land, have been resettled in areas that bear no resemblance to their native habitat, causing them to lose their livelihood and their cultural identity at the same time.



The documentary shows how activist Medha Patkar has spearheaded a movement of women and men from these indigenous communities. Together, they are committed to bringing about social change and empowerment and preventing further construction of the dams. Taken in a wider context, *Yindabad* explores the conflict between indigenous communities and a destructive state that promotes corporate development projects that strip the poor of their right to their livelihood.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE FOCUS

Yindabad draws attention to the key issues in the fraught relationship between development and marginalization. The indigenous population (the Adivasi) of central India have been engaged in a struggle for the past three decades with the Narmada Valley Development Project, a plan to construct hundreds of large to mid-sized dams on the Narmada River. Over 2.5 million people have been displaced by the flooding of forests, cultivable land, and villages.

The indigenous women and men find their role as erstwhile custodians of ancestral land and biodiversity dismissed. The film illustrates that forced displacement is the result of market-induced injustice, the apathy of the government, and the power and influence of large corporations. In presenting people's lived experiences, their loss of livelihood, and the denudation of the environment, the film gives them a voice and visibility critical in providing avenues for knowledge and change.

BACKGROUND

The Narmada River is India's largest westward-flowing river and has immense religious and cultural significance to the people who call it their home. Funded by the World Bank, the Narmada Valley Development Plan envisages 30 large, 135 medium and 3,000 small dams on the Narmada River and its tributaries. The two principal mega-dams are the Sardar Sarovar Dam and the Narmada Sagar Dam, which have forcibly displaced millions of people, caused the inundation of forests, and the destruction of the habitat of rare species.



Despite these problems, the Indian government remains committed to building more dams. As recently as September 2017, Prime Minister Narendra Modi committed his government to the completion of the Sardar Sarovar Dam Complex. At that time, some 40,000 families in 192 villages still faced eviction or submergence. (All India Press, September 18, 2017)

Resettlement plans, if provided at all, have been grossly inadequate, as affected people have been relegated to areas without adequate resources to lead safe, healthy lives. In response, local opponents, environmental activists, and academic, scientific, and cultural professionals formed an alliance of civic society organizations. This alliance came to be known as the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), or the “Save the Narmada Movement,” led by Medha Patkar. For three decades now, Patkar has been mobilizing communities, launching campaigns to stop evictions and the further construction of dams, and engaging in a protracted legal battle in defense of rehabilitation and resettlement.

Patkar used Gandhian methods of non-violent protest, such as sit-ins, peaceful marches, and *satyagraha*, or the pledge of truth to fast until death, so her pleas could be heard by the powers that be. She also participated in collective *jal samadhi* (water burial), where she and supporters of the NBA stood submerged in rising waters on-site until they received state attention. Patkar and activists of the NBA have been arrested many times, often unjustly, under the pretext that they are defying state orders. However, this has not deterred them from their resolve to protect people and the environment from the impact of unequal, harmful development.

In 1991, Patkar and the NBA received Sweden’s Right Livelihood Award, often called the “Alternative Nobel Prize.” They received the award for their “inspired opposition to the disastrous Narmada Valley dam project and their promotion of alternatives designed to benefit the poor and the environment.” This award represents international recognition of the exemplary efforts of the NBA, especially women activists, as they continue to campaign for human rights and environmental protection.

In challenging the established paradigms of development, the NBA successfully prevailed upon the World Bank and government to introduce resettlement and rehabilitation standards. The work of the NBA continues today as they pressure central and state governments to honor their commitments.



Medha Patkar (above), founder of Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA)

Photo: *Times of India*



KEY PEOPLE AND LOCATIONS

Kamala Yadav, NBA activist

Deadlibai Vasave, Domkhedi village

Baba Maharia, Yalsindi (Jalsindhi) village

Magat Varma, Lepa village; continues to live with his family in his village and has not accepted government compensation

Rankuwar Rawat, an activist who moved to a camp when her village was flooded

Rajendra Singh, working for water self-management in Rajasthan

FILM SCENES AND THEMES

Dams and people: understanding what it means

7:35–8:26 (and 13:22–14:00)

Women speak about dams. Coming to realize that something like a dam constructed in another state can impact their lives is frightening. Deadlibai Vasave and Kamala Yadav give voice to the women who were affected by the dams and became activists to protest the destruction of their heritage, culture, ecology, and livelihood.



Yindabad

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Providing a context

8:26–8:40

Man rowing on the Narmada River, singing a melodious tune, *Jindabad* (or *Yindabad*, the title of the film), a political slogan meaning “Long live” and that freedom belongs to the Adivasi. This scene ushers in the conversation on communities joining hands in a protracted struggle against the state and corporations that strip the poor of their livelihood.

Community-engaged activism

10:03–11:39

Medha Patkar speaks about her first visit to the Narmada valley in 1985. In asking about the detailed plans and financial viability of the proposed construction of dams, government officials confessed they did not have information available. Yet the decision to build dams was imposed on the communities. These communities—indigenous populations who are peasants and fisher folk—are dependent on the natural resources for survival. Patkar decided to fight for the rights of these dam-affected people. Thus, the “Save the Narmada Movement” came into being.

State apathy

17:00–21:47

Community members speak about how the government never informed them about any plans to resettle displaced people. With high illiteracy levels and no primary school established by the government, how will anyone learn and grow up to get jobs? Little information is made available about resettlement programs. Community members seek more information but receive few answers. Baba Maharia demands that all resettlement plans be transparent; that land submerged under rising dam water be compensated with another piece of land; that the loss of cattle be compensated with cattle; and that the loss of homes be compensated with homes.

Relationship of people with environment

20:44–21:45

An indigenous woman speaks about dependence on “Mother Earth” for everything. The Narmada River is worshipped as a goddess twice a year to thank her for all the bounties she provides.

People's marches

22:07–25:00 (and 30:56–35:07)

Several peaceful demonstrations were led by the Save the Narmada Movement. A major feature of this movement is the involvement of women from marginalized communities who have joined the movement and become activists. Members of the growing movement participate in a community protest called *jal samadhi*, or “water burial,” as a way to protest by standing in rising water as police drag people away. Losing land, culture, lives, and homes becomes real as the water rises. Strong female community leaders charge their communities to move forward with their battle against the dams. Many people were arrested in these demonstrations, causing further displacement.



Marginalized and displaced

28:09–30:24

Some members, like Magat Varma, voiced the opinion that resettling in cities, which are unfamiliar environments, is not an option. Rankuwar, an activist with the NBA, was forced to leave her village due to rising waters. She was resettled in a tin shed and demands that she be compensated for the farmland she lost because of the dams. Her paltry shed in a slum does little for her life and livelihood. She says that while she is housed in a shed, her cattle have to be tied up, exposed to the weather, and held in fields far from where she lives.

On-the-ground uncertainties

35:30–41:55

With uncertainties mounting, Deadlibai talks about water reaching close to her house one year and not knowing what might happen the following year. Medha Patkar points out that the height of the Sardar Sarovar Dam was increased beyond the original plan to divert more water to the cities. As a consequence, some villages were deprived of water and others were submerged. A woman talks about leaving home and her struggles to understand the life she has been forced to live, where value for community is less and everything costs money.

An alternative way

43:43–45:29

Rajendra Singh provides an alternative way out. He suggests moving away from centralized water management systems to a pro-poor, sustainable approach based on small self-managed dams.

Against big power

48:00–58:00

Medha Patkar talks about the role of the World Bank, the influence of the corporate sector, the growing privatization of water, and the impact of centralization. She questions globalization and the displacement that is too easily accepted as part of development. Guddibai laments living in cities, where the Adivasi are treated as beggars; losing community has been detrimental to her life.



“Now our demand is the government must save our culture.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The film *Yindabad* documents the conflict between large-scale, market-driven forces and the inroads made in the lives of indigenous people. Do you think it presents the people’s perspective?

1. The NBA is considered the longest environmental and social struggle in India. Share some thoughts on why this has been a protracted battle. What key environmental concerns come to mind when you view the film? Discuss.
2. India’s first prime minister called dams “temples of modern India.” (See <http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/mp/2003/07/07/stories/2003070700880200.htm>.) What is the significance of this statement when it comes to the Narmada valley?
3. Who are the Adivasi? What are their typical lifestyle practices? How have dams posed a threat to their cultural identity and indigenous knowledge systems?
4. Which two women from the community do you think articulate the struggles of the community the best? And what sets them apart?
5. Medha Patkar, as the leader of the NBA, has been awarded the Right Livelihood Award ([vimeo.com/219489548](https://www.vimeo.com/219489548)). What have been her critical methods of protest?
6. According to Patkar, “Displacement is equated with development.” What do you think she meant by that statement?
7. How does the privatization of water result in unequal distribution of natural resources? In your mind, what is the role of entities like the state, World Bank, and corporate bodies in perpetuating that inequity?
8. Community member Baba Maharia demanded more information on resettlement schemes. Think about how Adivasi who are forcibly displaced can be compensated, if at all. If you were a community worker, how would you go about working on a plan to resettle them?
9. With reference to Rajendra Singh (see the two-minute clip, starting at 43 minutes), what are some of the more sustainable ways of water management? Give examples from other experiences around the world.



SHORT VERSION OR EXCERPT

Where time is short, teachers may choose to assign a combination of two clips.

- View the final 10 minutes of *Yindabad* (48:00–58:00)
- View the five-minute interview with Medha Patkar on Vimeo: vimeo.com/219489548.

Questions relating to the short version

1. How is development defined in communities and presented by big corporations and aid agencies?
2. How do mega-dam projects impact the lives of community members living off natural resources? How are constitutional rights to life and living at stake in the face of large-scale construction?
3. What conditions are germane to the struggles of successful people? Discuss in relation to the Save the Narmada Movement.
4. What are the alternatives to large-scale development projects? Can they provide lessons on people-centered initiatives?

ACTIVITIES

Visit indigenous populations and interview key individuals who can speak to the marginalization and discrimination they have faced. Engage with indigenous people to understand their challenges and rights. This can take place in any part of the country or world.

Read about specific experiences of indigenous populations:

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/aug/28/exiles-human-cost-of-conservation-indigenous-peoples-eco-tourism>

A suggestion is to reach organizations that work with indigenous populations around the world, such as Cultural Survival:

<https://www.culturalsurvival.org>

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

Cultural Survival provides an overview of the Narmada:

www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/narmada-issue-overview

Baviskar, A. 2005. *In the Belly of the River: Tribal Conflicts over Development in the Narmada Valley*. Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

(Studies in Social Ecology and Environmental History)

Narmada Bachao Andolan interviews provide an overview of the

32-year-long struggle: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZB_YtmZjMY

Report by the World Commission on Dams, saying that large dams caused harm in India, as reported in the *New Indian Express*:

<http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2018/mar/20/dams-in-india-did-more-harm-than-good-says-un-water-report-1790004.html>

Zmolek, Michael. "Damming the Narmada and the Three Gorges." *Refuge*, Vol 12. No. 1 (1992), accessible at

<https://refuge.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/refuge/article/viewFile/21647/20320>

