

नर्मदा बचाओ आंदोलन

- नर्मदा-आशिष, नवलपुरा, बडवानी, मध्यप्रदेश ४५१५५१
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Press Note|

16th June 2024

Day 2 of Medha Patkar's Indefinite Fast!!

Stop the water level of Sardar Sarovar at 122 metres!

Full and fair compensation for all Sardar Sarovar Dam affected families till 2023.

The 15th of June marked the beginning of an indefinite fast by Medha Patkar, for justice in the Narmada valley. The demands from this fast, include, rehabilitation of all the remaining Project Affected as per the laws, policies, and Supreme Court orders. The women and men in the present struggle are also asserting their right to, a fair market value compensation to all those who endured losses in the 2023 man-made devastation along the Narmada, the appointment of Rehabilitation officers and Hon. Members of grievance Redressal Authority, Madhya Pradesh, in all the vacant posts, and till all these tasks are not completed, maintaining the Sardar Sarovar water level at 122 metres (crest level), keeping the 17 metres gates open.

Following Gandhi Ji's spirit of Satyagraha, the day started with a tribute at Gandhi Smarak, near Badwani in Madhya Pradesh. People that have been adversely affected by the Sardar Sarovar Dam and its mismanagement; farmers, fish workers, labourers, adivasis, dalits, people of different religions with the same need to assert their rights, came together in a nonviolent spirit of Satyagraha. They walked over the old bridge, across the Narmada, from Rajghat to Chikhaldia and stopped to pay respects to the river that they call 'Ma,' their mother.

Women of the movement led the way with blue flags bearing the symbols of the river, banners that express their rights, chanting '*Narmada Bachao, Maanav Bachao*' (Save the Narmada, Save Humans), '*Hum hamare hak mangte, nahi kisise bhikh mangte*' (We are demanding our rights, we are not begging), '*Mahila shakti aayee hai, nayee raushanee laayee hai*' (Women power has come and brought new light).

The procession stopped at Chikhaldia, a village that is fully devastated, except for the Gandhi statue which people have placed at a height above the water level. It is also known to be where the first farmer in South Asia was born. Bhagirath Dhangar and Medha Patkar made speeches about the 2017 Satyagraha, which included a 17 days fast, recollecting history, the achievements, and the people.

On arrival at Kheda Muhalla of Chikhaldia, the Satyagraha site, the procession was met with more chanting and commenced by commemorating martyrs of the movement, alongside mentors including Mahatma Gandhi, B. R. Ambedkar, Birsa Munda, Savitri Bai Phule, and Fatima Sheikh. Medha Patkar was accompanied by a group of women sitting on a relay fast

for 24 hours – Sevanti Badole from Pichodi, Laxmi bai and Kaali bai from Kavati and Sushila Nath, originally from Chikhaldan and now living in a tin-shed.

People representing different villages affected, shared their grievances, their struggle, their support towards collectively achieving their right to full and fair resettlement and rehabilitation. It was very emotional, as Saraswati bahen started to weep during her speech, as she remembered the people who have passed away since the Narmada Bachao Movement began 39 years ago, Shyama Bharat narrated the story of fish workers who are still awaiting the registration of a Federation and right to reservoir fisheries.

While thousands have struggled over the last 39 years and achieved the rehabilitation of thousands, thousands still await full and fair resettlement and rehabilitation, 15,946 families who were excluded from rehabilitation after acquisition of their houses, were added to this list last year, when the Sardar Sarovar gates were kept closed to celebrate the Prime Minister's birthday. The repercussions were that whole villages drowned within hours, 1200 cattle died, 6 people died, including a little girl, shops were destroyed, people lost livelihoods, and there is still no justice. People from these villages described how their homes filled up with water with tears in their eyes, Anita bahen described how her family needed to break the wall of her house that faced their farm, just to escape, demolishing a wall, the force of the water entering the door. Sushila Nath, one of the women on relay fast, shared her struggle as she was forced out of her home and into a 12 by 16 feet tin shed five years ago, a tin shed that is like a furnace in the summer, floods in the monsoon, with no electricity, water – people live outside under a large neem tree through the day, and can only enter their "homes" when it is slightly more bearable, at night.

The people shared songs throughout the day, and extended this energy when SDM Pramod Singh Gurjar reached the Satyagraha site requesting Medha didi to stop her fast. Collector Dhan made a phone call with the same request. However, everyone refused and the SDM stayed to listen to peoples' grievances that included the issues of resettlement, rehabilitation, and even inadequate access to rations. People expressed their commitment to struggle till attaining full justice and readiness to have a dialogue for the same. SDM also assured the people that he will convey their grievances and demands to the higher authorities and take next steps towards resolving these issues.

Today, 16th of June, is Day 2, and those sitting on relay fast are Saraswati bahen from Semalda, Bhagwan Septa from Narmada Nagar, Gauri Badole and Sita Avasya from Pichodi. Till the demands are met, the people continue with their Satyagraha in Chikhaldan's Kheda Muhalla, with Medha didi on an indefinite fast.

Om Patidar, Sushila Nath, Kailash Yadav, Hari Solanki, devesingh Tomar,

Kuwarnsingh Nargave, Rahul Yadav, Mukesh Bhagoriya,

Kamla Yadav, Hemendra Mandloi, Mahendra Tomar

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