

Women's struggles over natural resources in India

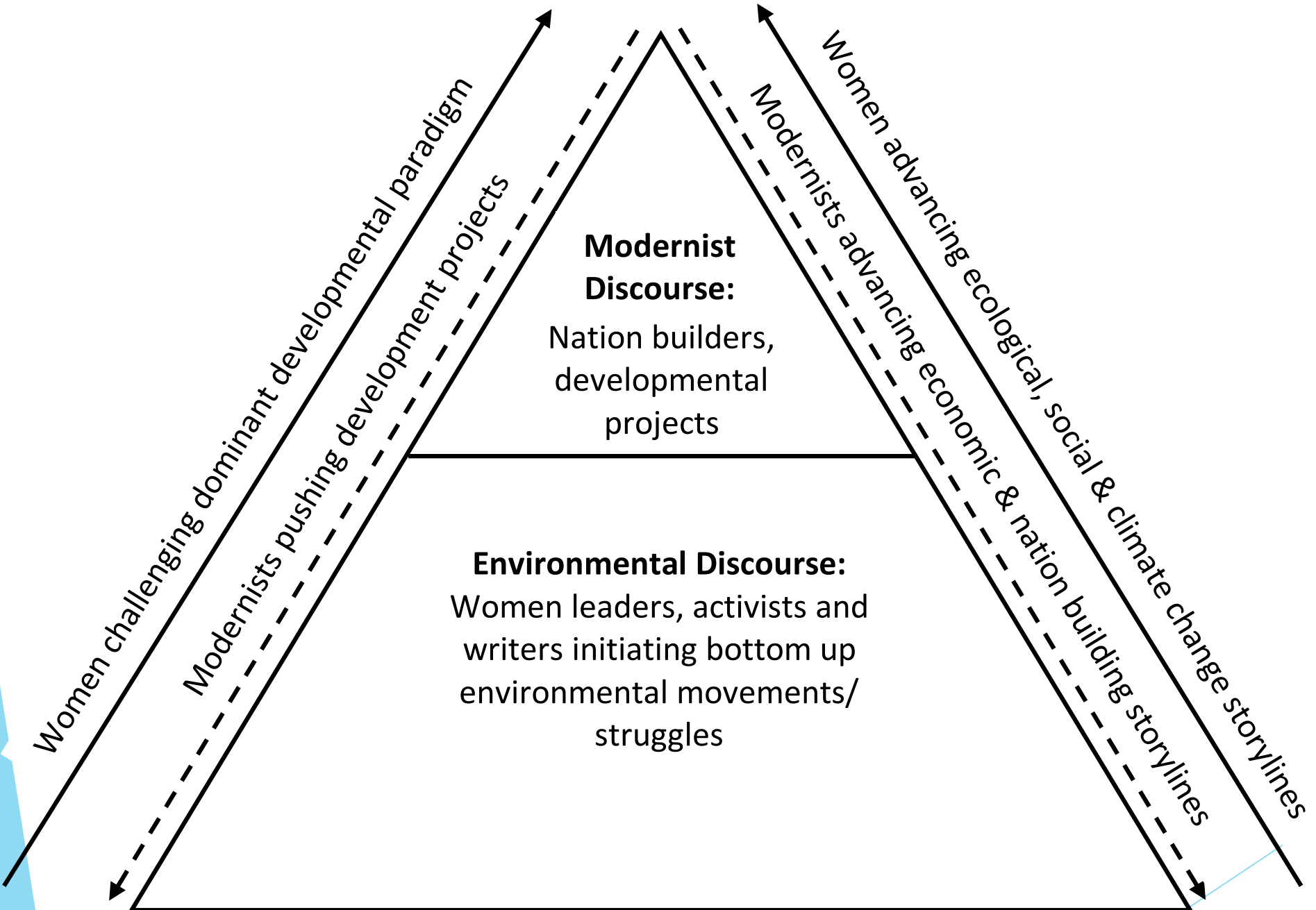
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Two big development discourse in postcolonial India

- ▶ Discourse constitutes ‘the ensemble of a set of storylines, the actors that utters these storylines, and the practices that conform to these storylines, all organized around a discourse’ (Maarten Hajer, 1995)
- ▶ Storylines are argumentative and symbolic in nature, and their subjective meaning has to be interpreted in the particular context of social action
- ▶ Storylines merge to form discourse and they struggle for dominance, seeking hegemony over time

- ▶ We can see two big development discourses in India:
 - ▶ 1). Modernist discourse
 - ▶ 2). Environmental discourse



Power Stratification of Two Big Discourses

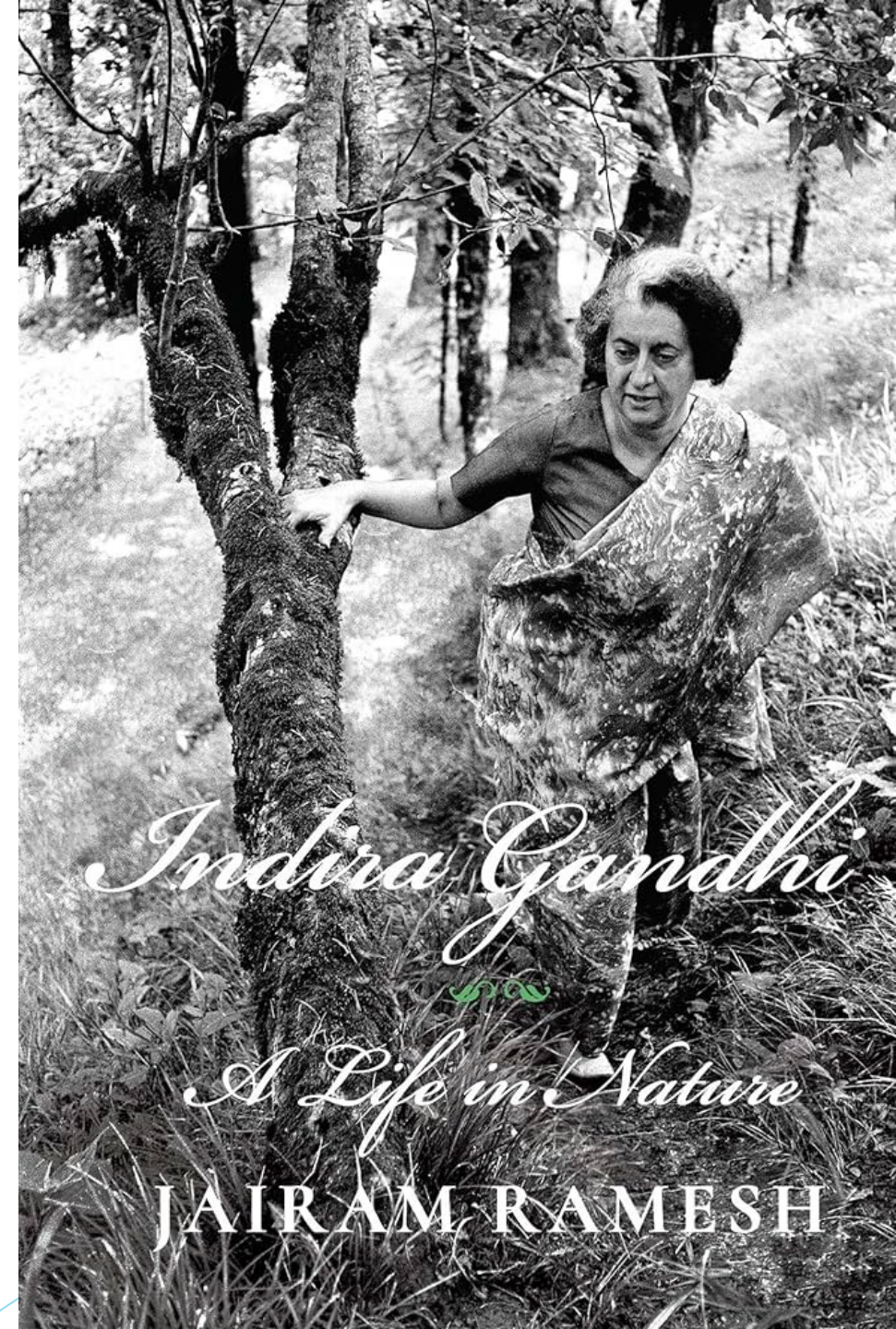
Source: instructors' compilation

Women leadership/advocacy in environmental protection

- ▶ Indira Gandhi
- ▶ Medha Patkar
- ▶ Amita Baviskar
- ▶ Nandini Oza
- ▶ Licypriya Kangujam

Jairam Ramesh wrote '*Indira Gandhi: A Life in Nature*'

- ▶ Jairam Ramesh, a member of Parliament, has held key ministerial portfolios between 2006 and 2014
- ▶ Rural development, drinking water and sanitation, environment and forests, power and commerce
- ▶ Green signals: ecology, growth and democracy in India (2015)
- ▶ Legislating for justice: the 2013 land acquisition law (2015)
- ▶ Indira Gandhi: a life in nature (2017)



- ▶ Jawaharlal Nehru = 1947 - 1964
- ▶ Indira Gandhi = 1966 - 1977
- ▶ Indira Gandhi = 1980 - 1984
- ▶ Ramesh discovers Indira Gandhi as Naturalist Prime Minister

Jairam Ramesh cited some of Indira Gandhi's favorite poems:

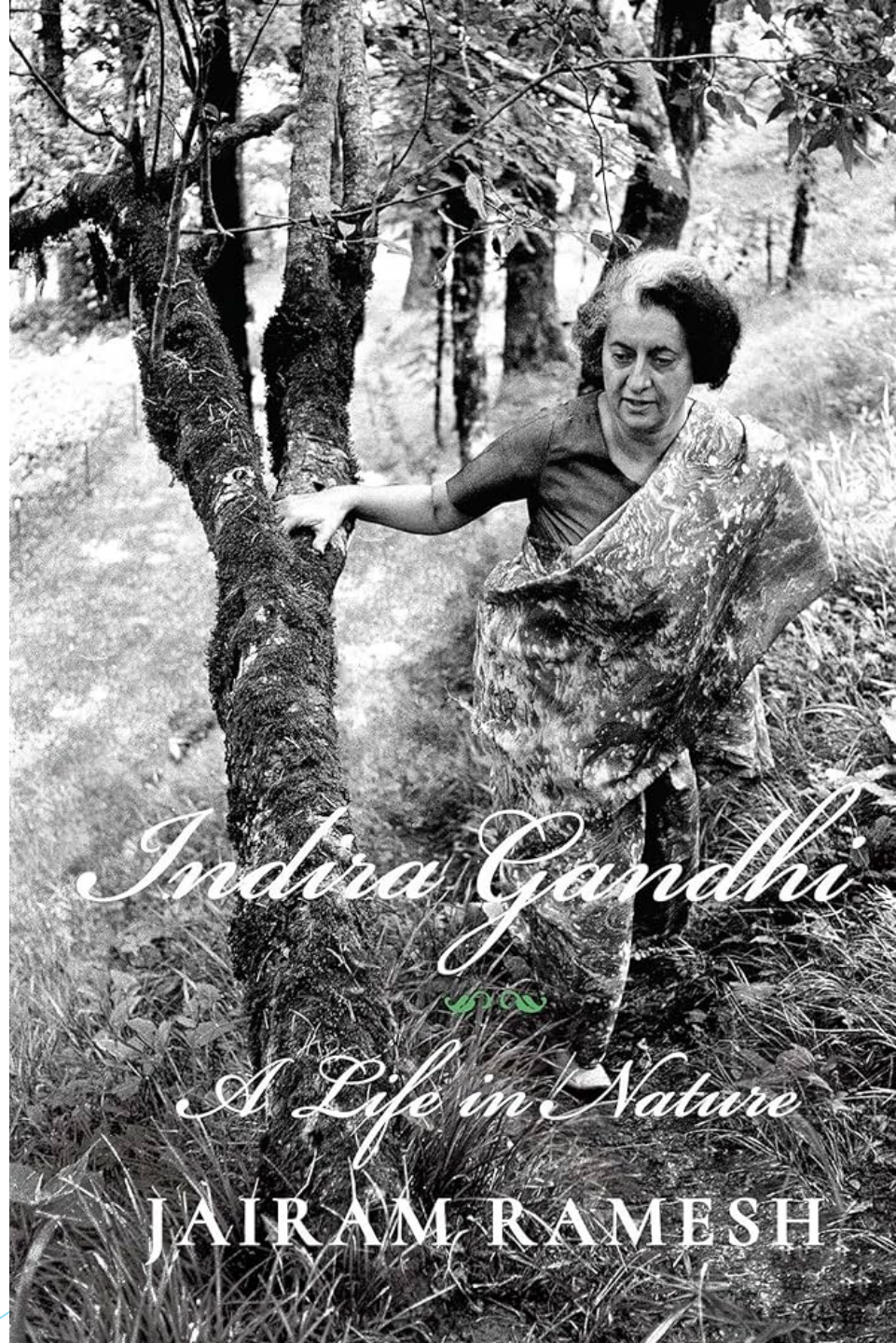
- ▶ 'Alone Looking at the Mountain' (Li Po)
- ▶ 'The Kingfisher' (William Henry Davies)
- ▶ 'I Wandered Lonely on a Cloud' (William Wordsworth):

*For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils*

Ramesh excerpted quotes of Gandhi

- ▶ ‘As an only child whose childhood was invaded by the turbulence of a vast national upheaval, I found companionship and an inner peace in communion with Nature. I grew up with love for stones, no less than trees and for animals of all kinds. I have always felt that closeness to nature helps to make one a more integrated personality.....’
- ▶ ‘I have had the good fortune of growing up with a sense of kinship with nature in all its manifestations.....’
- ▶ ‘Even as a small child, I was very keen on nature. At the International School they attached great importance to the study of nature: we studied leaves, insects and everything in detail. I think that also had a life-long influence’

Indira Gandhi: A Life in Nature



Indira Gandhi

A Life in Nature

JAIRAM RAMESH

Indira Gandhi: A Life in Nature

- ▶ **First term of Indira Gandhi (1966 - 1977):**

 - Stockholm Conference 1972

 - Wildlife Protection Act 1972

 - Project Tiger 1973

- ▶ **Second term of Indira Gandhi (1980 - 1984)**

 - Forest Conservation Act 1980

 - Andaman & Nicobar

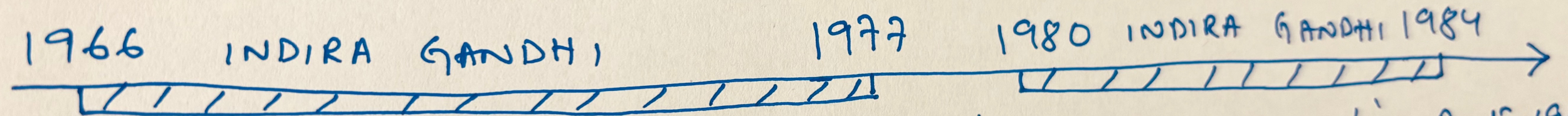
 - Western Ghats

 - Halted Silent Valley Project

- ▶ **Jairam Ramesh discussed the environmental legacy of Indira Gandhi**

Stockholm Conference 1972
Wildlife Protection Act 1972
Project Tiger 1973

Andaman & Nicobar, Western
Ghats - Environmental Conservation



Jairam Ramesh disowned all these
environmental aspects of Indira Gandhi

Forest Conservation Act 1980
Halted Silent Valley project

Summary of 'A Life in Nature'

- ▶ Indira Gandhi, prime minister for 16 years, was as charismatic as she was controversial - at once admired and criticized for her political judgements and actions
- ▶ Yet beyond such debate, what was not been fully understood is her lifelong communion with nature and how that defined her
- ▶ Weaving personal, political and environmental history, Jairam Ramesh tells the compelling story of Indira Gandhi, the naturalist: her environmental legacy
- ▶ Ramesh tells us how Gandhi's views on the environment remained steadfast even as her political and economic stances changed;

- ▶ Gandhi's friendships with conservationists lead to far reaching decisions to preserve India's biodiversity;
- ▶ Gandhi urged and persuaded her colleagues as she took significant decisions particularly forests and wildlife;
- ▶ Gandhi finely developed beliefs resulted in landmark policies, programmes, initiatives, laws and institutions
- ▶ Drawing from unpublished letters, notes, messages and memos, 'A Life in Nature' offers a lively, conversational narrative of a relatively little known aspect of Gandhi
- ▶ This book acts as a compass to India at a time when the country faces the formidable challenge of ensuring ecological security and sustainability in its pursuit of high economic growth

Gandhi's influences on environmental policies

- ▶ Indira Gandhi got into the whirlpool of politics but the real Indira Gandhi was the person who loved the mountains, cared deeply for wildlife, was passionate about birds, stones, trees and forests, and was worried deeply about the environmental consequences of urbanization and industrialization
- ▶ She was singularly responsible not just for India's best-known wildlife conservation programme—namely, Project Tiger—but also initiatives for the protection of crocodiles, lions, cranes, bustards, flamingos, deer and other endangered species

- ▶ She almost single-handedly pushed through two laws—one for the protection of wildlife and another for the conservation of forests
- ▶ Today's laws for dealing with water and air pollution were enacted during her tenure
- ▶ Gandhi used her political authority to save ecologically sensitive areas from destruction like the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and the rainforests in the Western Ghats
- ▶ She repeatedly drew the attention of chief ministers and other political colleagues to issues concerning wildlife, forests, pollution, resettlement, and for the need to always maintain what she called 'ecological balance'

Gandhi's speech in the Stockholm Conference

- ▶ Gandhi was the only head of government, other than the host prime minister, to speak at the Stockholm Conference:
- ▶ ‘.....this gathering represents man's earnest endeavour to understand his own condition and to prolong his tenancy of this planet..... The inherent conflict is not between conservation and development, but between environment and reckless exploitation of man and earth in the name of efficiency.....’
- ▶ ‘.....modern man must re-establish an unbroken link with nature and with life.....’
- ▶ ‘.....it is clear that the environmental crisis which is confronting the world, will profoundly alter the future destiny of our planet.....’
- ▶ ‘.....will the growing awareness of one earth and one environment guide us to the concept of one humanity?.....’

Gandhi's concern on Silent Valley

- ▶ In 1973, the People's Science Movement launched Silent Valley Movement
- ▶ A hydroelectric dam project was planned in this ecologically sensitive areas



Intervention of Gandhi

- ▶ In 1980, Indira Gandhi was to be confronted with three big ‘dam’ issues— Silent Valley, Tehri and Lalpur. Each of them was hugely contentious with strong proponents and opponents
- ▶ During election campaign in Kerala, Indira Gandhi states that,
- ▶ ‘All were concerned deeply over Kerala’s economic development and availability of power..... at the same time, the world is getting more and more conscious that all such developments should keep in view ecosystem or ecology because destroying or disturbing it will have long-term adverse effects. Today world opinion is quite agitated about the Silent Valley..... it is worthwhile to see whether we can get some benefits without destroying these forests’

- ▶ Gandhi wrote to the Governor of Kerala that,
- ▶ ‘.....now I see Press reports that the Kerala State Electricity Board is going ahead with the project’
- ▶ ‘This is not a legal matter but a question of the protection of the environment and the conservation of one of the only remaining tropical rain and forest areas in the world. Eminent people all over the world have expressed concern over the project’
- ▶ ‘In my view further execution of the project should be stopped.....’

- ▶ ‘The Silent Valley is an untapped gene pool and has a number of medicinal plants of great value to our medical scientists.....’
- ▶ ‘The question of going ahead with the Hydro-electric project can be examined as soon as data from studies currently in progress in the area become available. I am informed that the data collected by the scientific teams now in the Silent Valley area will be available for analysis in another month. This could be analysed by a joint Government of India-State Government Committee, so that decisions which are in the best interests of all concerned can be taken soon’

- ▶ Indira Gandhi has seen the recommendations of the Menon Committee on the Silent Valley Project in Kerala. Gandhi agrees that for valid ecological reasons, the Silent Valley Project cannot be approved and requested to examine the possibilities of starting alternative hydel projects in North Kerala
- ▶ Gandhi led government halted hydroelectric project and instead declared Silent Valley as National Park



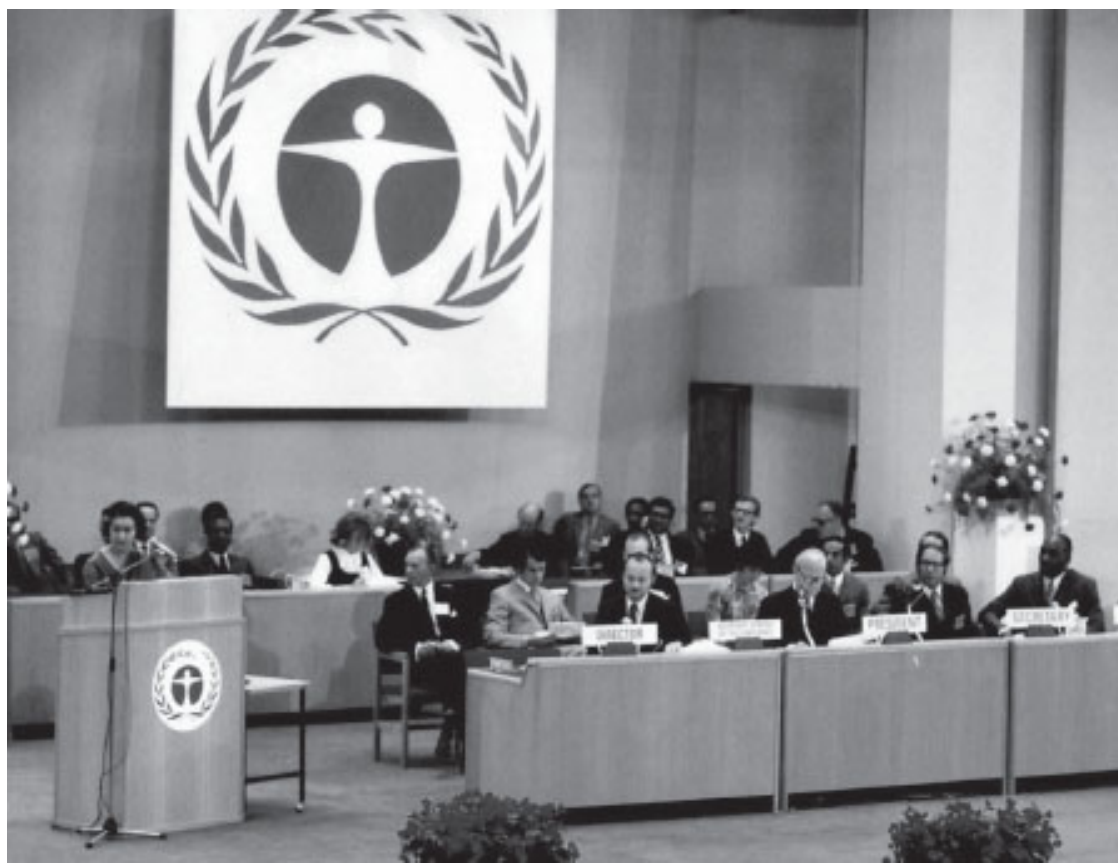
Indira Gandhi with a tiger, Teen Murti House; 1956/57.



Indira Gandhi with a koala, Taronga Zoo, Sydney; May 1968.



Indira Gandhi at the first meeting of the reconstituted Indian Board of Wildlife, with Karan Singh (left) and Jagjivan Ram (right); July 1969.



Indira Gandhi addressing the UN Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm; June 1972



Indira Gandhi taking a walk in the hills, Himachal Pradesh, 1975.



Indira Gandhi feeding kangaroo during a retreat organized by the Commonwealth Summit, Melbourne, Australia; May 1981.



Indira Gandhi presented with the Order of the Golden Ark by Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, New Delhi; August 1982.



Indira Gandhi with Sunderlal Bahuguna (extreme left) and other anti-Tehri Dam activists, Tehri; September 1979.



Indira Gandhi collecting shells, Andaman and Nicobar Islands; June 1981.

Women water activists in India

- ▶ Medha Patkar

- ▶ Nandini Oza

- ▶ 1961:

- ▶ 1970s:

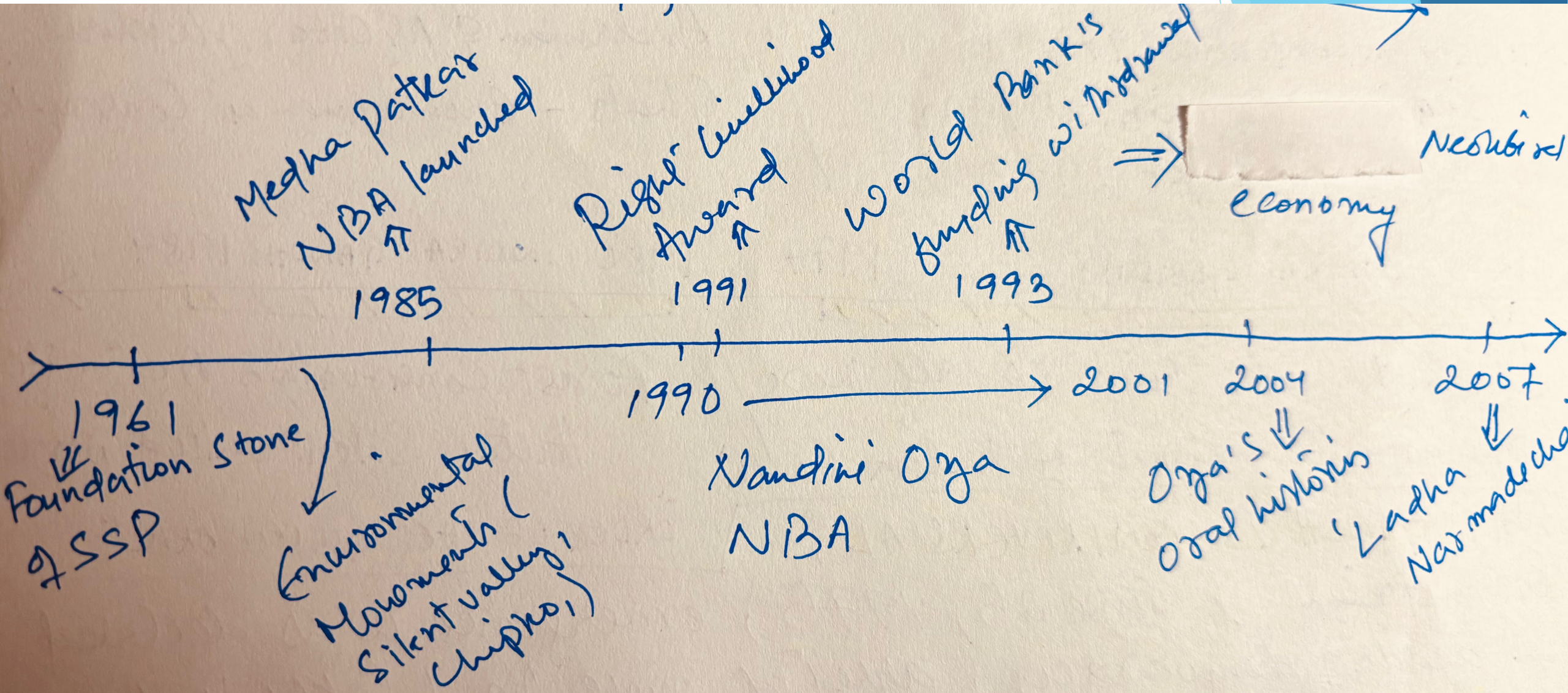
- ▶ 1985:

- ▶ 1990-2001:

- ▶ 1993:

- ▶ 2004:

- ▶ 2007:



Medha Patkar
NBA launched
↑
1985

Right to Livelihood
Award
↑
1991

World Bank's
funding withdrawn
↑
1993

Nesubir
Economy

1961
Foundation Stone
of SSP

Environmental
Movements
(Silent valley,
Chipko)

Nandini Oya
NBA

Oya's oral histories
'Lathakani'
Narmada

1990

2001

2004

2007

- ▶ **Sardar Sarovar Project:**
- ▶ Narmada river constitutes core religious, social and cultural aspects, as well as supports livelihoods and sustenance of the Adivasis community
- ▶ These harmonious relationships were altered by the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP)
- ▶ Sardar Sarovar Dam was initially a dream of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel
- ▶ Nehru laid the foundation stone of SSP as part of nation building process



Medha Patkar

- ▶ Medha Patkar is an Indian activist known for her work with people displaced by the Narmada Valley Development Project
- ▶ Large-scale plan to dam the Narmada River and its tributaries in the Indian states of Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Maharashtra
- ▶ Patkar grew up in an environment imbued with a sense of social justice
- ▶ An advocate of human rights, Patkar founded her campaigns on the rights to life and to livelihood
- ▶ Patkar's activism took place when India was promoting dam building as a route to modernization
- ▶ Commissioner of World Commission on Dams



- ▶ **Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA):**
- ▶ Patkar is the founder of NBA, prominent anti-dam coalition in India
- ▶ The NBA spearheaded one of the most sustained and prolonged grassroots movements against dam construction on the Narmada river
- ▶ At the heart of the NBA agitation, however, was the fate of the Adivasi people—forest-based subsistence communities, often referred to as tribal



- ▶ Through the NBA, Patkar sought help for those rendered homeless because of the SSP and other large dams
- ▶ Patkar led NBA and some 3,000 displaced people on a march from Madhya Pradesh toward SSP site, but they were stopped at the Gujarat border by police and pro-dam activists
- ▶ After further protest and opposition, including hunger strikes, Patkar and the NBA achieved a breakthrough when the World Bank withdrew from the project
- ▶ Patkar has dedicated her life against damming of Narmada Valley
- ▶ Patkar jointly received the *Right Livelihood Award* with Baba Amte for seeking social justice and promoting alternative arrangements to the Adivasis

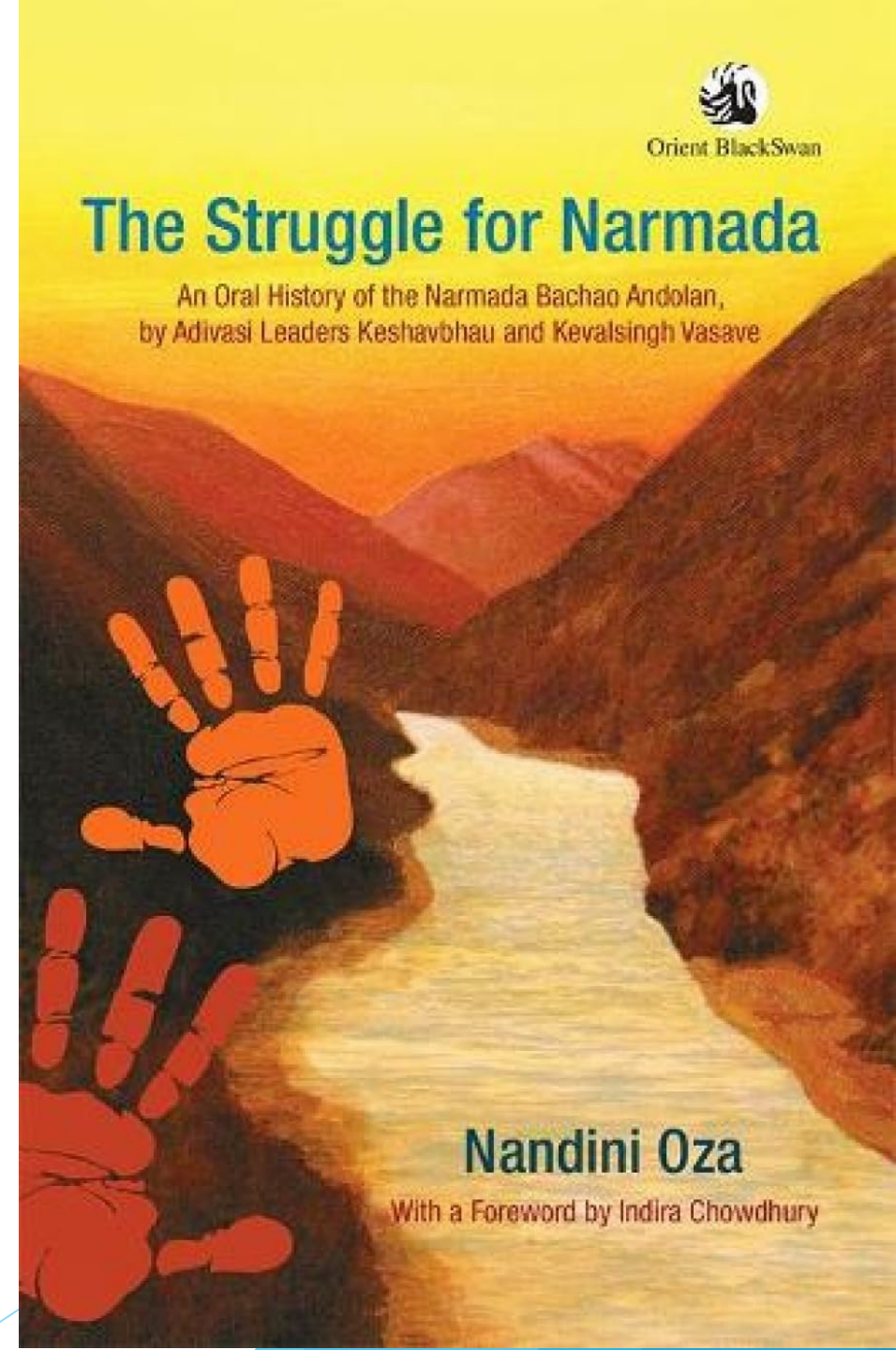
Nandini Oza [Full time activist of NBA (1990-2001)]

- ▶ Nandini Oza is a researcher, writer and an archivist
- ▶ She was the former President of Oral History Association of India
- ▶ As an activist of the NBA, Oza lived and worked amongst the people affected by SSP
- ▶ Oza's main responsibility in the NBA was to help mobilize and strengthen the organization of affected people and also coordinating programs, rallies, and demonstrations in Madhya Pradesh and in Gujarat
- ▶ The NBA placed the negative impacts of SSP before several forums including the World Bank and the Supreme Court

- ▶ Oza has represented NBA nationally as well as internationally
- ▶ One of the main responsibilities of Oza was fund collection for NBA
- ▶ NBA faced severe human rights violations (police firing, beatings, harassments, attacks on NBA offices, disruption of public meetings and restriction on the movement by the state)
- ▶ Oza's work in the NBA was to challenge human rights violations

- ▶ In 2002, Oza moved out of the role of a full time activist of NBA but continued to reside in the Narmada valley, maintaining close links with the struggle and the affected communities, spending much of this time in documenting these oral histories
- ▶ Since 2004, Oza's primary focus has been on recording the Oral History of the Adivasi struggles against the SSP
- ▶ She wrote '*Ladha Narmadecha*' in Marathi in 2017, recently translated into English as '*The Struggle for Narmada.....*' in 2022

- ▶ The central role played by the communities of Narmada Valley, especially the Adivasis, in this decades-long struggle cannot be ignored; yet their lifelong contribution, struggles and sacrifices are neither well-recorded nor known today
- ▶ Most of the literatures documented the middle-class-dominated activist narratives and their ideological filters
- ▶ The '*Struggle for Narmada*' is an effort in oral history that aims to capture the multifaceted complexities involved in the struggles of the Adivasi people

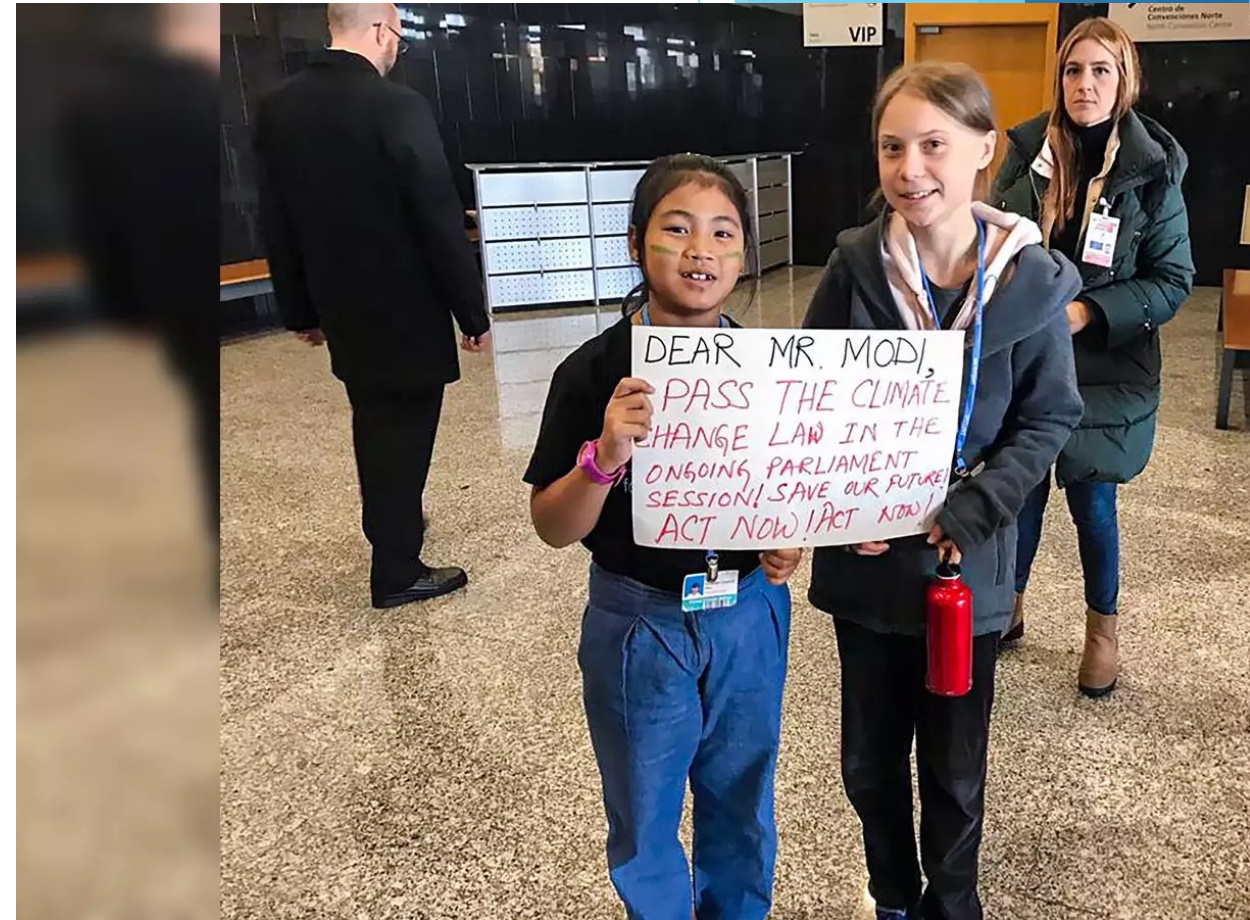


- ▶ Oza records the untold stories of two Adivasi leaders: Keshavbhau and Kevalsingh Vasave
- ▶ Oza interviewed them twice, first after their displacement from their villages in Maharashtra and again after their resettlement
- ▶ This allowed Oza to focus on the various layers of emotion and traumatic experiences that the Adivasis experienced due to their forced marginalisation and the overall impoverishment of their community

- ▶ Both leaders provide riveting accounts of their role in the resistance movement and how they conceived their challenges against the powerful dam builders
- ▶ They also share with a sense of triumph the relative successes during the course of their struggles (withdrawal of World Bank funding)
- ▶ Oza does well to extrapolate from her interviews how the flow of the waters was deeply woven into Adivasi traditions and identity-making

- ▶ In sum, Oza's innovative effort to capture the unheard voices of the Adivasi people provides us with much insight into how the anti-dam protests were perceived and comprehended by the affected communities themselves
- ▶ These oral accounts suggest that the Adivasis possessed considerable agency in shaping various mobilisation strategies against the Narmada dams
- ▶ *'The Struggle for Narmada'* is certainly an important and welcome addition to the growing literature, both academic and popular, against the global large dam industry

Licypriya Kangujam



Licypriya Kangujam

- ▶ Kangujam is a child climate activist from the Manipur state of India
- ▶ At her young age, Kangujam was affected by the cyclones and air pollution which shaped her to become a climate activist
- ▶ In 2018, Kangujam attended the United Nations Disaster Conference in Mongolia and thereafter founded the Child Movement
- ▶ Kangujam demanded to introduce climate education in the schools, to plant a minimum of 10 trees by a student every year, and to pass a climate law in India
- ▶ Inspired by Greta Thunberg, Kangujam started the 'great October March 2019'

- ▶ In the COP25, Kangujam jointly held a placard with Thunberg saying that, ‘Dear Mr. Modi, pass the climate change law in the ongoing parliament session! Save our future! Act now! Act now!’
- ▶ On the same platform, Kangujam appealed to the world leaders that ‘I have come here to tell world leaders that this is the time to act, and it is a real climate emergency.....’
- ▶ Kangujam further shared that ‘our leaders don’t trust each other. If they trust each other, we can easily fight the global climate crisis with a concrete action plan’

Kangujam's awards

- ▶ Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam Children Award (2019)
- ▶ World Children's Peace Prize (2019)
- ▶ Rising Star of Earth Day Network (2019)
- ▶ Global Child Prodigy Award (2020)
- ▶ Noble Citizen Award (2020)
- ▶ National Youth Day Award (2021)
- ▶ CNN News18 Water Heroes (2021)
- ▶ International Women's Day Award (2021)

Kangujam's interviews

- ▶ 'Survival for the Future: Interview with Climate Activist Licypriya Kangujam', interviewed by Harvard International Review in 2020
- ▶ 'Being a young climate activist' interviewed by Nature Human Behaviour Journal in 2022

Being a young climate activist

Q: What inspired you to become an environmentalist and a climate activist?

Kangujam: ‘.....I grew up in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, for my schooling. My life was hit by Cyclone in 2018 and Cyclone..... in 2019. During the cyclones, many people lost their lives and many children lost their parents and thousands of people became homeless. I was very sad. I couldn't sleep, I couldn't drink. I even couldn't take my food. After all these experiences, I moved to Delhi. Again, my life was messed up completely by high air-pollution levels and the extreme heatwave crisis. All such incidences in my young life turned me into a child climate activist’

Q: What does climate activism mean to you?

Kangujam: 'Climate activism is all about bringing a change. Fighting climate change means fighting for our safe future..... It's all about inspiring each other to save our planet and our future.....'

Q: What would you like the world to know about climate change and its effects in the Global South?

Kangujam: ‘..... we cannot deny the fact that climate injustice is deeply rooted in racism, capitalism and colonialism. The Global South is fighting the impact of climate change due to Western economic growth in the frontline..... We wanted the rich countries to pay for the loss and damage through urgent climate finance.....’

Q: How do you think scientists can help in the fight against climate change?

Kangujam: ‘Scientists have already shown us the solutions to the global climate crisis. Just we need to implement them. That’s why we’re pushing our decision-makers to listen to the science and act on science..... though scientists cannot stop global warming overnight, we can slow the rate and limit the amount of global warming by reducing human emissions to fight the climate change’

Q: What is your vision for the future of climate activism and the fight against climate change?

Kangujam: ‘I have a dream where there are more bicycles on roads, instead of more motor vehicles’

‘I have a dream where there are no coal power plants and thermal power plants, and they are replaced by clean solar energy’

‘I have a dream where all the children living in this world have clean air to breathe, clean water to drink and a clean planet on which to live’

‘Asking for clean air to breathe, clean water to drink and a clean planet to live on are our basic rights’

‘We need to keep speaking up about the climate crisis and need to hold lawmakers accountable for their political decisions’