

**Macro Violence, Micro  
Resistance.  
(Development Violence and  
Unarmed Grassroots Resistance)**

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*Unarmed Resistance:  
the transnational factor  
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‘Nonviolent change’ means not just the absence of violence but also a conscious decision to use such means of protest and resistance even if it entails personal suffering and bearing of violence perpetrated by the opposition. In contrast, ‘unarmed resistance’ is a broader more inclusive term, which implies passive action and is limited in depth. The purpose here is not to make a value judgement but only to make a distinction between the different concepts/phrases.

In India, nonviolence is often seen as an absolute, a sine qua non for enduring change. Much has been written about nonviolence theory and philosophy in the last 50 years, and it is generally viewed as a philosophy of life. It has been developed at a theoretical level as a refined technique by a small school that prefers to view nonviolent action in black and white terms given the history of India’s freedom struggle and the land gift movement<sup>1</sup>, which followed. Understandably, nonviolent action has not been understood in its totality even in its land of birth; philosophies and theories are the province of thinkers and visionaries. For nonviolence to speak to lay people, it should be seen more as a journey and a process that is evolving and which is accessible to everyone.

The historically oppressed have to discover their voice, strength and identity, before nonviolence might answer their needs and become their tool. Victims may often go through such a process aggressively/militantly before they become aware of nonviolence as an alternative way of change – one whereby durable peace, faith and trust might also be achieved along with a working relationship between parties to a conflict. Understanding this journey towards self-discovery is the only way that nonviolent philosophy might transform into nonviolent action. Viewing nonviolence puritanically and treating it as a preserve of the blessed will prevent it from ever propagating amongst the people.

India’s encounter with the philosophy and practice of nonviolence in recent history would seem to be a short break between the economic and political violence during the British and post British Independent India. The following account looks at State policy, its impact on the toiling majority who bear the brunt of development violence riding on the back of a politician-bureaucrat-corporate-media-judiciary consensus; and some shining examples of a search for a just alternative.

## **BACKGROUND & CONTEXT**

India is considered a newly industrialising and developing country that is egged on to catch up with the developed West. Gujarat state leads the way in implementing the pursued ‘globalising’ agenda in the last fifteen years. As a result there are rising investments in hazardous chemical industries that are:

- natural resource-intensive,
- that do not have much employment potential,
- cause large scale displacement and dispossession of large communities practicing traditional vocations.

While uncritical policy makers and economists like to circulate the growth-story, there is a tragic unfolding reality that most people sold to the idea of ‘globalisation’ either deliberately choose not to, or naively cannot, see. That reality is:

- growing inequality is the quickest social process and the biggest unreported story

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<sup>1</sup> The land gift movement initiated by Vinoba Bhave asked landowners to donate one-sixth of their land for redistribution among the landless in the country. Over 4 million acres was collected in this way.

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- 'high' economic growth is coupled with falling human well being, including decreasing per capita food availability
- we have fast cars, a few excellent expressways, underground metro rail, a choice of airlines on the one hand, and failing public transport and other public services on the other
- the glare from the spectacle of city beautification, high-tech urban infrastructure construction, and flashy glass towers that rise overnight, blinds people to the slums and ghettos being razed to ground making millions homeless (the last 2-3 years have seen massive demolition drives in every major city of the country)
- the profits from privatisation of public resources and national properties such as roads, water, electricity, coasts and ports, forests and lands, are promised to Corporations via concession agreements and special rights while their costs and losses are underwritten by public funds
- the privatisation of education, health services and public food distribution services
- laws have been and are being changed to bring about LPG (Liberalisation, Globalisation and Privatisation) changes, including the creation of special economic zones which are deemed foreign territories to circumvent the operation of labour and other laws.

### IMPACTS

**Indeed , development-induced displacement uproots more people than any tsunami, cyclone or earthquake.** For the common people, development most often can be distilled down to the **D's** of **Displacement, Dispossession, Unemployment, Disempowerment** and **Deskilling, Destruction** of natural resources and **Dehumanisation** of the toiling masses. The Development ideology brooks no dissent and rides roughshod over communities, cultures, traditional occupations and lifestyles. It would be too lengthy to detail every instance of development-induced violence therefore suffice it to cite only a few examples:

- dams and other development projects have displaced anything between 25 and 50 million people in the last 50 years<sup>2</sup>, 60 % of those displaced are indigenous people whereas they constitute only 8 % of the population
- uranium mining in the eastern predominantly tribal state of **Jharkhand** causes genetic defects among the families of mine-workers, and the authorities simply refuse to acknowledge the problem, while cities enjoy the benefits of nuclear power
- in the south eastern state of **Orissa**, 13 indigenous people trying to protect their lands from acquisition for a steel manufacturer were killed by the administration-police-corporation nexus. Their private parts were mutilated during post mortem to teach the indigenous people a lesson (this is not the only instance of violence and killing in the state)
- for the farmers in the southern states of **Andhra Pradesh, Kerala**, the western state of **Maharashtra** and the northern state of **Punjab**, the reality of globalising export-oriented agriculture has prompted mass suicides (over 100, 000 farmers in the last 10 years)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Estimates of various scholars have range from 25 to 50 million. According to a top official of the Planning Commission the fig. is closer to 50 million

<sup>3</sup> India's Agriculture Minister quoted this fig. in Parliament. The Home Ministry quotes farmers' suicides to be above 900, 000

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- ports and coast-based export oriented industrialisation is displacing and dis-employing fisher-people across the country (the leader of the movement against the port in Gujarat died of police torture)<sup>4</sup>
- factory workers are either forced to go without pay for months, or are losing their jobs<sup>5</sup> due to changing technology shifting production facilities

This is the state of the indigenous (adivasis), farmers, animal rearers, fisher-people, the factory workers – the primary producers in India’s high growth economy. The map of ‘21<sup>st</sup> century’, Information Technology driven high-tech, ‘developed’ India is blotched with the blood of the poor toiling majority. The result of mass suffering: about 15-20% of the mainly urban middle class have never had it so good – with the roaring materialism of fast cars, expressways, cheap flying, internet and super and hypermarkets who could protest.

The flavour of the times is:

- to be a **satellite** and **service** economy revolving around and dependent on others
- **pay and use**: only those with the means have the right and access to services
- **universalisation of middle class norms**, lifestyle, aspirations, the selling of dreams
- paying **lip service** to “sustainable development”, “participation”, “rights”, “justice” whereas the those at the wrong end of the stick live and experience a different reality
- a clinical **lack of sensitivity** to the violence and iniquity around,
- the **self-defence/violence** of the victim is magnified, and the **violence of the system** is legal

The tragedy is that the forces these processes unleash pit one set of victims/poor people against another set of poor people: the drought affected versus the displaced, the unemployed versus the dis-employed, farmers vs. factory workers and so on. People end up fighting for a share of the same small pie. This is in contrast to the criminally wasteful use of natural resources that sustains the lifestyle of a small population. First a scarcity is engineered, then the ‘brilliant’ solution of privatising resources in order to streamline their distribution is invented!

The details here may be drawn from India, but this story resonates throughout the world. This applies as much to the Ogonis of Nigeria, the Mapuche of Chile, the people of Cochabamba, Bolivia and the indigenous of Philippines. People everywhere witness their resources being appropriated in the name of more ‘efficient management’, ‘choice’, ‘liberty’. The irony is that our public discourse seems to get smarter, the language more refined. Consequently we are mystified by cleverly changing language disguising a constant reality. We are made to hear a language that conceals rather than communicates.

## RESISTANCE FOR SURVIVAL

The assault on traditional occupations affects a large number of communities across the country. Not all victim communities resist. Those that do are met with State force. It must be remembered that in developing 3<sup>rd</sup> World countries, the public is not necessarily sceptical of

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<sup>4</sup> Lt. Col. Pratap Save died of police torture because he led the anti-port movement in South Gujarat

<sup>5</sup> People’s Democracy, Vol. XXVIII, No. 44, dtd. 31<sup>st</sup> Oct. ’04 estimates job losses in the Manufacturing sector between 1998 and 2000 at 230,000, in Agriculture at 70,000 between 1992 and 2000, in Mining at 90,000 between 1994 and 2000.

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the machinations of corporate deceit and State force. It therefore gets cheated into parting with its homes and lands even when State power is not overtly used. There is also the hope that one might have a share in the party too. A study of how different affected communities react to violation of their right to life and livelihood is very instructive. Four examples cited in the following paragraphs pertain to Gujarat, where we have been actively involved in raising awareness and trying to organise people to resist.

**Movement against Umargaoan Port in Gujarat**

As part of its infrastructure development efforts, the Government of Gujarat planned a mega-port in South Gujarat, with Unocal, a US based Corporation involved mainly in the energy business. The company had a record of using forced prison labour in Burma/Myanmar, and of collaborating with the Taliban in Afghanistan. The port project claimed it would generate employment and boost exports. The loss of livelihoods fisher people and the resultant impact on a population of up to 50,000 would find no mention in the official GDP statistics. Peaceful protests of the fisher community were rewarded with arrests and torture leading to the death of its leader. If the Government thought that that would smother the movement, it was not to be. Public outrage and resultant solidarity, media spotlight, the defensive stance of the Government, contributed to the movement gaining strength. A nonviolent people's movement faced up to the might of the state machinery.

The Government tried its best to instil fear by filing false cases against activists, menacing movements of police in the area over an extended period and the like. The nonviolent tools people took recourse to were prayer and protest meetings, village to village foot marches, media outreach, getting prominent people, especially top retired army officials, (because the leader killed was an ex-serviceman) to visit the area for solidarity, setting up a people's commission of inquiry because the Government initially refused to set up an official commission were all part of the nonviolent strategy.

The development juggernaut today consists of the politician-bureaucrat-corporate nexus. A further challenge a movement faces is the withdrawal from the ranks of individuals who are either cowed down or bought over. They would normally have the potential to do the greatest damage, except in a nonviolent movement in which planning and decisions are a transparent process, in which such resistance is a conscious decision, and in which the willingness to undergo suffering is a primary resolve.

Participation in resistance has a liberating effect. People learn to overcome fear, they come to deal better with state power that otherwise commands awe. Every movement develops its own songs, literature and resources. The success of a movement ought to be measured from the bonds it creates among the activists even if it fails in the long run.

The semi-literate fisher people who spend a good proportion of their time out at sea have managed to hold off port construction for over 6 years now. Women played a very major role from the start and at every stage. It was the women who engineered the breakthrough from the spell of fear.

**Adivasi (Indigenous) Forest Lands Struggle**

Indigenous people, with their unique culture and oral history, lived in consonance with nature and a great faith in destiny. Often they were settled on by the ruler of the day in forest villages for logging wood first for the shipping industry, then for the construction of railways and then to meet the exploding urban demands. They were only wage labourers but ended up being held responsible for destruction of forests. They never demanded titles to the lands on which they were settled. Law and Government policy would have them displaced, their rights to land

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and forest curtailed to compensate for the environmental destruction caused by over-consumption, development and urbanisation. A decentralised but coordinated movement across different states in the country over the last 3 years has prevented them from being dispossessed of their lands. They have suffered state violence over the ages. According to Government Planning Commission estimates 60 per cent of all those displaced by development projects have been Adivasis though they constitute only 8 per cent of the total population. The end of British rule in India made no difference in their lives. The latest threat of eviction from their traditionally cultivated lands came in the year 2002. Tribal houses were destroyed in many places, criminal cases filed against them apart from usual harassment perpetrated by the Forest Department. Activist groups and NGOs got together as they realised there was a pattern in what was unfolding. There was a transnational dimension to what was happening to them. In order for India to fulfil international agreements to achieve 33 per cent of land under forest cover, Adivasis were expected to sacrifice their lands. Resistance consisted of village level meetings, demonstrations, holding non-official public hearings, court interventions and lobbying with the Government. Fortunately or otherwise politicians have to fight elections. Enough pressure was built on the Government to draft a new law giving people titles for lands traditionally belonging to their ancestors. The fight continues and the draft law is expected to be passed in the coming months.

### **Campaign against Industrial Pollution and Mining**

Gujarat being a forerunner in industrialising India is subject to a plethora of environmental problems that are conveniently overlooked as a 'minor' cost of advancement. The state specialises in all manner of chemical production, every river only carries effluent, groundwater is severely contaminated, hazardous solid wastes lie indiscriminately strewn across the 275 industrial hubs/estates across the state, and there are serious occupational and community health problems that will not be officially acknowledged.

The aim of organising people on this issue was to challenge the state policy of specialising in hazardous chemicals given that it's a water scarce state. Raising the various environmental and health issues should have resulted in a critical look at the policy. What was achieved was only technical fixes of effluent treatment and waste disposal, shifting the problem out of sight through some compensatory measures and a Public relations offensive by the Government.

Industrial workers exposed to occupational health problems do not mobilise because they are often migrants and therefore economic refugees willing to put up with a great deal. The affected local communities do not organise because they do not have it in them to challenge State policy, and would rather find a way around the problem, escape it rather than fight it. The present often becomes an enemy of the future!

### **The fight to save Land and Village Commons**

In trying to outdo itself in globalising and liberalising, the Government of Gujarat introduces ever-new schemes and incentives for potential investors and industries. To promote corporate farming the Government decided to turn over grazing lands and village common property resources for industrial agriculture. The different communities that make a living from these common property resources just do not contribute to the official GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and are therefore dispensable. These include goat, sheep and cattle rearers, those who live by making charcoal from local shrubs and plants, and others who engage in small time sand mining for a living. The "Save our Lands" is a campaign to protect the livelihoods of these marginal communities that is currently on, and how successful it will be is anybody's guess.

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The outcomes of these four battles cannot be viewed in terms of success or failure. It is meant to be a process. Yet the positives and the negatives varied. There was some measure of achievement in the first two instances whereas the third case should go down as 'no substantial achievement.' The fourth battle is unfolding at the time of this writing.

Resistance for survival transforms into survival for resistance for some. Struggle for change is not about fishing for small success stories. Objectives can be broken down into achievable steps but the woods cannot be missed for the trees; the larger vision cannot be lost.

### **LEARNINGS**

Lessons learnt from each of these campaigns have been very educative. One can itemize them as follows:

- i) It must be realised that these battles were not only against State power but also against the dominant global ideology of Liberalisation, Privatisation, Globalisation and therefore against a violent tide sweeping the world over.
- ii) A battle against State power is bad in itself and success stories are few and far between. The common people engaged in their daily struggle for survival do not have the time or energy to fight for change. They are often gullible. Their tendency is to find an escape from problems rather than confront them. We therefore have the phenomenon of activists, NGOs, and thinkers acting as advocates for the victims, without commensurate support from the affected. Activists can either be enablers and facilitators, or come to occupy leadership roles and decide for the affected. This has its own dynamics because they are 'outsiders' who do not suffer the plight of the victims and therefore cannot fully identify with them. Consequently there is the danger of preaching without practice.
- iii) In India, a real effective movement takes off only where a traditional community identity is involved, where people live and work together, share together the risks and hazards of survival as in the case of the fisher people and Adivasis. The odds are that migrants who constitute a disparate group thrown together will not organise as they do not constitute a community with a joint past or shared future.
- iv) Resistance, in order to be sustainable, has to be indigenous to the affected community. No amount of outside support will sustain it in the long run. It will in any case not be empowering if it is dependent on individual, charismatic, central, outsider leadership.
- v) Resistance, in order to be empowering, must necessarily be nonviolent because nonviolence is the only tool that is universally accessible, it involves an experiential journey of growth as one tries to bring over opponents to appreciate one's viewpoint rather than defeat them. It can plant the seed for a mutually shared future.
- vi) The State apparatus and the vested interests that are threatened by people's or people oriented campaigns waste no time in neutralising the campaigners using means fair and foul including the law, police, media and every possible tool to brand them as "anti-development", "anti-national" to render them politically untouchable.

This foregoing narrative relates to outside involvement that is very local or national. And yet it has its own dynamics. Transnational involvement has to be critically viewed in this light.

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**THE TRANSNATIONAL FACTOR / IMPACT**

It would be a folly to believe that the transnational factor has come into play recently with the advent of colonization, industrial revolution and present day technology. It would be good enough to note here that we have all stuck it out together for ages and benefited mutually.

In post-Independence India the two distinct streams of voluntary work are:

- a) constructive, developmental work carried out by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) who are funded by governments, foreign foundations, multilateral agencies and others, they collaborate, negotiate, implement Government and other fund-driven programmes. They would usually want to remain on the right side of the powers-that-be.
- b) struggle oriented, rights based activism which usually deals with a problem, project, policy or the like, it is a voluntary initiative and usually involves conflict with the government, bureaucracy or corporations.

While being concerned with the latter type of resistance work, the former cannot be overlooked because of the amount of space it occupies and thereby directly and indirectly affects the struggle.

They can be complementary, or can set the agenda and pace for each other depending on their relative strengths.

The transnational factor often, and erroneously so, ends up meaning and being limited to:

- a) Europe, US and the West,
- b) Financial assistance,
- c) The flow being unidirectional, from the west to the east

The reasons for this are obvious. There is very little independent and lateral communication and collaboration between the 3<sup>rd</sup> World, between India/Asia with Africa or Latin America for instance. Most of the intra-Third World communication is routed through Europe or the US and we end up seeing things through the western eyes whether it is at the people-to-people level, or through the media, and one gets the feeling that that's how it operates even between governments. It doesn't have to be so but that's how it seems to be. Financial assistance is the easiest form of collaboration. Other forms of assistance have their limitations and involve issues of language, perceptions, differences in situations and contexts, culture etc.

India's freedom struggle was a mass based movement fought with minimal direct transnational assistance. The effort was also to minimise dependence on financial resources to the barest minimum. All the work was voluntary. The organisational membership fee was a few pennies. The post-Independence development vision was totally founded on western financial aid that killed individual initiative, spirit of sacrifice and participation in the process. The \$ and Pound Sterling conversion rates had and continue to have a very distorting effect. Perceptions, policies, programmes are more often than not fund driven. In practice it is the funding agencies and foundations who deliberately or otherwise set the agenda. Consequently all attention is focused on material development, physical targets etc. A human-centred, rights based, social consciousness-focus was dispensed with. That's how it has been in the 60 years of official "development movement".

Consequently, we have a dinosaur of a development army that is apparently decentralised and autonomous, but conditioned in thinking, agreed in goals, objectives, using the same or similar language and style of operating. It is absolutely uncritical of the status quo and it will not challenge the establishment/official line. The development bureaucracy has grown too big and has a vested interest in self-perpetuation. It has the uncanny ability to convert every issue,



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problem and struggle into a fundable project. That being the rationale of its existence it will simply not disturb the apple cart. Social processes would be very slow moving and therefore uninteresting for the fund-techno-institution savvy. With changing times the language changes but the basic reality remains the same.

Meaningful resistance for change requires a critical mass of people that remains outside the system. It seems difficult to survive outside the system in the West. Working from within the system imposes the handicap of remoteness and a disconnect with the reality. Therefore if solutions coming from the west, or from those within the system in the east would be of limited utility.

The transnational influence is negative to the extent that it is limited to monetary aid, is of scale that is unwieldy and self-perpetuating, and disconnected from reality.

**Other forms of assistance and solidarity**

Activists working for peace and justice have always stood for sharing of concerns and globalisation of the movement/s. It is only in the last two decades that the language has been hijacked for use in commerce. In its real sense it would encompass the following:

- a) solidarity action, moral support
- b) sharing of information, analyses, multi-disciplinary expertise
- c) lobbying, exerting pressure, holding to account, especially when they have some kind of leverage on any of the players involved
- d) a two-way learning and sharing process

These are very constructive forms of support and help that play a crucial role in a movement. Any movement has to be a broad alliance between the affected victims, facilitator-enabler activists, media, conscientious intelligentsia-experts, and the global solidarity element. Every movement goes through various cycles and phases, it is never up and growing all the time. Experience teaches that the various elements of the alliance have to sometimes play more an active role and secondary role at different points in the cycle. Very often a movement needs a boost, especially when it effectively disturbs the status quo and a backlash from the establishment is inevitable. That is when transnational solidarity has to keep the flame burning, to let the perpetrators of injustice/violence know that the world is watching. On the other hand such solidarity makes the movement vulnerable to the charge of serving foreign masters, illegitimate interests etc. It must be borne in mind that the establishment-governments-corporation nexus have claim to some form of legitimacy/legal sanction whereas the resistance would appear to be largely 'self appointed'.

It is often the case that the transnational factor is either more active, it dominates, or is more visible because it consists of symbolic protests, lobbying, letter writing things that are easy. Those engaged in struggle on the ground face a more direct battle and therefore have a very limited space to operate in and are often subject to grave physical threat.

Globalisation of movements is imperative not just for support in 'problem areas' especially in the 3<sup>rd</sup> World but also for the 1<sup>st</sup> World that must question its lifestyles, consumption patterns and the repercussions it has globally.

Alternative globalisation is a resounding 'no' to is commerce driving all human actions, a 'no' to the subtle and not so subtle systemic violence, a 'no' to displacement and dispossession of the poor and toiling.

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It is a call for a human centred development, a search for technologies that promote life in consonance with nature. It entails a two-way exchange and learning from the indigenous knowledge and diverse cultures of the “illiterate educated”. It is an effort at deconstructing myths such as the need for “development of the poor”, “subsidising the poor”. The fact is that it is the poor who not only subsidise the rich but also sustain this planet.