



Association for India's Development

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PRESS RELEASE FOR MONDAY, MARCH 23rd

MEDHA PATKAR SPEAKS ON PEOPLE'S MOVEMENTS: THE STATE AND THE CIVIL SOCIETY

Cambridge, Mass.: Noted Indian environmentalist and human rights activist Medha Patkar addressed a gathering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on March 23rd as part of a talk entitled "People's Movements : The State and Civil Society." About 75 people attended the talk on this Monday morning.

Patkar has been spearheading the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada Movement) against the building of large dams on the river Narmada since the early eighties. Since then she has been involved with many peoples' movements across India against displacement, corruption, and communal violence. She is the recipient of several awards, including Amnesty International's Human Rights Defender's Award and the BBC Green Ribbon Award for the best international political campaigner.

She called the peoples movements in India as "reconstructive", highlighting that they were not anti-development. Rather they favored development that is participatory, transparent, just and equitable. She said that the Adivasi communities also wanted development, but not the kind where they have to shoulder only the costs and get no share of the benefits. "We do not favor developmental policies that fill godowns and leave stomachs empty," she said.

She sought to remind the audience that river valleys were civilizations within civilizations and that Narmada valley had cradled civilizations older than Mohenjodaro and Harappa. Destroying such valuable, dense and vibrant communities will cause incalculable harm to humanity as a whole. Material compensation, even when fairly disbursed, can never truly make up for what is destroyed.

Patkar also pointed out the irony of squandering of resources that are acquired unjustly by displacing indigenous communities. "The Sardar Sarovar Dam on Narmada irrigates only 7% of the area it was designed to do," Patkar cited.

She talked about movements like the Ghar Bachao Ghar Banao (Save Homes Make Homes), that have been exposing how glittering high-rises are coming up by displacing thousands of urban poor. Through the nexus of the politicians-builders-corporates, urban land is being grabbed at virtually no cost. While hawkers, who take up a sliver on the sidewalks, are being evicted, usage of cars that takes up a lot of space is being incentivized.

She strongly appealed to the Non-resident Indian population to go back to the home country to work with peoples' movements in advocating for the rights of the marginalized. Answering to a question, Patkar felt that each one of us could contribute by making changes in our own lives that fostered a value system of consuming to satisfy one's need and not one's greed.

PHOTOGRAPHS:

<http://gallery.aidindia.org/gallery/gallery2/v/AID+Chapters/AID+Boston/AIDBostonEvents/MedhaPatkarMar2009/PressRelease>

<http://www.aidboston.org/MedhaPatkar2009/boston.html>