

**State, modernity, nuclear energy and Muslims in India:
A case study of protest movement against the Jaitapur Nuclear Power
Project in Maharashtra, India**

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Introduction

India has witnessed several protest movements against the nuclear power projects in the wake of gigantic nuclear expansion. Protest against the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Project in Tamil Nadu was one of the major protests among this. Recently, Government of India have proposed many new nuclear power projects across the country, among these one of the world's biggest nuclear power project is planned at Jaitapur, the Jaitapur Nuclear Power Project in the Konkan region of Maharashtra. The project is spread around 1000 hectares comprising 7 villages in the Western Ghats with an estimated production of 9,900 MW and plan to install 6 reactors each of 1650 MW that was planned to be imported from the French nuclear giant Areva in a 18 billion Euro deal. However, Areva faced financial crisis and EDF, Électricité de France has taken up the project and further negotiations of the project is under way. The project has directly affected Madban, Nivel, Karel, Mithgavane, Varliwada and Natte villages and other neighboring areas of the district. The villages affected in Jaitapur have considerable Muslim population who are engaged in fishing and their participation is reflected in the movement against the project. Mr. Irfan Quazi and Mr. Tabrez Sayenkar were the leading campaigners against the project who were killed by the police during the protest movement. On the other side government has been negotiating with the community leadership by arguing that, the life of fisher folks will not be directly affected by the project, hence they should withdraw from the protest against the project. The opposition against the nuclear power plant in Jaitapur started with the very declaration of the project in 2008 as the proposed region is one of the biological hot spots of the Konkan region.

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Anti-nuclear activists and environmentalist across India and abroad raised concerns over the project for establishing a nuclear power plant in such biologically sensitive geographical area and other concerns such as the comparatively higher cost of electricity generation at the plant, seismic prone geographical area of Jaitapur, credibility of the EPR technology etc along with the very fundamental questions on the nuclear energy as a sustainable source for the energy generation. Locals started their opposition against the project as early as the project was declared and they resisted the land acquisition for the project when the land was being measured and acquired for the project. However, they couldn't resist the Indian nuclear establishment for long and the state made it sure that required land for the project is being acquired. After years of opposition to the land acquisition and intense struggle against the project, the land has been acquired and few infrastructure facilities have been constructed at the project site.

Key words: State, Modernity, Nuclear energy, Development, Muslims in India

Movements against nuclear power projects

Movements against nuclear energy emerged in the western world as an extension to the environmental movements in the second half of the 1970s (Kitschelt,1986). They started questioning the nuclear accidents in different regions in the world, and then these were further catalyzed by several nuclear accidents. For instance, the Three Mile Island nuclear accident in 1979 had triggered several protests in the US and elsewhere. These movements in the West were typically characterized as 'new social movements'. However in India, the emergence of anti nuclear movements was preceded by the Chipko Movement in 1970 and in the 1980's the Bhopal gas accident which raised serious questions of industrial safety and security. Later, many other people's movements that emerged questioning the construction of dams, displacement of people and related environmental costs, this in turn influenced other grass-root movements in the country such as protest against large dams being built across the Narmada river. Thus, the anti-nuclear movement in India, unlike in the West, is based largely on issues like livelihood, displacement and land acquisition. There are two streams of anti-nuclear movements in India, first an urban-based movement, which largely represents the anti-nuclear movement in the mainstream media. This movement is aimed at addressing the issue of the nuclear bomb rather than fall out of nuclear energy. The second movement is found in many parts but is restricted spatially. In this case, the movement is clear on its stand

vis-à-vis nuclear energy and the bomb. Unlike the first type, the second one clearly views the links between development, security, the state and nuclear scientists. This version of the movement is rooted in the livelihood of the people. The threat of displacement, loss of livelihood, alienation from their own surroundings and the harmful radiation from nuclear power plants are catalysts for this strand of the movement (Srikant, 2009). These two roots define the anti nuclear resistance in India out of which either of them could not grow independently because of several reasons. However, two movements that could gain a little bit momentum were the movement against the Kudankulam power plant in the state of Tamil Nadu and the protest against the Jaitapur Nuclear Power Project in Maharashtra. The consolidated struggle against the projects was able to get a halt for the construction of the projects for a while and was also able to educate people in India about the harmful effects of nuclear energy.

In Jaitapur when the project was announced, locals, fisher folks, different political parties and activist started voicing against the plant. When the land acquisition started for the project, people had started resisting the land grabbing opposing the proposed nuclear power plant, they had also started agitations and Dharna demanding that the power plant should not be constructed, they were also suppressed by the different agencies of state, leaders were arrested and those who were not ready to give their land were forcefully taken over. Jaitapur have also shown waves of protest and people's mobilizations against the plant, which came out strongly many a times since the plant was announced. Though, most of the Gram Panchayat in the affected area had unanimously passed resolution against the project, that didn't make any impacts. State and central government agencies repressed the local resistances time to time, they arrested peaceful protesters. The government has lathicharged protesters, promulgated Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC, relating to unlawful assembly) and Section 37(3) (1) of the Bombay Police Act (prohibiting different kinds of assembly), slapped cases on the agitators, including for attempt to murder, and intimidated the local people against expressing their anger. A number of leaders of the Konkan Bachao Samiti (Save Konkan Committee), the Konkan Vinashkari Prakalp Virodhi Samiti (Konkan Committee against Destructive Projects) and the Janahit Seva Samiti (People's Welfare Committee, Madban) the organizations that are in the forefront have been arrested many times. There are many local organizations under which the series of dharna and protest including hunger strikes took place, organisations like Janahit Seva Samiti, Madban, Konkan Bachao Samiti and Konkan Vinashkari Prakalp Virodhi Samiti. However,

the Jaitapure movement also got strong supports from other civil society groups in India, many solidarity marches were also organized by different organizations different times, those were also suppressed by the police and during many of these marches people were arrested in different places before they reach the project site in Jaitapur. People who are voicing their dissent are those who lost land, livelihoods, scared about their futures, children and the coming generations. Among these, Muslim fisher folks are one of the dominant community at Jaitapur who are at the forefront of this struggle which didn't get much attention in the discourses about the struggle in Jaitapur against the nuclear power project.

Muslims and Social movements

Prior the Independence and even after the independence, movements among the Muslims in India were largely categorized as the movements within the community for reformation, education, development of the backward community and movements for women's right etc. Most of these were within the community under the leadership of the community organizations, reformers, clergy and the community leaders. However, there were also political mobilizations of the community not only in the form of political parties but also as social movements. Recently, there is also political movement of Dalit Muslims in Bihar and neighboring regions that is the caste, class movement of the Indian Muslims called Pasmada Movement (PM) as a political response of the elitism and elite politics among the Muslims and also the raising the question of Caste and Class among Muslims. Women's movement has also emerged raising radical changes on the gender relations. Unlike the social movements led by Tribals against the state led development programmes and encroachments of their land which took their livelihoods and life, movements against atrocities, for dignity and freedom by Dalits, the assertions from the Muslims didn't received similar attention though they were part of the many similar struggles both by themselves and along with the others. Their struggles and political articulations got categorized outside of these discourses and got labeled as within the community, anti-national, anti-India or outside the realm of India, that is for Pakistan or elsewhere like Khilafatⁱ. Despite having many examples of the significant Muslim presence in many social movements such as justice for the victims of Bhopal gas accidentⁱⁱ, The struggle for the victims in Endosalfan in Kasargode, Keralaⁱⁱⁱ, the movement in Bombay against the demolition of slums and for the housing rights^{iv} nowhere the Muslims presence in these movements were talked about. These are some examples where the Muslim masses have been taking actively part in the social movement outside the so called community and community causes. Though there have been considerable Muslim

presence in the many other protest movements in India, none of them received attention with regards to the active participation of Muslim masses. According to the 2011 census Rathanagiri has around 30 per cent of the Muslims population. The villages that are affected by the project in Jaitapur have substantial Muslims population who speak Marathi, who are generally known as Konkani Muslims whose livelihood is depended on mostly on sea and land in the region. Only in Natte and Sakhri Natte villages that will directly affected by the project there is around 1500 Muslim families residing who are mostly fisher folks. Muslims fisher folks have been at the forefront of the struggles against the power project. In Sakhri Natte one of the village that is affected by the plant, Irfan Quazi a campaigner against the nuclear power project and a local mango trader, and nephew of Saifuddin Qazi a prominent local congress leader who is active in the struggle against the plant was killed in an accident during December 2010. He was on the way to pick up his kids from school when his two wheeler was hit by a police van, he was rushed to a primary health care center nearby and declared dead. His death made high suspicions that, the police and authority wanted to kill him and there by reduced the intensity of the protests, since their entire family was fully involved in the struggle against the project. Locals felt that the hand of police in the murder of Qazi and staged protests for justice for Quazi which was also turned into violence between police and protestores. In another incident on 18 April 2011 Tabrez Sayekar, a Muslim fisherman was killed in the police firing and many others were seriously injured. The police had fired against a peaceful people's rally against the proposed nuclear power project. This fueled the protest against the project again. After the death of Tabrez Sayekar, considering his death as a martyrdom of the struggle against nuclear power project people have also made a Chowk in his name which became the center of protests later. As a strategy to co opt the protesting people in the Muslim dominated villages, the state has reached out to the Muslims clerics and community leaders to convince them that the project is not going to directly affect them anyway and it's also not going to affect the marine life on which their lives are depended on. There have also been meetings of the officials and clerics and then community meetings with people in different villages. State officials held several meetings with the clerics and community leaders on this and villagers were also offered fishing jetty, creation of cold storage facilities, desilting of the Musa-qazi fishing jetty and provisions of nets and vessels. However, these things could not break the struggles against the plant.

"This struggle is a struggle for a better future for our children and coming generations, if there is no fish and other resource in sea, a generation can't survive here. Everyone is

participating in this and there is no divide that Hindus or Muslims. The nuclear radiation and the effects of power plant is not going to differentiate people on the basis of religion. They are trying in many ways to curb the protest and resistances, so far we have lost two lives, hundreds of people were injured and cases were charged on many people but state is going ahead with the construction of the plant". - Villager

Muslims in the area has been a strong support base of Indian National Congress Party. Congress had its government in the state of Maharashtra and at the center during the initial negotiations of the project and during the land acquisition process including the initial construction. People had turned strongly against the government in the state and at the center despite many congress leaders visiting the site and speaking to the people. Shiv Sena a pro Marathi Hindu nationalist political party in Maharashtra has also hold in the region. Shiv Sena along with few other parties were also opposing the project, though it does not have a clear policy on nuclear energy and nuclear power plants as such. Since the nuclear power plant has been a problem of the common people in the region and there is also mass movement against it, Sena is also opposing the project. They had to maintain their strong hold in Konkan region they had also taken a step against the plant and the congress government which was in power during the initial times was their principal enemy in the region.

"There is nothing Muslim about resisting the nuclear power plant, we are well aware what happen in Fukushima and other places. Our life is based on sea and the soil that we have here, we know how it will get affected by the plant, and we don't want the plant here. We can't live with a snake on our bed, that is why we are resisting this. Everyone is aware about the consequence of nuclear energy and it's a fight for our lives. Many strategies have been adopted by the government to stop us including killing, but we still continue to oppose the plant. They have also tried all possible ways to curb the resistance even through with community networks"

-A Villager

From what is known to public about the people's movement in Jaitapur there is nothing about Muslims or their significant presence. The presence of the Muslims in the resistance against the nuclear power project in Jaitapur was one of the significant social movement in which the strong presence and active participation of Muslims have been observed. Two people who got killed in connection with the movement were also belonged from the same community, among the injured and the number of cases resisted against the people in connection with different protest and rallies from the community were also

significant. Challenging the diverse mechanism to curb the resistance by state, the people's movement against the nuclear power project still continues. This has taken place in Jaitapur despite the strong efforts of the state to co opt Muslim fisher folks involving different officers and trying to influence the movement via clerics and community leaders. In this light of this, I argue that, the debates on the resistance against the state led developmental projects in the post colonial India, Muslims are seen as the passive subjects of development rather than as a mass that confronted the state. However, Muslim fisher folks in Jaitapur have been instrumental in the resistance against the project and the actively part of the people's movement that has been going on since 2008. It is generally believed that, the Muslims can be influenced and co opted easily by the state and other power strictures. However, the concern of the common fisher folks and farmers in the region remained at the center of the resistance against the project. Though the state and its power structures have made continues efforts to influence the clerics and community leaders in order to convince the community and get them out of the struggle against the nuclear power project that has not impacted in destroying the resistance against the project. As the negotiations and discussions are in progress for the project the struggle against the project continues. The participation and role of the coastal Muslim population in the protests against the nuclear power plant in Jaitapur against the nuclear power project shows how Muslims are not only responding to the modernity but also questioning and challenging the state crafted model of development.

Note

- (i) See Steven M. Buechler 1995.
- (ii) Aligarh movement led by Sir Sayed Ahmed Khan. The main thrust of the movement was to persuade the Muslim landed gentry to take an English education without out that it was feared that Muslims would be unable to compete with the Hindus and would remain backward, Movements like Khilafat movement (Shah 2004).
- (iii) The Bhopal Gas accident, 1984 was a catastrophe in which Forty tons of toxic gas (Methy-Iso-Cyanate, MIC) was accidentally released from Union Carbide's Bhopal plant. An estimated 10,000 or more people died. About 500,000 more people suffered agonizing injuries with disastrous effects of the massive poisoning.
- (iv) Plantation Corporation of Kerala has been spraying Endosalfan in the cashew plantations in the distinct of Kasargode, Kerala during 1976 and 2000, more than 50000 villagers of Kasargod district in Kerala, India have been affected by this.
- (v) Mumbai city has witnessed a strong anti eviction and housing rights movement for last more than 3 decades. Mumbai has around 20 per cent Muslim population mostly concentrated in Slums and they have been at the forefront of mobilizing for the housing rights.

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