Since 1987, Narmada valley oustees and their NGO representatives have been non-violently protesting their forcible displacement caused by the construction of the Sardar Sarovar dam. As their protests have escalated so have state actions to stop the protests. Indian NGOs have sought national and international attention to expose the World Bank and Indian state governments for violating and abusing the basic human rights of the people protesting their displacement by Sardar Sarovar.

The human rights abuses in the Narmada valley include unprovoked, excessive physical police abuse towards non-violent protesters; discriminatory arrests based on fabricated, trumped up charges; arbitrary invocation of prohibitory orders to check the movement of activists; failure to provide charges upon arrest and witness before a magistrate within the constitutionally mandated period; failure to provide food and medical care to detainees; theft of personal property by police and other state officials; and the failure of law enforcement to be representative of, responsible and accountable to the community as a whole.


When considered cumulatively as detailed below, these abuse must be as part of a systematic, official effort to intimidate rural poor and tribal people to repress the views, demands and actions of a non-violent movement having clear social, environmental, and economic concerns about a large scale development project...

A majority of the oustees in the states of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra have been protesting their forcible displacement since 1987. Many have declared their total opposition to the project and are involved in a Gandhian, non-cooperation movement, refusing to move from their villages. Numerous non-violent
protests have been staged with the support of the grassroots organizations Narmada Bachao Andolan, including sit-ins, bridge blocking, rallies, and marches. Over the past few years, there have been an increasing number of human rights violations associated with these protests. The state has increasingly used repressive police force to stop these protests, silence the activists and intimidate the Narmada valley ‘oustees.’ This has generated an atrocious array of human rights violations.

As the oustees are outnumbered in their own villages by hordes of armed police, as the movements of dam opponents are blocked by police and inspiration activists are publicly beaten and carted off by police, some Narmada Valley oustees have been intimidated into accepting their own powerlessness and have accepted alternative land, resigning themselves to being displaced. However, a majority of oustees continue their opposition to Sardar Sarovar in the face of this repression. The tension has now reached new heights, as partial submergence of some villages due to the partially constructed dam is inevitable this monsoon. Currently there are daily collisions between resolute, but peaceful, villagers and armed police. The situation seems intractable and any acceptable resolution will depend on the government initiating an open and fair dialogue with the oustees and their supporters.

[The report goes on to list 72 specific instances of human rights violation over the period from 1988 through 16 April 1992 including invocation of the Office Secrets Act of 1923 in 1988, beating and intimidating protesters, including pregnant women, forcing villagers from their homes, abusing their family members and destroying their identification papers.]