Chapter VII
PUBLIC MOBILISATION ON KAIGA PROJECT

One of the basic objectives of the voluntary organisations is to influence the political process and ultimately to serve the interests of the people of a particular region. There are a number of voluntary organisations in the North Canara district of Karnataka state. These voluntary organisations have been uniting people to achieve the specific objective of facing the likely environmental problems of the Kaiga project. Therefore, voluntary organisations have been mobilising people on problems of the Kaiga project and thus they are attempting to provide inputs to the public policy making.

Since 1985, an anti-nuclear agitation has begun threatening the three new reactors either proposed or being constructed at Kakrapar in Gujarat, Kaiga in Karnataka and Kothamangalam in Kerala. And the Department of Atomic Energy has been forced to re-think about the Kaiga project in the light of a directive from the Supreme Court. Of all its enemies, the one which the DAE understands the least is democracy.

In Gujarat the Gandhians have begun to take a prominent lead in the agitation against the two 235 MW atomic reactors being constructed at Kakrapar. They have decided that there is a clear link between the 'atoms for peace' and 'atoms for weapons' programmes of all governments across the globe. The Institute for Total Revolution - ITR (Sampoorna Kranti
Vidyalaya, Gujarat) took the lead in the agitation in Gujarat by organising seminars and public meetings.

The first demonstration against the Kakrapar plant was launched on May 1, 1985 at Bedkuavadur. Today, signature campaigns and programmes educating the villagers continue with the intention to compel the authorities to reverse the decision to go ahead with the plants at Kakrapar.

The second major agitation against an atomic reactor arose in Kerala in respect of the plans to locate two 235 MW reactors at Kothamangalam. Here the opposition came from the teaching community and the local scientists who formed a society called the Organisation for Protection from Nuclear Radiation. Other environment groups also involved themselves in the agitation, including the Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishat (KSSP).

There have been protests against the plants at Narora in Uttar Pradesh and at Nagarjuna Sagar in Andhra Pradesh. In the former case, anti-nuclear activists from Delhi travelled to Narora to register their protests, but were unable to get popular local support.

As for the Nagarjuna Sagar plant, a major national seminar addressed by former Supreme Court Judge V.R. Krishna Iyer had already been organised as part of the strategy of mobilising public opinion against the construction of the proposed reactors.
The anti-Kaiga nuclear reactor agitation is another mass-based agitation against nuclear energy to emerge in the country.

Such agitation helped to mobilise the people against nuclear projects. In the context of any agitation on issues of public importance voluntary organisations are influential in mobilising the people.

The voluntary organisations and the elites motivate people in a conscious manner to agitate against the project and to force the government to stop the project. They attempt to educate people. The environmentalists and voluntary organisations have generated debates on issues and problems of Kaiga. This has significantly contributed to the agitation against the Kaiga project in Karnataka.

The local elites also have played a very crucial role in mobilising the people. They have tried to educate the common people by creating in them awareness about environmental hazards of the Kaiga project. Public mobilisation by voluntary organisations, local elites, eminent personalities like Shivram Karanth, Pejawar Swamiji etc. against Kaiga, was very effective. Almost all sections of society were involved in expressing their concern against the Kaiga project.

In the initial stages, the issues concerning Kaiga appeared to be of a regional character and the support base was confined to local areas.
Subsequently it was realised that issues concerning nuclear power projects have a bearing on the whole country. As a result, people from outside the region of the Kaiga project took interest in the issues and problems of Kaiga and started to express their concern against the project. Such concern was expressed by way of processions, demonstrations, satyagrahas etc.

The Nuclear Power Corporation of the government also arranged a counter demonstration justifying the Kaiga project and mobilising people in support of the project. But its impact on the local people was quite negligible.

**Role of Personalities in Anti-nuclear Agitation**

There are only a few critics who, in the absence of any mass awakening persistently continued their protests through the media. Prominent among them may be mentioned Praful Bidwai, a powerful writer and an eloquent speaker who is working as an assistant editor with the *Times of India*. Leading national environmentalists like Sunderlal Bahuguna, Baba Amte, Medha Patkar have been influencing people on issues concerning environmental protection.

Eminent literary figure and elite like Shivaram Karanth has influenced significantly in mobilising people on Kaiga issue in the entire Karnataka state. The charisma of Shivaram Karanth has played an influential role in mobilising people. He adopted the Gandhian ideology
of environmental protection and Gandhian techniques of satyagraha (Quest for Truth) for mobilising the people.

Another vocal critic has been Dhirendra Sharma, who has voiced his concern for environment in his book "India's Nuclear Estate". Such personalities have influenced the elites in North Canara and they in turn were able to voice their protest against the Kaiga project.

Voluntary Organisations in Anti-Kaiga Agitation

Public mobilisation and agitation at grassroots level did take place in the initial stages of Kaiga movement in the vicinity of the nuclear reactor under construction. Later on it spread to the other parts of Karnataka and also Goa.

Public mobilisation started with a small group of socially conscious "omnivores" working with larger number of eco-system people who explained the hazards of nuclear projects. The elite and the literate people decided to mobilise the general public to struggle against the threat to the existence of the people living in and around Kaiga.

The voluntary organisations, the elites, etc. through a process of organisation and struggle have tried to educate, enlighten and mobilise the public about the environmentally destructive nuclear power projects.
Voluntary organisations or Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in urban centres have taken keen interest in nuclear related environmental issues and as a consequence, a number of workshops and seminars were organised to motivate, and generate public awareness and to mobilise the people, against the Kaiga movement. By spreading the message of environment through the skillful use of media, and more innovatively organising protest marches and eco-development camps, it has been possible to mobilise the public against the Kaiga project.

These groups not owing allegiance to any political party, have been trying sincerely to focus public attention on the linkages between environmental degradation and the Kaiga nuclear project. The action groups in the environmental field by spreading consciousness, have sowed the seeds of protest against the very process of development itself.

Environmental activists and elites have raised major questions about the orientation of economic planning in India and Karnataka, its in-built biases in favor of nuclear energy and its neglect of ecological considerations. On the other hand, they have also suggested an alternative framework (micro and mini-hydel schemes) for development which they argue would be both ecologically sustainable and socially just.

The collective response against the Kaiga and environmental degradation are being given wide publicity in the print media. Leading
environmental activists like Shivaram Karant, journalist Nagesh Hegde, intellectuals like Vishnu Kamat have published a number of articles in newspapers drawing attention of the public to the environmental degradation likely to be caused by Kaiga project.

**Mass Media in Anti-Kaiga Agitation**

There has been a virtual spate of environmental writings in English and Indian language newspapers and magazines. Among the most notable of such publications have been the Citizen’s Reports On "The State of India’s Environment," and the magazine *Down to Earth* published by the Delhi based Centre for Science and Environment and a number of books and articles in magazines on such subjects as energy, environment and nuclear power etc. These can influence the elites in perceiving issues and problems of environment.

The twin govt. owned electronic media- Radio and T.V. - also have been playing an important role in reporting, interpreting and publishing against the degradation of nature and environment in India. But such propaganda fails to reach the hearts of the people. But a few dedicated workers of voluntary organisations interested in the welfare of the masses and preservation of the environment have been able to win the confidence of the people as they reach the hearts of the people through the protest marches.
We rely too much on T.V., Radio, films and books but all these may not have living spirit which can touch the hearts of the people. All great social revolutionaries in the past lacked the modern means of communication, but whatever they spoke came from their hearts and reached the hearts of people. This message lives in the hearts of the people as already stated.

In mobilising the people towards environmental consciousness, nuclear hazards and its impact on economy of the nation, oral means of communication also plays an important role. For example, the hazardous effects of Kaiga such as deforestation, and other pollution problems were demonstrated by the people of the North Canara district through plays and folk songs in all parts of the district. Such plays have certainly contributed to public awareness against Kaiga project.

**Gandhian Techniques in Anti-Kaiga Agitation**

In the state of Karnataka, themes on environmental abuse are presented on the stage in the dance-drama form known as Yakshagana. In the sphere of communication too, the most innovative technique of the environmental movement adopted by Mahatma Gandhi. "Padayatra" or walking tour, was used by Gandhi to spread the massage of communal harmony. His disciple Vinoba Bhave, followed it to persuade landlords to donate land to the landless, popularly known as "Bhudaan" movement. Padayatra has been enthusiastically revived by environmental activists.
The most notable Padayatra organized to create awareness on environment was the "Save the Western Ghats March" of 1987-88. This took seven months of preparation and involved over 150 voluntary organisations from the states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Goa and Maharashtra. The predominantly urban marchers themselves came from a variety of backgrounds and age groups. Their aim was three fold; (i) to study at first hand environmental degradation and its consequences on people living along the Ghats; (ii) to try and activate local groups in playing watch-dog role to prevent further ecological deterioration and (iii) to mobilise public opinion against Kaiga project in general.

As methods of mobilising public and creating consciousness among them, Satyagraha and Padayatra have received considerable coverage by media.

The "Save the Western Ghats March" inspired Padayatras across other vulnerable mountain systems. A 'Save the Sivaliks' march was undertaken across 200 kms of Sivalik range in Jammu and Kashmir during the winter following the Western Ghats enterprise, while in early 1991 a 50 day march was organized through the Eastern Ghats of Andhra Pradesh and Orissa (Vanya Pranta Chaitanya Yatra).
Interest Generation Against Kaiga Project

While there is widespread agreement within the environmental groups as regards the failures of the present development model by nuclear projects, the voluntary organizations made adequate efforts at working out possible alternatives of energy production for development.

The voluntary organisations and the elites have provided enormous publicity material highlighting the hazards of nuclear energy degradation of natural forests and their plant and decline in animal species urging the government to take remedial action. They also filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court against the proposed Kaiga Nuclear project in North Canara district. These activities commanded a popular following. This made the proponents of nuclear energy to dub environmentalists as being anti-progress or even as agents of foreign powers out to sabotage India’s forward march.

Mobilising the public has been proving to be an uphill task because the government of India has been holding the nuclear power stations as prize carrots to state governments. The state governments, in turn, consider it as a matter of prestige to have a nuclear plant in their states. Politicians consider it to be a vote-getting machine for the ruling party and the people are being lured of job opportunities in the plant.
Systematic campaign is inevitable to mobilise the people to dispel the myth that nuclear energy is a remedy for removing underdevelopment and a source of energy for achieving progress and prosperity. However, elites on their part maintain that nuclear energy is not a safe, cheap and clean source of power.

As things stand today, very few people know the true nature of nuclear energy. Even scientists, economists, physicians and administrators in the developing countries are unaware of the danger it poses to the future generations and the losses it causes to the people's purses directly and indirectly.\textsuperscript{5}

Interestingly, a large section of the public fears the dangers associated with this unfamiliar energy source. Consequences of radiation, disposal of nuclear waste, the spectre of cancer - all of these can be and are not properly understood by a large section of the public.

The accidents at Three Mile Island and Chernobyl intensified these fears. These fears are based not only on what actually happened as a result of these accidents, but also on what might happen. But according to the philosophy of Friends of the Earth International "Think Globally, Act Locally," the environmentalists have given a number of illustrations from different countries to convince the people that nuclear problem was becoming a threat to the earth and mankind.\textsuperscript{6}
The Kaiga controversy is a rallying point for many Karnataka people in their struggle against the Kaiga project. The project is opposed by literate and illiterate, affected and unaffected people. They question the wisdom of the government in imposing development on an unwilling people even to the extent of their extinction in case of an accident.

People's opposition to the Kaiga plant generated public interest against the project. A large number of students, journalists and women aligned themselves to the side of the Kaiga opponents.

The history of people's opposition to the Kaiga project dates back to the days before the Chernobyl accident. The agitation in the district began with a march by 2 young men from Sirsi to Karwar. The agitation gained momentum with the storm created by the Chernobyl accident. The first meeting of villagers was organised in Malavalli, a small village in the midst of hills and thick forests. In December 1984, about 300 people gathered from different villages. At this meeting they evolved a strategy to oppose the mighty nuclear establishment. This led to an awakening among the people, leading to a grassroots level agitation in North Canara district.

The task of mobilising the villagers was difficult as the topography of the area is quite tough and one had to walk for hours to reach a village. Even after this, it proved difficult to explain to the innocent villagers about the risks involved in nuclear energy.
Spontaneously or otherwise, the initial resistance as a form of primary protest to the Kaiga project began in most cases after some of the harmful consequences of the project were explained in detail. Pre-realisation about the harmful effects of the project itself mobilised the people by external agencies like voluntary organisations, elites, etc.

The voluntary groups conducted research on Kaiga and other affected areas. The data was later used to authenticate, and strengthen the people's opposition to the project. Information campaigns were also conducted in rural centres, urban centres, academic institutions and also outside the country.

In November 1987, a memorandum of public concern signed by 60 prominent citizens including U. R. Ananthmoorthy, then Vice Chancellor of Gandhi University, Kottayam, late Gopalkrishna Adiga, Poet, Shivaram Karanth and others demanding a national debate on nuclear energy, was submitted to the Governor of Karnataka against the establishment of the Kaiga project. In October 1988, hundreds of environmentalists and elites from different parts of the state met in Karwar under the leadership of Pejawar Swamiji and staged a protest against the project and courted arrest along with others. On October 22, 1988, about 3000 people led by North Canara Zilla Parishat member Manorama Gaonkar, took out a procession through the streets of the town and staged a dharana before the Thashildar in Yellapur demanding immediate scrapping off of the Kaiga nuclear plant.
Members of Parisara Samrakshana Samiti on 17th January 1989, picketed government offices at all the taluk headquarters of North Canara District, demanding stalling of work on the atomic power plant at Kaiga. In February 1989, with the arrest of a few fishermen leaders on criminal charges during the agitation, a tense situation was created in Karwar and a bundh was observed. On April 26, 1989, the agitators led by the Pejawar Swamiji observed "Chernobyl Day" by going on a hunger strike at Kaiga.

The eminent leadership of late L. T. Sharma an environmentalist, who spearheaded the agitation, gave momentum in mobilising people against Kaiga. Even doctors, advocates and teachers gave moral support to this agitation.

The tempo of the agitation was kept up constantly. The agitators gheraoed the local MLAs, MPs and the then chief minister, Ramakrishna Hegde. Then he promised to hold a public debate on nuclear energy before taking the final decision on Kaiga. The agitators called this struggle a second battle of independence.

The state government of Karnataka appointed 4 committees to visit nuclear power plants all over India and to submit a report. Each committee visited different nuclear power plants and submitted its report asking the state government to abandon the idea of establishing a nuclear power plant at Kaiga.7
Opposition and resistance to Kaiga project was intensified in most parts of Karnataka and Goa. Because for the local people and other inhabitants of these areas Kaiga nuclear project means a threat to their survival, the erosion of their resource base, forcible eviction, displacement from their traditional home-lands, exposure to radiation hazards and unknown death. Even with sufficient precautions taken by government and nuclear scientists to deal with the likely problems of environment in Kaiga project, public has always feared that a reactor would one day explode. Being aware of the consequences of one such accident i.e.Chernobyl, they do not want to be exposed to such risk. Moreover, people have become aware that nuclear power leaves wastes, the disposal of which is coupled with dangers of radiation.

Against such background, people question the wisdom of relying on the dangerous nuclear technology. Economically also, they feel nuclear power does not make sense and safety-wise we must anticipate more Chernobyls; healthwise also we are now only beginning to feel the consequences of what might happen after 30 years of using nuclear power.

Voluntarily, a large number of people started to support the agitation against the Kaiga project. The elites feel that nuclear power is particularly irrelevant to India. They also feel, there is low level of electrification in India. Therefore, the priorities must be electrification of the rural India and not mimicking the west where electricity consumption is high. Besides, the commissioning of the project will entail huge debts.
It is learnt, the common man in the third world consumes 120 watts of electricity compared to 2,900 watts in the U.S.A. - 24 times more. This being the case, local electrification schemes based on indigenous resources are far more relevant to the needs of the people in India than large power stations, super grids, etc. - ideas borrowed from the west.

Ignoring the feelings, opposition and agitation of the people, the nuclear establishment encroached upon tropical forests in Kaiga and earth work has started. People are wondering as to why the government is behaving like a dictator. Even before laying the foundation stone for the Rs.2000 crores Kaiga plant, the work has begun. To date, the reactor buildings, houses, etc. have come up. Thus it appears the government has laid the foundation for the grave for burying of the democratic process. India is the biggest democracy in the world: However, its government through the nuclear establishment, appears to be acting systematically against people's aspirations.

In the North Canara parliamentary elections of 1989, the issue of protecting environment was the focal point in the election manifestoes of major political parties like Congress(I), JD and others were held mainly on the issue of environment. But, the independent candidate, Shivaram Karanth contested the election making the Kaiga as the main issue.
Hence, during the 1989 parliamentary elections, the issue of Kaiga and protection of the environment gained much attention of the people.

### The Results of 1989 Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name of the Candidate</th>
<th>Political Party</th>
<th>Votes Secured</th>
<th>Percentage of Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>G. Devaraya Naik</td>
<td>Congress(l)</td>
<td>2,40,571</td>
<td>35.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Ananth Nag</td>
<td>Janata Dal</td>
<td>2,08,803</td>
<td>30.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Basanna Palkekar</td>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>82,534</td>
<td>12.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rajya Raitha Sangha</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Shivaram Karanth</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>58,902</td>
<td>8.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>B.D. Naik</td>
<td>Janata Party</td>
<td>23,616</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Keshava Durugappa Naik</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>15,077</td>
<td>2.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>M.S. Darshvantha</td>
<td>C.P.M</td>
<td>9,352</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Vasu Naik</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>4,155</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Krishna Naik</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>3,217</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>D.N. Naik</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>1,754</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Votes Polled:** 6,47,981 94.71

**Invalid Votes:** 36,166 5.30

**Total:** 6,84,147 100.00

The Congress(l) and the Janata Dal were the only two parties having secured more than two lakh votes. Ananth Nag though a popular film actor, secured less than the Congress(l) candidate. The Raitha Sangha candidate secured third highest number of votes and next to him was the environmentalist Shivaram Karanth.

It is to be noted that Shivaram Karanth was a non-party leader and contested as an independent candidate. When he decided to contest the election from Karwar, he was requested by the then chief Minister, Mr. Ramakrishna Hegde to contest on behalf of Janata Dal. But Shivaram Karanth refused the offer. He declined to associate himself with the Janata Dal because he felt, he could not take independent decisions and put forth his environmentally sustainable development views being in the party.

The Janata Dal stand on Kaiga would not be any different since, it was this party which tried tirelessly to establish the Kaiga plant in the region. So, naturally it had to uphold the establishment of the nuclear plant at Kaiga whereas Shivaram Karanth was vehemently opposed to the plant. He realised that if he were to join the Janata Dal he must abide by the decision of the party which favoured the Kaiga project and could not oppose it. Or else, he must try to persuade the people in power to drop the project which they might not do since, they were pioneers of the plant. So, the next alternative that would have been left to Shivaram Karanth was to resign from the party in order to safeguard the environment and the interests of the people of the region.
It is an open secret that money and mafia power plays a vital role in any election. The 1989 Parliamentary elections were not an exception. The political party candidates spend huge amounts of money and party funds to get elected. So, the votes that the party candidates secure cannot genuinely represent the will of the people. There can be a number of manipulated votes and the people might not have voted honestly and according to their conscience.

At the time of the 1989 elections, Shivaram Karanth was out of Karnataka. So his supporters and well wishers who were also environmentalists, campaigned in favour of Shivaram Karanth. There was no influence of money or high promises to give to the people. His election manifesto was mainly concerned to protect the environment by stopping Kaiga nuclear project.

In the election campaigns, people were enlightened about the hazardous effects of Kaiga plant like deforestation, nuclear radiation, waste disposal, water contamination, air pollution, etc. The elites and the people supporting environment voted for Shivaram Karanth. Hence, the nearly 60,000 votes secured by Shivaram Karanth were genuine and honest. These people voted according to their genuine conscience. Securing 60,000 votes without the influence of money power etc. positively indicated the real personality of Shivaram Karanth and the acceptance of his ideology by the voters.
The environmentalists felt that there were actually two groups at the time of election. While one group, the government group, strongly supported the project, the other group strongly opposed the project. But, government with its election tactics wooed the people to cast their votes in favour of their party candidate. The political parties also highlighted in their election manifestoes other vital problems like food, housing, etc.

The number of votes secured by Shivaram Karanth shows that the environmentalists were able to mobilise the people with regard to the problems of environment and the Kaiga nuclear plant. These votes clearly indicate the earnestness of the voters and their faith in protecting the environment. Several non-political leaders conducted their campaigns in favor of Shivaram Karanth with transparent honesty and strong commitment which are seldom found in the utterances or activities of party leaders.

The public could see the difference between the hollow promises of the vote seeking politicians and the devotion and purposefulness of the non-party leaders. The non-party leaders, who supported Shivaram Karanth, often exposed the designs of the government whose activities would pollute the environment and threaten the life of living beings.

**Collapse of the Dome**

The Kaiga project was started amidst agitation, protests and opposition by the environmentalists. For 4 years continuously, they protested and agitated against the Kaiga project declaring Kaiga is not safe.
The collapse of a portion of the concrete, in the dome of the first reactor building of the Kaiga Atomic Power project from a height of 40 meters on 13th May, 1994 at 11.30 a.m. further aggravated the fear of the people about the safety of the Kaiga project. At construction stage, the dome collapsed. This gave rise to increased controversy over the issues associated with the project. The collapse of the inner containment dome of Reactor I at Kaiga confirmed the fears of the anti-Kaiga activists that Kaiga nuclear project is not safe.

Reactions

The people of North Canara district and the state have expressed fear over the collapse of the dome. This event has led to increased suspicion about the likely harmful effects of the nuclear plant and contributed to mobilise the people against Kaiga project.

The scientists of the Nuclear Power Corporation (NPC) state that the dome is designed to withstand an earthquake measuring 6.5 on the Richter scale and that the double containment structure forms the 5th barrier against radiation escaping from a damaged core. But, even in normal weather conditions and in the absence of earthquakes or other natural calamities, the reactor dome collapsed. If, by chance, the dome had fallen when the reactor had been functioning, thousands of people would have died. Radiation would have spread even in the neighbouring states and resulted in destruction of living beings in the area. A disaster like the
Chernobyl may take place in Kaiga also. People have realised that all is not well with Kaiga. Most of them have totally lost confidence in the scientists who support the Kaiga project.

The atomic scientists, experts and the departmental officials announced their reactions to the dome collapse that Indian technical know-how is supreme and is much advanced and as such the plant is most safe. They declared that there will be no compromise with regard to safety.

There is no definite and satisfactory explanation given by the Nuclear Power Corporation for the mishap. Wild rumors, confusing statements from political leaders and the tight lipped policy on the part of the officials of the NPC made people panicky in North Canara about the dangers involved in the project. 7-A

Even after the collapse of a portion of an inner dome, the project director declared that the first unit at Kaiga would become operational by June 1996 as per the schedule.

A. Gopalkrishna, President of Atomic Energy Control Board, said, under the presidentship of V.S.Gupchup of Bombay University and six others, an expert committee was constituted to find out the causes of the dome collapse, and suggest the future course of action. This was an independent committee with no links to Nuclear Power Corporation and was to conduct an elaborate inquiry and submit its report within two months.
The committee found two alterations made in the original blueprint of the project and enquired whether these changes were the cause for the dome collapse. A.Gopalkrishna however held the view that, they were not worried about the time schedule in completing the project. He said, "let the project be completed in 2001 A.D. We are particular about safety". He further remarked that this is the first time in the country that the dome has collapsed at the construction stage.

R. N. Nayak, former Minister for Information, Kannada and Culture, Govt. of Karnataka, expressed his opinion that negligence and laxity might have caused the mishap. He said that a chunk of the concrete had fallen off from the dome of the first reactor building indicating that proper curing work had not been done after the concrete was laid.

It is well known that safety norms prescribed by the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) are not always scrupulously adhered to. Over Rs. 500 crores have already been spent and nearly a decade has passed after the project was conceived, but the future of Kaiga Nuclear Power Plant still hangs in the balance.

The maiden nuclear power project of the power starved Karnataka has been reeling under controversies and uncertainties ever since its inception. The collapse was caused due to the caving in of a portion of the dome which might further impede the pace of execution of the work with the likely spurt of a corresponding escalation of cost.
Actually these lapses tend to confirm the environmentalists' total opposition to nuclear energy. The people have realised that the assurance given to them about safety, is hollow and a clear betrayal. They have felt that the project has proved to be unsafe to the environment and the people.

But, delay and escalation does not matter to the people as long as the authorities in charge of the plant can prove convincingly that they accord over-riding priority to safety. It is felt, that this they can achieve by making the execution and operation of nuclear plants transparent and as a first step in that direction, they should make public the finding of the Experts' Committee on the accident of Kaiga. The former chief minister of Karnataka Veerappa Moily, said that he had written an elaborate letter to the prime minister on the collapse of the dome at Kaiga reactor.9

The collapse of the dome has further added to the complexity of doubts in the minds of the people. The former minister R.N Nayak and Karwar Legislator Prabhakar Rane feel that the dome has collapsed due to the negligence of the officials and defective works. They said officials were under the impression that it is sufficient, if the collapsed dome is repaired. But now it seems the container walls must also be dismantled and rebuilt. It means there is doubt whether the entire plant may be abandoned. Therefore production in the Kaiga Plant may not start in this century.
Ramakrishna Hegde, the then chief minister of Karnataka brought the project strongly supporting it. Now after relinquishing office and after the collapse of the dome, opines. "I am surprised and scared".  

The Parisara Samarakhsana Samiti states the mishap had exposed the real strength of any atomic reactor and the false claims made by the scientists of the Atomic Energy Commission. But when 130 tonne massive slab comprising about 40 per cent of the inner dome collapsed, groups opposing the Kaiga gathered in large numbers and protest rally was held in Karwar on 2 October, 1994. The rally was attended by around 2000 persons representing a wide range of groups from Goa and Karnataka and was one of the largest among such gatherings in the almost decade-old anti Kaiga agitation. Several groups of residents from the Goa border taluka of Canacona, from where Kaiga is barely 25 km away, and groups like the Goa foundation, Jagrut Goenkaranchi Fonz, the United Goans Democratic Party as well as several women groups attended the rally voluntarily to voice their opposition to the project. All these contributed to strengthen mobilisation of people against the Kaiga project despite negligent attitude of government about the sentiments of the people.

The Nuclear Power Corporation still faces one of the toughest challenges at Kaiga in Karnataka. Paramahansa Tewari, the chief engineer in charge of the Kaiga plant remarked as, "We never thought that we will face such opposition in Kaiga. People’s sentiments are deep against nuclear energy. But by offering jobs we will be able to win them over."
Many anti-Kaiga activists are undeterred by the hectic activity going on at the project site. The people of Karnataka feel that their demand is still valid and needs a general attention. They may not accept the Kaiga nuclear plant. They hope the plant will finally be shelved as Bedthi project was shelved in the region. The battle is tough, but there are hopes. Whether the agitation against the nuclear plants will succeed or not is still not clear and mobilisation of people against Kaiga project may or may not influence the government. But, it has already made issues and problems of Kaiga debatable and controversial among the people. It has also exposed the nuclear establishment as a bunch of mendacious irresponsible individuals, unable to defend their activity and always running to take protection under the petticoats of the Atomic Energy Act.

It is clear from the foregoing that for the first time in the country’s history, the fate of a nuclear reactor no longer lies in the hands of mere scientists or even the administration. It depends on ordinary villagers in Kaiga, Malavalli and other places in the district.

It is also clear that school children, uneducated villagers, scientists, journalists, political activists can all mobilise to demystify nuclear realities and form a formidable combine to stall the actions and plans of an unaccountable nuclear department.
As the agitation begins to gain strength for a major assault in the days and months ahead, the world already quite terrified by the mind haggling toxicity of nuclear energy is going to watch their moves closely and with great sympathy.

The aspirations of the common people are supposed to get recognition in the democratic political system after getting themselves mobilised against Kaiga project.
REFERENCES