CHAPTER 8. MEDIA AS IMAGE AND OPINION BUILDER

Media builds images of people and institutions. Media also creates public opinions about Government, about police about judicial system. Police in India has been the target of media. There may be corruption is some ranks but it cannot be forgotten that hundreds of policemen die while performing duty, some in very young age. Media does not write or telecast much about that but when a constable is caught taking one hundred rupees two hundred column centimeters of news is printed. What lacks is PR and lobbying. Every institution has right to preserve and polish its public image. In USA they call it public affairs. The police image can be polished when someone is entrusted to send to media good job done.\(^{37}\)

The celebrity of social action Anna Hazre has been a retired soldier from army who is resident of village Ralegan Siddhi in Ahmednagar District of Maharashtra State. Anna rose to fame in April 2011 when he started hunger strike for pressurizing central Government to pass Jan LokPal Bill and make appointment of JanLokpal a law. According to Political Critic Rajiv Dixit (now dead) Media can make National Hero to any simple man. Anna Hazre is scantily educated retired soldier of Indian Army but his courage, dedication in fighting against corruption and renunciation of comforts and luxuries for self is impressive. Anna Hazre is unmarried, has no family, he lives in a room attached to Yadav Baba temple in his village. In 1980 he got recognition due to his work in water conservation around his own village and making the village self sufficient with zero unemployment and zero hunger in the village.

\(^{37}\) Reddy C.V.Narsimha Effective Public Relations and Media Strategy PHI Learning Pvt.Ltd p 21
Hindu radical who tours and lectures in Hindi language one Rajiv Dixit (Now dead) charged that Anna Hazare has been provided media support by ‘Multi National Companies’ alliance. The Hindu radical said in public meetings that for Anna in 2011 at JantarMantar 20 OB vans and 40 TV journalists were deployed by Multi National Corporation alliance the Alliance spent several lacs of Rupees every day during Anna’s fast unto death on Jan Lokpal Bill.

Whatever may be real issue of payment to the media owners and TV Journalists reason but it cannot be denied that media has tremendous power to build and to change public opinion. Media alone has created the halo around Woman Police Officer Kiran Bedi who had transformed
“Tihar Prison In Delhi from notorious criminal making factory to a good correction centre which gave her Ramon Magasaysay award for good public service. She had been famous as brave and upright police officer who never succumbed to political pressure. When she was denied the post of Delhi Police Commissioner due to gender prejudice she took voluntary retirement.

relapsed in to its previous state soon after she left the post of Inspector General of Police Prisons NCR Delhi. After her retirement she appeared on her solo television show “Apki Kacheri” and became famous as an upright top police officer who took up cause of legal literacy and awareness about their rights, after retirement. Media was in forefront to give a glow to her public image. Her association with Anna Hazare and Arvind Kejriwal gave boost to Jan Lokpal Bill agitation. Media also projected that it was her political mistake that she joined Bhartiya Janata Party to become Chief
Minister of National Capital Region Delhi and fought assembly election against her one time colleague in social activism Arvind Kejriwal.

The negative media publicity defeated Kiran Bedi and also the ruling Bhartiya janata Party. After defeat in Delhi Assembly polls 2013 of BJP and also of Kiran Bedi as a candidate her image got a set back. Media played a major role in her defeat by projecting her negative side of ditching a one time friend due to political temptation that she might become the Chif Minister of NCR. Arvind Kejriwal has a grip over Delhi’s middle class therefore it was tough for Kiran Bedi to win a seat let alone become Chief Minister. People sented her stand as treachery. Projection of Kiran Bedi as antagonist of Kejriwal was a political blunder of Bhartiya Janata Party. This point was repeatedly highlighted by media. The media shattered the image of Kiran Bedi branding it as the opportune.

Some social activists vow not to change role as politician viz. Anna Hazare. But some social activists do not think this way. They say the social activist ad politicians both serve the society therefore change of role is not a breach of trust and if opportunity is there then social activist can become a politician. Arvind Kejriwal successfully changed his role from social activist to politician and became the Chief Minister of National Capital Region Delhi.
Ms. Kiran Bedi standing (left) supporting Anna Hazare’s agitation

Media has disgracefully ousted Chief Minister A.R. Antulay and gracefully hoisted Kejriwal to the post of Chief Minister of NCR Delhi in 2013. Media builds public opinion about the social maladies very fast and blows it up to a major issue in the nation. By writing in print media and by carrying audio-visual stories in electronic media the 16 December 2012 gang rape case of a female physiotherapist intern in Delhi, the media raised the issue of women’s security and the security of girls in a big way. Due to intense pressure built up by the media the central government appointed a judicial committee headed by J.S. Verma, a former
Judge of the Supreme Court to suggest amendments to criminal law to sternly deal with sexual assault cases. The committee, which also included retired judge Leila Seth and leading advocate Gopal Subramaniam, was given a month to submit its report. The Committee submitted its report within 29 days, on 23 January 2013, supposedly after considering the 80,000 suggestions and petitions received by them during that same period from the public in general and particularly from jurists, lawyers, NGOs and women’s groups.[8][9] The report indicated that failures on the part of the Government and Police were the root cause behind crimes against women. Major suggestions of the report included the need to review in conflict areas, maximum punishment for rape as life imprisonment and not death penalty, clear ambiguity over control of Delhi Police etc. People of India could win the battle of women’s security just because media gave tremendous support.

It is surprising that media has lost interest in Swami Agnivesh of Haryana who is Hindu Arya Samaji monk from Rohata district of Haryana. He born to a telugu speaking couple in Andhra Pradesh but was sent for education to Gurukul in Raohatak district. His original name is Sham Rao There he became a scholar and monk wearing safron garb gave himself to the task of removing social ills. Television channels always invited him on talk shows to discuss and debate importnat unsolved social issues. He was invited by anchor Rajat Sharma in his famous episode AAPKI ADALAT. Agnivash Edits and owns journals and magazines. His magazine “Sanghursh Jaari Rahega” is famous for abolishing bonded labour, uplifting the rural landless labour and also urban labour toiling in below subsistence level wages. Electronic Media gave him much publicity and thus Agnivesh n
was made crusader of bonded labor. Media has built images of many social workers and politicians who are honest friends of the weak and the downtrodden. Magasaysay award winner Medha Patkar who fought for tribal and aboriginal people and Nobel Peace prize winner Kailash Satyarthi who fought for the bonded child labor.

Media sometimes gives such publicity that a simpleton appears to the public as the most intelligent and most talented. Laloo Prasad Yadav is the example

Swami Agnivesh a Hindu Araya samaji monk who dedicated himself to the task of abolishing bonded labour and giving right wage to the workers everywhere in India
Another person who from a humble position of a University Teacher rose to international fame is Ms Medha Patkar. She was given unprecedented publicity by the media. The print media (newspapers and magazines), the electronic media (Television and radio) carried news stories and articles on Narmada Bachao Andolan started and spearheaded by Medha Patkar when she took up the cause of tribal people whose land and homes were about to be submerged in Narmada river’s water when the Gujrat
Government decided to raise the height of Sardar Sarovar dam being built on Narmada river.

Biography by Aaron Crawford of New Zealand

In 1955, India's Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, has been widely quoted for calling dams the "temples of modern India". Yet, it is pointed out decades later by Medha Patkar, Nehru in 1958 described the dams as "a disease of gigantism' that we must withdraw from"(Jensen). Throughout the ensuing struggle, for Medha Patkar information and appropriation are significant and sometimes synonymous.

Medha Patkar was born in Bombay, India on December 1, 1954. Medha was raised by two politically and socially active parents. Her father fought in the independence movement that helped establish India's sovereignty from British colonial rule. Later Medha's father helped with the organizational
efforts of the trade union. Medha's mother is a member of a women's organization named Swadar. Swadar is set up to help and assist women who are suffering difficult circumstances stemming from financial, educational, and health related problems. Medha's mother and her father's activism played a major role in shaping her philosophical views. Medha's societal analysis is highlighted through her philosophical wisdom, whereas she says, "(t)here has to be a micro-to-macro linkage to put ourselves forward as political actors"(Jenson). Patkar's articulation of a micro-to-macro linkage is the foundation of her political, social, and economic struggle.

After earning a M.A. in Social Work from the Tata Institute of Social Science, Medha began working with voluntary organizations in Bombay for five years. Following this voluntary work in Bombay she also worked with voluntary organizations in tribal districts of East Gujarat for two years. Medha then earned a position on the faculty at her alma mater the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. While back at Tata Institute Medha Patkar began working on her Ph.D. However, Medha was slowly emerging towards a split in her life's pathway and she would be forced to make a life altering decision.

In west India, during the sixties and early seventies, debates were increasing over how to "better" provide for this section of the countries impoverished areas. The argument for building several large dams was gaining momentum within the local state government of Gujarat. However, the surrounding states of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra took on a more critical approach to the dams and remained in opposition. The state's ideas of building the dams were proposed to the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal in 1969. The state sought legitimacy through claims that the dams would create a surplus
of water that could be channeled to the impoverished areas, therefore providing clean drinking water, irrigation, and electricity. Ten years later in 1979 the Sardar Sarovar Project in particular and the Narmada Valley Development Project as a whole, in which called for 30 major, 135 medium, and 3,000 small dams, were granted approval for construction by India's Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal.

In 1985, as news of the dams began to filter into central and eastern parts of the country, Medha Patkar and a few of her colleagues from the institute took a trip to the Narmada Valley region.

Upon her visit to Narmada Valley and a few of its villages Medha discovered that all ground work for the Sardar Sarovar program, which is considered the centerpiece of the Narmada Valley Project, had been suspended. The projects halt came at the immediate request of the Ministry of Environment.

The SardarSarovar Project was stopped due to the "nonfulfillment of basic environmental conditions and the lack of completion of crucial studies and plans" (Patkar 157). The first thing Medha knew she had to do was establish some dialogue between her self and the residence from the Narmada Valley area. Listening to the people, Patkar learned that the only information they were given was that the dams would be built and people in the area would be rehabilitated or displaced. Medha also found out that the residents had not seen nor been briefed by a representative as declared by the local governments. The people were full of questions and comments and Medha listened carefully to their concerns about their rights as well as there outrage at the situation. Through Medha's highly effective means of interactive
communication between the government (at a macro level) and the residents (at the micro level), she presented these critiques to the local governments. Then Medha delivered the government's responses and all new information back to the people of Narmada Valley. As Medha became deeply immersed in the Narmada struggle, she was also currently in the midst of working activism.

The following year in 1986 the World Bank was called upon by the state governments and project leaders to provide some of the financing for the Sardar Sarovar Project. Medha Patkar knew that the only way to defeat the World Bank and stop the construction of the Sardar Sarovar was through organizing. Therefore, Medha and her colleagues organized a long march from Madhya Pradesh to the dam site. The thirty-six day march would be a symbol of solidarity among the neighboring states of Narmada Valley as well as a direct challenge to the government and the World Bank. Medha viewed the march as "a path symbolizing the long path of struggle (both immediate and long-term) that [they] really had" (Patkar 166). The thirty-six day long trek also allowed them to discuss in great length the details of the Sardar Sarovar Project, other development issues, and alternative methods/ideologies they could propose.

Overriding the march as a whole was a dualistic ideological approach. On the one hand the marchers had to endorse a strict ideological commitment to non-violence. On the other hand the practice of Satyagraha must be fully embraced. Satyagraha is an ideological practice that Gandhi took on to help defeat the British. The word satya meaning truth or love and graha meaning force were coupled with non-violence as the preconditions for this march. In
order to show this commitment marchers walked with their hands folded and tied in front of themselves. However, as Medha and her fellow marchers reached the border of Gujarat they were greeted with the deployment of thousands of police officers spread out along the border. As the marchers tried to continue the police acted with violent forms of repression. According to Medha Patkar the police were "caning the marchers and arresting them and tearing the clothes off women activists" (Patkar 166). The police's use of physical force and abuse against the marchers brought in the inquiring local on her Ph.D. However, Medha decided to leave the world of academia behind, and in a manner similar to that of her parents she chose socialress. This extra publicity would become beneficial for the marchers and Medha Patkar as well.

The march was highly successful in bringing more attention to the Sardar Sarovar Project. The added exposure allowed Medha to connect with residents from the eastern part of the project called Andolan. Soon after Medha Patkar formed the Narmada Bachao Andolan (save the Narmada movement). The Narmada Bachao Andolan or NBA, created in 1989, was formed in order to provide the residents in the Narmada Valley with access to important project information, and legal representation. The NBA came to represent the solidarity among the states and tribal territories affected by the construction of the dams. The NBA's primary focus was directed towards stopping the Sardar Sarovar Project. Yet, Medha Patkar advised the organization to include within their focus the World Bank.

Medha Patkar and the World Bank endorse two drastically different ideologies. Patkar believes in a decentralized, highly democratic means of
production and sustainability. Whereas, the World Bank takes on a more centralized, "one size fits all" mentality. Medha Patkar, in an interview with Robert Jensen, analyzes the World Bank's power, legitimacy, and authority. Patkar says, "Once the financing is taken care of... (f)oreign capital legitimates the process. Lenders like the World Bank bring their own credibility, among the elite and planning population, and then people say, 'who are you to know better than the World Bank?" (Jensen). Thus, Medha knew that the economic clout of the World Bank could and would act as a self- legitimizing force. Therefore, the next barrier within the struggle was centered on how Medha, the residents, and the NBA would combat the economic dominance of the World Bank.

Reflecting back on the success of the march, Medha knew that the violence and abusive acts against non-violent marchers undercut/undermined the police's moral legitimacy. So in order for the residents, the NBA, and Medha to drive out the World Bank they would need to undercut, undermine, and discredit the Bank's legitimacy. Medha and the NBA decided to expose the Bank's lies and ulterior motives for funding the Sardar Sarovar. They discovered that the Bank was well aware of the projects negative impact on the people and their environment prior to their endorsement of Sardar Sarovar. The project's major negative impacts would cause water logging and salinization of the soil heavily used by the agricultural/horticultural segments of the population, the degradation of the surrounding bodies of water, as well as the lack of alternative land for the citizens displaced by the dams. The Narmada Bachao Andolan thus pitted the Bank up against India's Ministry of Environment and Forests by highlighting the World Bank's agreement to act as part financial supporter of the Sardar Sarovar Project
after India's Ministry of Environment and Forests had challenged and forcefully stalled the project.

Medha Patkar believed that the most affective non-violent weapon for protesters was the right to fast. The style of fasting implemented by the NBA to undermine the World Bank’s authority is called a Dharna. A Dharna is a fasting that takes place on the literal doorstep of an offender or debtor. The Dharna is highly affective in that it both draws attention to a desired place or region and provokes direct confrontation through non-violent action. The NBA fasts mainly targeted local government officials, ministers, and the dam sites that were to be submerged. As a result, after nearly seven years of opposition, protests, and fasting, Medha and everyone working with her were able to get the World Bank to withdraw its endorsement of the Sardar Sarovar Project in 1993. Yet, the NBA, the local residents, and Medha's celebration would be short lived as India's government announced it would increase its financial assistance to the project.
During the early nineties Medha started gaining national and international notoriety for her efforts in the movement. Patkar won the Goldman Environment Award in 1991 as well as in 1992.

Medha Patkar has also received many other awards such as the Right Lively Award, Green Ribbon Award for Best International Political Campaigner by BBC, the Human Rights Defender's Award from Amnesty International, among many others. However, one of Medha's greatest rewards came in 1995 from the Supreme Court. Previously, in 1994 India's Supreme Court allowed the height of the Sardar Sarovar Project, within certain areas, to be increased. Shortly after this decision, Andolan (of the NBA) presented India's Supreme Court with a petition to stop the construction of the Sardar Sarovar Project on the grounds of its severe environmental destruction, incongruent and inconsistent economic planning, as well as its genocidal affects to the regions citizens whose livelihoods are inextricably connected to the land. In 1995 the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the residents, Medha Patkar and the NBA, by legally stopping all construction of the Sardar Sarovar Project until the government could produce a competent and coherent project plan. This, however, did not stop Medha from her from continuous organizing. Medha and her colleagues went to Seattle and Washington to protest the World Trade Organization in 1999. Then during the following year, Patkar and her colleagues traveled to Prague within the Czech Republic to protest the International Monetary Fund arid the World Bank.

Unfortunately, Medha's oppositional gains once again were short lived. In 1999 India's Supreme Court lifted the ban on the dam project and allowed
for another dam height increase. The project workers wasted little time building and attempting to clear the land, forcing Medha Patkar and the NBA's opposition to increase tenfold. In August of the same year, The Hindu, one of India's leading national newspapers, reported that "(t)he Narmada Bachao Andolan leader, Ms. Medha Patkar, and about 50 others were taken under police custody from the remote Domkhedi tribal village... Ms. Patkar and others had stood in nearly waist-deep waters for almost 12 hours before they were taken into custody... (a)s the Narmada waters rose due to incessant rainfall in parts of Madhya Pradesh in the last 36 hours, coupled with releases from three dams on the river the "satyagraha" villages were submerged. A couple months prior to this satyagraha, Medha and her colleagues were involved in two other satyagrahas at submergence sites. During one, the water reached the level of Medha's neck before she was forcefully moved. Renowned writer and author Arundhati Roy joined Medha Patkar in the struggle against submergence.

Medha Patkar, using the notion of solidarity as a springboard, then helped create the National Alliance of People's Movement or the NAPM. NAPM is a collaboration effort of over a hundred India based organizations to collectively organize around issues of globalization, neoliberalism, and sustainable development, as well as many others. The NAPM recently created the People's Political Front. Medha was asked why she believed the transition was necessary. Her eloquent response was "(i)t is necessary to challenge the changed culture of politics, which is criminal and communal to a large extent; which brings in not just religion but caste as a force, to carry on the game of numbers. Not only is it corporatised and corrupt, but crudely
and confidently uses and misuses the resources of the country, with big industrial houses financing and controlling the parties" (The Hindu 04).

Currently, the Narmada Valley Development Project continues its push towards the ultimate goal of 30 major, 135 medium, and 3000 small dams along the Narmada River. The displacement of the residents and the lack of land and/or rehabilitation continues to plague the project's development. Other negative affects are an increase in male suicides and homelessness, and that the once plentiful water is slowly becoming scarce. Seemingly the plight of India appears to be a reflection of injustice, inequality, and social misery. However, Medha Patkar, her colleagues, the NBA, and the NAPM, are all symbols of hope. Medha Patkar conveys this message of hope and solidarity, when she says, "(w)e have to challenge these forces, conveying to them that we who resist are not just in nooks and corners of the world. We are together... But it can't be just a one-time demonstration in the street, but continuous strategizing and action on multiple fronts that can challenge these forces" (Jensen).

Thus media is recognized as image builder of activist Ms. Medha Patkar and also opinion builder about ill effects of mega dams on environment and displacement of tribal people who inhabit this country from the beginning of civilization. Such image building inspires others to cleanse the putrefied society in future generations.