The Indian state has embarked upon a very ambitious nuclear power generation plan to gain what they variously call ‘energy security’ and ‘energy independence.’ The Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) has set a target to produce 20,000 MW power from nuclear power plants by the year 2020 and to reach the ultimate goal of generating 40,000 MW nuclear power soon after. As part of the massive expansion plan, the Indian state is setting up more nuclear power plants all over the country and seeking funds, fuel and futuristic technology from all possible sources. Koodankulam, a coastal village on the Gulf of Mannar near the southernmost tip of India, is one such nuclear site where the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL), a subsidiary of the DAE, is setting up two 1,000 MW light water reactors with Russian technology and loan. The department has proposed to set up six more nuclear reactors at Koodankulam. Although there are some people who are enthusiastic about the jobs, other economic opportunities and the overall development of the region that the Koodankulam project may bring about, many people are very concerned about the dangers the nuclear power plants may pose to the local environment, the livelihood of the local people and their health and safety.

Although anti-nuclear sentiments and activities were not hitherto totally unknown in the southernmost tip of India, the area woke up to the nuclear reality in 1988 when the
Koodankulam project was first proposed, the conflict between the Indian state and the anti-nuclear movements has been rather dormant. There have been intermittent encounters between them with mixed results. A study of this conflict assumes great importance in the light of the contemporary fusion of issues such as energy, development and environment; the present-day articulations on human security and human development; the current trends of the globalizing world reposing greater faith in violence in the form of terrorism and militarism; and the popular struggles across the world to create, preserve and nurture the democratic spaces in the wake of various assaults. The task here is to see if and what we can learn from the Koodankulam struggle. Locating myself at the interstices between the Indian state and the local civil society, I try to look at the conflict both as a student of social sciences and as an anti-Koodankulam and anti-nuclear activist. Attempting to understand the conflict parties’ assumptions, perceptions and values, and the overall dynamics of the conflict, I seek to probe the nature and scope of anti-nuclear movements in India today by bringing in some of my own personal activist experiences and discern the possible lessons the anti-nuclear movements in other parts of India could derive from this case.

**Background to the Conflict**

The southern districts in Tamil Nadu have been plagued by communal disturbances and caste clashes for many years. For instance, Kanyakumari district, the southernmost tip of India, witnessed violent communal clashes in the early 1980s. There were attacks and counter-attacks, reprisals and retaliatory actions between Christians in the coastal villages (*Mukuvar* caste) and the inland Hindus (especially *Nadar* caste). The Venugopal Commission that inquired into the 1982 communal riots in Kanyakumari summed up the situation succinctly:
It is the socio-economic problem arising out of deprivation, unemployment, hunger, squalor, lack of proper housing facilities and civic amenities, operating against the background of anger and discontent with an increasing population and overcrowding towns and villages, which is the main reason behind these clashes in Kanyakumari district. With the rising socio and political consciousness, everybody expects that the more the better. The economy and infrastructures are not keeping pace quantitatively and qualitatively with the increasing demands. More hands are grasping at the limited opportunities available in Kanyakumari district. …The level of spread of violence and frustration will keep increasing unless the phase and pattern of development are able to meet the growing expectations of rising numbers. Generating full employment and containing the growing regional and sub-regional disparity, hold the key to solve the problem and pave the way for communal harmony and peace in the District on a permanent basis.4

The Ratnavel Pandian Commission that was set up some two decades later to investigate the growing incidence of communal disturbances and caste clashes in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu also came up with similar conclusions. It concluded that the southern districts in Tamil Nadu should have more development which in turn would create more employment and economic opportunities for the young people, thereby weaning them away from anti-social behavior. The authorities have used this pro-development reasoning to implement the Koodankulam nuclear power plant, Sethusamudram canal project, Colachel commercial harbor, Nanguneri high-tech park (a Special Economic Zone), and many other smaller projects in the southern tip of India.
The Rajiv Gandhi government in New Delhi signed the Koodankulam nuclear power project deal with Mikhail Gorbachev on November 20, 1988, barely two years after the nightmarish Chernobyl accident that took place on April 26, 1986. Due largely to a handful of social activist groups such as *Samathuva Samudaya Iyakkam* (Movement for Equitable Society), public opinion was mobilized against the nuclear power plant and Rajiv Gandhi was forced to put off the foundation laying ceremony that had been planned for December 19, 1988. Between 1989 and 1991, the situation changed rapidly as the Soviet Union collapsed, Gorbachev lost power and Rajiv Gandhi (who had been out of power) was assassinated. Consequently, the Koodankulam project was shelved until March 1997 when Prime Minister Deve Gowda and Russian president Boris Yeltsin signed a supplementary deal to the 1988 agreement. The anti-Koodankulam campaign was also revived slowly with talks and seminars on the issue organized by several groups such as the National Alliance of People’s Movements (NAPM), and the nuclear weapons issue was also included in the anti-nuclear agenda of the local social movements ever since the May 1998 nuclear tests (Pokhran II) of the Vajpayee government. What had started off as NIMBYism (Not In My Backyard) became a more comprehensive and principled movement. But still Koodankulam continued to be the rallying point against nuclear plants as it provided immediacy and a sense of urgency and focus. The *Anumin Nilaya Ethirpu Iyakkam* (Nuclear Power Project Opposition Movement) was created on November 14, 1999 at Nagercoil and a sporadic and small-scale mobilization continued. When Prime Minister A. B. Vajpayee signed the final agreement on the Koodankulam Nuclear Power Project on November 6, 2001, a broad umbrella organization called the People’s Movement Against Nuclear Power (PMANP) was
founded at Madurai on November 10, 2001 to spearhead the struggle against the Koodankulam nuclear power plant.

The state elites largely ignore the facts that mega “development” projects such as the Koodankulam nuclear power plant would hurt the ecological balance of the sub-region, give rise to environmental and health hazards, and undermine the rights to life and livelihood of the farming and the fishing communities alike. For the elites, development means economic growth reflected in enhanced statistical aggregates and not the cumulative pursuit of happiness of individual citizens and communities. In their short-sighted scheme of providing larger economic good for the largest number of people, sociological and environmental consequences matter little. Most importantly, the mega “development” projects with huge budgets and overlays have been quite appealing for the state elites as these projects provide substantial economic incentives in the forms of contracts, commissions, and kickbacks.

For many of the poverty-stricken villagers, however, mega “development” projects look appealing as they could increase the value of their land, create jobs for their children, generate more economic opportunities, bring more visibility, attention and resources to their communities, and enhance the overall development of their area. As far as the Koodankulam project is concerned, the mostly illiterate and semi-literate rural people in southernmost India, are largely unaware of the consequences of nuclear power plant accidents or an attack or a nuclear war. When the patriarchal state thrusts “development” projects down their throats in a high-handed manner with little public participation or democratic dialogue, the relatively privileged top layer of the rural societies plays along (and seeks to make the best out of the situation), and others passively
acquiesce due largely to the we-cannot-fight-the-government or why-should-I-stick-my-neck-out and other such apolitical attitudes that are prevalent in the contemporary Indian political culture today.

There are also fissiparous tendencies in the civil society of this complex peninsular tip sub-region. Although many local farmers (mostly Nadar caste) in and around Koodankulam are enthusiastic about the development-enhancing potentials of the nuclear power plant, nuclear fears run very high among the coastal fishing communities (Mukuvar caste). They are afraid of plant interference in fishing, disposal of the hot and radioactive coolant water into the sea, overall impacts on fish and marketing, and even eventual evacuation from their native villages. Similarly, many people in southern Kerala do not seem to be mindful of the fact that Koodankulam is quite close to them and the state boundaries could not possibly insulate them from any nuclear catastrophe on the other side of the border. Muslims, another significant section of the civil society in southernmost India, also tend to keep away from sensitive issues such as the Koodankulam power plant. Either this largely business-oriented community thinks that their predominant business interests may be jeopardized by social and environmental activism or they are afraid that such activist initiatives could be wrongly interpreted as disguised Islamist politics or even acts of terrorism by the authorities. The student community and the non-student youth of Tamil Nadu and Kerala are held back by the celluloid world, caste and religious associations, and partisan party politics. The self-centered urban middle classes are so busy climbing up the economic ladder that they fail to see that the bottom of the ladder is on fire.
Only the coastal communities are more informed about and care for the environmental impacts of many of the “development” projects of the Indian state. The state of Tamil Nadu has a 1,000-km-long coastline comprising 442 fishing villages which is 17.4 percent of India’s coastline. The Tamil Nadu coastline is divided into four zones: the 350-km-long Chola zone extending from Chennai to Thanjavur district; the 270-km-long Palk Bay from parts of Thanjavur to Ramanathapuram; the 320-km-long Gulf of Mannar between Ramanathapuram and portions of Kanyakumari district; and the 60-km-long western zone comprising the rest of Kanyakumari district. Both the southern zones are adversely affected by the sea sand-mining operations and will bear the brunt of the Koodankulam and the Sethusamudram projects. Though the coastal communities’ contribution to the economic vibrancy, and nutritious food intake of the local people is quite significant, other sections of the civil society often overlook this and perceive the coastal communities’ concerns as narrow and parochial.

In spite of all these intricacies and complexities, the Koodankulam conflict is very much there on the socioeconomic-political radar of the southern tip of India. However, the Indian state elites, like the proverbial cat that closes its eyes and assumes that the whole world is dark, tend to conceal the conflict. Incredible as it may be, the state abhors any opposition to a “development” project as anti-national and even unpatriotic. The state ignores or intimidates the unorganized and self-motivated dissenters, tends to violate even the democratic rights of the dissenters and seeks to neutralize the situation in its favor. The local civil society in the southern tip of India, on the other hand, is rather preoccupied with its internal dynamics and is confused about the conflict, like a dog chasing its own tail. The conditions are not yet ripe for the
Koodankulam conflict to reach a climax as the cat is in the ‘dark’ and the dog is going in a circle.

At this point, it is also pertinent to consider the characteristics of social movements in India in general. Gail Omvedt posits that most social movements in India today draw upon the 19th century ideologies such as Gandhism of elite nationalism and the Dalit-Bahujan ideology of anti-caste movements. Marxism, on the other hand, is stuck in left nationalism (with an outmoded dependency theory approach) and has little to offer the masses who desire sustainable development. So it is neo-Gandhism, in alliance with the dependency theory of Marxism, which is providing themes for most oppositional movements today. Given this situation, Omvedt claims that there is a need for a new social vision—an all-encompassing ideology to inspire and lead new social movements. In reality there is a call for such new social movements in India. The rural and agricultural India is in “deep and continuing distress” with rising unemployment, falling gross food grains output, loss of purchasing power because of the state’s reduced spending on rural development, falling per capita food grains absorption (which is now one of the lowest in the world at around 154 kg for India as a whole, lower still in the villages of India) and declining per capita caloric intake. Due to rising costs of production but falling global commodity prices due to trade liberalization, farmers have descended into deep debts, lost assets including land, and more than 9,000 farmers have committed suicide across the country since 1998. It is indeed true that “rural India is crying out for work and food.” In the midst of this struggle for survival, cries for human security, better health, environmental safety, and sustainable development are quite weak. So it is no wonder why anti-nuclear or peace movements are not pervasive or powerful in contemporary India.
Scholars have already pointed out the difficulties involved in taking on nuclearism because of the fact that the nuclear technology is shrouded in secrecy and sustained by state control. Robert Jungk established in the late 1970s that the arrival of nuclear fission opened up new dimensions of terror and the quest for ‘total immunity’ from the risks of nuclear power necessitated surveillance, prohibitions and constraints in the society. Jungk concluded that a nuclear state would inevitably tend towards totalitarianism. Writing about the Indian nuclear program almost two decades later, Itty Abraham asserted that the atomic program was presented by the Indian scientific and political elite as the postcolonial state's project of modernity. The Indian nuclear program became shrouded in secrecy "since it had been admitted, or rather could not credibly be denied; that the atomic energy program would aid India's defense." Praful Bidwai and Achin Vanaik posit that “the nuclear obsession of the ruling elites in a handful of states has proved thoroughly addictive and almost irresistible to change” but it has recently begun to weaken or loosen. They contend further that there are no easy solutions to force the states to move away from a pathological and misguided reliance on nuclearism in their search for security. Combining the moral concerns and the commitment to universal objectives such as nuclear disarmament, defense of human rights and social justice, we need to have strong Southern input into the global struggle for nuclear disarmament. Such a movement, according to Bidwai and Vanaik, “must be truly internationalist in outlook, concerns, reach and representation.” In this struggle, denuclearization and democratization become inseparable processes.

Most research and writing on states and anti-nuclear movements look at various state actions that contribute to the
emergence and development of anti-nuclear movements, or state structures that influence movement strategies and policy outcomes. However, the interactive perspective adopted in the book *States and Anti-Nuclear Movements* focuses on the interactions between the state and the anti-nuclear movements rather than exclusively on state structures, political elites, national policies or resource constraints and so forth. This interactive approach “pin-points outcomes as they are realised within and around different conflict arenas” and helps us trace “the actual impact of an anti-nuclear movement on the formulation, decision-making and implementation phases of policy-making.” This interactive comparative focus helps to determine which specific policy outcomes can be attributed to the anti-nuclear movement and which ones are the results of national policy, elite support, or the open state structures themselves. The interactive outcomes can be studied from the political economy perspective also which sees them as attributable to factors such as energy resources endowment, techno-industrial structures, and military interests in nuclear energy etc. From such an analysis, we can understand whether or not the movement-state interactions have made any discernible impact.

The study of encounters between states and anti-nuclear movements in *States and Anti-Nuclear Movements* formulates a few hypotheses with regards to the impacts the encounter dynamics could have on the movement and policy. The more protracted a conflict or the greater the socialization of the conflict with greater number of encounters and arenas, the more likely it is for a movement to achieve some policy modifications and some of its goals. With respect to impacts on the movement, the state elites play a crucial role. If they adopt a tolerant and flexible conflict-handling style, the less likely it is for a movement to resort to confrontational or violent politics.
On the other hand, if the state elites are closed to debate with a relatively small number of direct encounters and arenas allowing for the participation of the movement, it is more likely that the state elites would respond with the use of force and may cause a movement to demobilize and/or withdraw from the streets.\footnote{13} The case-studies in \textit{States and Anti-Nuclear Movements} probe the question “whether and to what extent the particular, national anti-nuclear movements actually posed a challenge to the polity during the ongoing conflict, and whether any changes in the polity resulted from their activities.”\footnote{14} Although the anti-nuclear movement in southernmost India is still in the nascent stages and the Indian state elites simply do not even acknowledge the anti-nuclear sentiments of the local civil society or recognize the fledgling oppositional movement, it can be illuminating to test the present case with the hypotheses that we have listed above. Moreover, this case study also seeks to identify the agents involved in the present conflict and see if the above interactive approach could help us delineate the interaction dynamics of the early stages of the conflict, probe the future scope and nature of their potential encounters and the arenas of their contestations, and finally discern the preconditions for the movement-state interactions to influence the policy outcomes.

\textbf{The State Elites and Conflict Concealment}  

The state elites who comprise both structural and dynamic elements of the state also include the “nuclear experts.” The Indian nukedom, that claims to be enhancing the country’s scientific and technological prowess and contributing to national security and energy independence, has always had an air of supremacy and inviolability. This Gaborian thinking holds that science means “the application of man’s reasoning power to ways for achieving his aims” and divides humans into “cyclic” and “acyclic” men, or “common” men and “dedicated
world-improvers.” According to Dennis Gabor, the British physicist who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1971, “the common man may be less used to balancing complicated rational arguments against one another than the highly educated man.” On the contrary, “[s]cience sprung first from the urge of exceptionally gifted men to exercise their mental powers.” Gabor contends that “a stable but progressive society can exist only if the ”cyclic” type is common, and the other is rare.” In this society, “True science will provide congenial work for uncommon men and women as far as thought can reach.” However, there is one predicament for “the social inventor” in this process and that is the need for “the engineering of human consent.”

Encountering difficulties in “the engineering of human consent” because of “social activists,” an Indian technocrat probes “the contrarian views of social activists and technologists,” to conclude that “social activists are among the most significant impediments to rational development.” He tabulates these “contrarian views” as below:

The Adversarial Relationship between Social Activists and Technologists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Activists</th>
<th>Engineers and Administrators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insist on zero-cost solutions</td>
<td>There is no free lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single issue activity</td>
<td>Should consider all ramifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not responsible for resultant problems</td>
<td>Responsible for all consequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No hesitation to break the Law</td>
<td>Constrained to act within the law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer impractical solutions</td>
<td>Must make their designs work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposed to innovation</td>
<td>Experiment with technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek to avoid poverty</td>
<td>Try to generate wealth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have high communication skills</td>
<td>No communication skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Talking of ecologists, this writer argues, “It is even debatable whether their methods will bring prosperity to the
people whose cause they claim to espouse – they are more likely to perpetuate their present dismal poverty.” The worldview of these Gaborian scientists and technocrats is obvious. There are two forces in the world. They are on the “right” side with privileged access to the scientific “Truth” through colonial education, the military-industrial-academic complex, and political patronage; the innate knowledge and wisdom and, most importantly, the divinely ordained duty of guiding the rest of the society to a scientific salvation. These modern messiahs as much as their cohorts from the military, political, bureaucratic, and economic constituencies with pronounced self-interests in continuing the science and technology programs are quite important actors in the ongoing neo-colonial scheme and they appropriate the larger nation-building task to themselves for obvious selfish goals and gains. They are blind (or deliberately choose to turn a blind eye) to social costs, environmental consequences, future liabilities, and other such externalities of their modern development scheme.

Although independent India’s Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) was set up in August 1948 in the new Department of Scientific Research, it was only on August 3, 1954 that the fully-fledged Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) was created under the direct control of the Prime Minister through a Presidential Order. The Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) was absorbed by the DAE by a Government Resolution of March 1, 1958. Just three months after the DAE was established, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru unequivocally declared in a conference on ‘Development of Nuclear Power for Peaceful Purposes’: “We want to utilise atomic energy for generating electricity because electricity is most essential for the development of the nation.” In 1950 India was producing a meager 1,800 MW power but now a generating capacity of 127,000 MW has been installed.
Almost all of this is thermal and hydropower, with the share of nuclear power an insignificant 2,770 MW, hardly 2.5 percent of the total energy output. The DAE failed to achieve their target of producing 10,000 MW of power by the year 2000 and the new plan is to produce 20,000 MW power by 2020. Although the DAE keeps promising the nation big things such as fast breeder reactors using thorium as fuel, and constructing advanced heavy water reactors (AHWRs) and so forth, the fact of the matter is most of the 14 units (two at Tarapur in western Maharashtra state, four at Rawatbhatta in western Rajasthan state, two at Kalpakkam in Tamil Nadu, two at Narora in northern Uttar Pradesh, two at Kakrapar in western Gujarat and two at Kaiga in southern Karnataka) are beset with technical problems and are operating at well below full capacity.

The safety of the DAE’s nuclear installations is supposed to be overseen by the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) set up in November 1983. However, it is not really independent of the DAE as the AERB reports to the AEC whose head is also the head of the DAE. When A. Gopalakrishnan, the AERB Chairman from 1993 to 1996, submitted the Safety Issues Report that ordered several procedures and corrective actions in Indian nuclear installations, “the BARC [Bhabha Atomic Research Centre] management refused outright to comply with [them].” In fact, in April 2000, R. Chidambaram, then secretary of DAE, simply took away the authority of the AERB to oversee the safety of a large number of critical nuclear installations meant for the weapons program in the BARC. An Internal Safety Committee set up by the BARC director became responsible for ensuring the safety of the public and the workers from dangers that could emanate from these facilities. Thus there is a strong basis to be concerned about the safety of the DAE reactors. What makes the Koodankulam project’s Russian-made VVER-1000 (Vodo-
Vodyannoy Energeticheskiy Reactor; water-cooled and water-moderated) reactors even more disconcerting is the fact that neither the DAE nor the AERB have had any experience with them. According to technical experts, there are grave and serious unresolved technical and safety questions with the VVER reactors such as the embrittlement of the reactor pressure vessel (RPV), failure of control rods to insert properly during an emergency, and steam-generator problems, etc.

However, the DAE does not see the need to inform the public anything about the Koodankulam project. The DAE’s secretive, opaque, exclusivist, and extra-Constitutional functioning has had legal sanction also. Section 3 of the Atomic Energy Act 1962 (the “Act”) enables the Central Government “to declare as ‘restricted information’ any information not so far published or otherwise made public” and “to declare as ‘prohibited area’ any area or premises” where “production, treatment, use, application or disposal of atomic energy or of any prescribed substance” is carried out. Leaping much further, section 18 (restriction on disclosure of information) restraints nuclear information sharing even more stringently. To make matters worse, the Supreme Court ruled in January 2004 that the Central Government had every right to maintain secrecy about nuclear installations and deny public information about them in the interest of national security, which was considered a paramount goal. Although the Indian Constitution guarantees access to information vide Article 19(1)(A), these are, according to the court, subject to reasonable restrictions in the interest of national security. Rejecting a petition by the People’s Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL) and the Bombay Sarvodaya Mandal for making public a government report on safety of nuclear installations, submitted by the AERB to the Delhi government in November 1995, the Court ruled that the petitioners were “not entitled” to obtain the document since it
has been declared “secret” by the Union Government under Section 18 of the Act.

It is important to note that the petitioners did not ask for any information about India’s nuclear arsenal or storage sites, and they merely expressed a genuine concern that there were not enough safety precautions in nuclear power stations in the country and stated that any accident could have a disastrous effect on human beings, animals, and the environment and ecology of surrounding areas. The Atomic Energy Act allows arbitrary suppression of all information, an act dubbed by senior legal personalities in the country as patently unconstitutional. The DAE is easily one of India’s most secretive departments and has much to hide: uranium mining hazards in Jadugoda, excessive irradiation of power-plant workers, waste mismanagement, numbers regarding explosive yields, and so forth.

Without any transparency, accountability, parliamentary oversight or popular scrutiny, and with unlimited funding, a ‘sacred cow’ status, an innocuous ‘science and technology’ label, and the ‘national security’ jingoism, the DAE is an undemocratic department. By making it possible for the DAE fraternity to keep several “incidents” and “accidents” under wraps and to persist with the authoritarian tendencies and practices, the Atomic Energy Act clearly undermines India’s democratic heritage. There is an added danger now that the DAE is looking into ways of making amendments in the Act in order to have private participation in the future nuclear power programs. Talking to reporters after inaugurating the Reverse Osmosis Plant and participating in the “Bhoomipooja” for the construction of turbine building and other civil structures at Koodankulam on August 1, 2002, the chairman and managing director (CMD) of the Nuclear Power Corporation of India
Limited (NPCIL) V. K. Chathurvedi said that NPCIL’s proposal in this regard was under the consideration of the Central Government. An amendment to the Atomic Energy Act is said to be under consideration at various levels of the government. Once the amendment is passed in the Parliament, rich power barons could invest in the nuclear power program and reap high dividends while the Indian state would subsidize nuclear research, enrichment of fuels, disposal of nuclear wastes, and decommissioning of plants with public funds.

In the wake of this privatization move, it is important to consider the track record of the NPCIL and the overall Indian nuclear establishment. The NPCIL was incorporated in 1987 and it presented a maiden dividend cheque of Rs. 50.44 crores to the Prime Minister on December 1, 1999. According to NPCIL’s five years’ balance sheet (1994-95 to 1998-99), Rs. 92,425.78 millions (almost Rs. 9,243 crores) had been used up by the corporation. If we include all the expenses that the country has incurred on behalf of the Indian nukedom from 1948 till 1994, the total cost for installing the current power generating capacity of the Indian nuclear establishment would be quite mind-boggling. And it is certainly not an exaggeration to claim that the civilian nuclear program in India has been money guzzling and inefficient.

The Koodankulam Nuclear Power Project has neither conducted any legally-mandated public hearings nor has it shared the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) with the public. On February 28, 2002, the Conservation of Nature Trust of Nagercoil organized a one-day seminar on “Health Hazards of Radiation” at Nagercoil and one of the invitees was S. K. Agrawal, the director of the Koodankulam Nuclear Power Project. We talked to him about the possibility of the
Koodankulam reactors adding more radiation to the region that is beset with a high amount of background radiation caused by the indiscriminate sea sand-mining of the Indian Rare Earths Limited and other private operators such as V.V. Minerals for thorium, bauxite, ilmenite, garnet and other such rare minerals. We also highlighted the fact that the sand-mining region between Chavara in Kerala and Thoothukudi in Tamil Nadu had been suffering from a very high incidence of cancer. In response, Agrawal casually pulled out a piece of paper from his pocket, drew an X-Y axes graph on it and identified the current level of radiation close to the X-axis without identifying what the axes signified. Redrawing on the same line once again, Agrawal reassured us that the level of radiation would be the same even after the Koodankulam plants started working. Later in the day, Dr. R. Ramesh of Doctors for Safer Environment (DOSE) and I confronted Agrawal on the stage asking why they were not sharing the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) that is said to have been done in 1988 (for a project that is going to go critical in 2007), the Koodankulam site evaluation study and the safety analysis report with the public. After much ducking, dodging, and dilly-dallying, Agrawal undertook publicly and on record that he would share the EIA and the site evaluation report with us and that he would let a few of us see the safety analysis report in their Mumbai office. On February 29, 2002 a few of us were shown around the Koodankulam project site by S.K. Agrawal and when I asked him about the reports that he had undertaken to share with us, he said he was going to Mumbai the next day and would give the reports as soon as he came back. Despite repeated reminders by Dr. R.S. Lal Mohan, another member of our group, Koodankulam authorities have not shared any of these reports with us or anyone else.
The Blind Carrying the Lame: Nuclear...

The Koodankulam project claims to have obtained (a backdoor) clearance from the Ministry of Environment and Forests in Delhi to set up two 1000 MW nuclear reactors. But the nuclear establishment keeps on adding more reactors to be set up in Koodankulam. The decision-making process is unfortunately not a transparent one. Such conduct on the part of the DAE is not limited only to Koodankulam. On July 27, 2001 a public hearing was held at the Kanchipuram District Collector’s office to let the public decide if they wanted the Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) at Kalpakkam (near Chennai). Except the first speaker, who also later turned against the proposed project, everybody opposed the project vociferously. But the central government sanctioned Rs. 3,600 crores for the same project and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh himself inaugurated the construction of the PFBR plants on October 23, 2004. In other words, the public hearing was treated as a perfunctory part of the process. It is pertinent to note that the 100x100 meter foundation pit of this PFBR plant was inundated by the tsunami of December 26, 2004, and Kumudam, a reputed Tamil weekly, reported in its February 14, 2005 issue that some 150 construction workers from northern India were killed in the pit. While the Kalpakkam project director claimed that no one died in the tsunami, the magazine quotes reports of the dead bodies being secretly cremated and demands the truth from the DAE.

It is also equally disconcerting that no political party or politician in India would take the DAE to task about its commissions and omissions. Almost all the political parties in India have similar understanding of ‘development’ and ‘national security’ and hold the same belief that the DAE is an agency for the development and security of the country. Hence they hesitate to challenge the status quo. I met a few Members of Parliament (MP) in October 2004 and in March 2005 in New
Delhi to lobby against the Koodankulam project. When I called on a prominent Congress MP and former cabinet minister from Tamil Nadu, he was on his morning workout. After listening to me frostily, he said that humans die either in their sixes (aaru in Tamil) or by the hundreds (nooru in Tamil) and hinted that the possible dangerous scenarios I was referring to should not be taken seriously. Impervious to the contradiction between his insensate statement on the insignificance of human longevity and his rigorous workout, he was sure that the scientists would take care of the safety of the plants and that was what we should ask for. Another Marxist MP from Tamil Nadu declared characteristically that if one were to ask him whether the youth of the country should starve without employment or die after working for ten days, he would prefer the latter option. He lectured me about radiation from TV sets, cell phones and computers, and when I pointed out the difference between these types of radiation and the ionizing radiation from nuclear plants, the irate MP butted in saying he knew all about it. In my interactions with some thirty MPs from Tamil Nadu and Kerala, I was quite surprised to find out that most of them seemed to know very little about the DAE, the weaponization program, or the nuclear power issue. Several MPs pointed out the need to consult with their party high command before they could take a stand on the nuclear issue; and only two MPs were keen on raising a question in the parliament and asked me to provide them with more information.

So the overall approach of the state elites is that if they ignore the conflict, it will simply cease to exist. The facts that the New Delhi government and the DAE do not share any information about the Koodankulam project with anyone make the local people suspect that it could also be a weapons production and storage facility. After all, Koodankulam is far away from Pakistan and China, and tucked away in a narrow
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When the Hindu right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government in Delhi and the Muslim League government in Islamabad carried out nuclear tests, Pokhran-II and Chagai, on May 11, 13 and 28, 1998, their nuclear adventurism, political rhetoric, and military postures threatened to push the people of the Subcontinent back to square one—the communal hatred and violence of the 1930s and 1940s—and to force to start all over again with an additional nuclear danger this time. Strangely enough, the futuristic security plan pushed us all back into the insecure past. In India, the BJP-led government set off the nuclear fireworks with very little strategic thinking or long-term socioeconomic-political forethought and compromised the country’s longstanding reputation for emphasizing normative considerations in international affairs. India’s rich nonviolence, peacemaking and peacekeeping heritage, adherence to Panchsheela principles, leadership in the Non-Aligned Movement, principled stand on specific issues such as the signing of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and the general resistance to the Western understanding of technologies and development were all abandoned overnight. Seeking admission into the notorious nuclear club and pinning the country’s pride on killing capabilities, the then-Indian rulers betrayed their underdeveloped self-image and undeveloped political credulity. As far as the Koodankulam power plant issue is concerned, the state elites have successfully concealed the dangers involved in the project and presented it as a source of employment, security, peace, and development.

**The Civil Society and Conflict Confusion**

Whether we should establish 'democracy' at the superficial level, or bring about 'social change' at the fundamental level is only the secondary issue for any civil society. What is
primary is the people's responsibility to challenge things and change them. After all, it is the people who participate in the state policies and take part in the gross social injustice. Describing the events in his country as 'cultural revolution,' Vaclav Havel said, "what is most important about this revolution is what the students began with. It is its humanitarian dimension." Although India is holding together and moving forward (albeit extremely slowly for some 400 million poor people), the mind-boggling pluralistic nature of Indian society, absence of class-based mobilization or any coherent social vision, lack of positive and charismatic political leadership, and the virtual impossibility of moving this huge 'nation' of more than one billion people (living in 27 cities with a population of one million and above, more than 4,000 towns and some 594,000 villages) to any single political cause are serious impediments to mass mobilization. In the absence of any revolutionary agenda, overt class conflicts have become more acute within the ruling classes between the major segments of industrial and agricultural capital. The oppression of the 'lower castes' has become more intensified. However, “increased mass awareness of civil and democratic rights has led to an opening up of new political spaces in which political movements and parties would be well placed to raise the demands of the backward castes, scheduled castes, dalits, adivasis and other oppressed sections of society. It is the long-term consequences of this development that will constitute the backbone of future politics in India.”

While the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) workers distributed the radioactive Pokhran-soil as the prasad of their nuclear nationalism, the Indian middle class reveled in newfound scientific glory without realizing that this was a copy-cat technology shamelessly lifted from the White Master who had exploded the inhuman atomic bombs almost sixty years ago. While many may still be indifferent to the facts that the nuclear
confrontation produces a perilous arms race, causes an unbearable burden on the national coffers, alarms other neighboring countries, and creates a very messy situation for the entire Subcontinent, most Indians seem to be clear about their priorities. In a survey conducted by *The Hindu* newspaper during September-October 1998, the people of India identified ‘population control’ (40.51 percent) and ‘poverty elimination’ (31.29 percent) as the most preferred national goals. Only 20.59 percent of the sample population considered “national security” as the number one national goal. But this has not resulted in any kind of spontaneous outbursts of protests or dissension against nuclearism, due mainly to the prevailing indifferent political culture that is marked by remarkable selfishness and submissiveness, poverty, illiteracy, lack of immediacy about the Indo-Pak confrontation in southern India, “nuclear cleansing” of the Indian state by presenting a positive picture about it and so on.

'India' or 'Indians' cannot be reduced to essences as some empiricists and idealists would do, but it is pertinent to point out the centrality of religions in ordering and interpreting life in the Subcontinent. Although misconstrued manifestations of religious enthusiasm are commonplace (which, by the way, render making any essentialist claims ludicrous), the daily transactions of life in India are definitely influenced by religions and the values they preach. Even Jawaharlal Nehru with his secular and modern bent of mind, who called communalism the "greatest enemy of the country," proclaimed to the Parliament once: "only a return to moral and spiritual values could control nuclear energy and save mankind." The “moral and spiritual values” are being replaced by amoral and material values of the globalization era with ‘financial security,’ ‘energy security,’ ‘national security,’ and other such security arrangements for the elites. A highly populated country
like India does have an increasing need for energy, but that energy has to be economical, sustainable and environment-friendly because of the over- and dense-population. We need to spend less (of our national resources) on energy because we have other pressing needs such as health, education, housing, transportation and so forth. We cannot afford the “use and discord” strategy as in nuclear power projects for obvious reasons—among them limited land availability, and future generation’s needs. Our energy projects have to be environmentally friendly because even a small incident can harm, hurt, or kill a huge number of people. But unfortunately, the apolitical trends and tendencies in the Indian civil society are not conducive to influencing the thinking or the functioning of the Indian government or the DAE.

In fact, many of the local *Panchayat* leaders in the Koodankulam area work as subcontractors on the nuclear power project. Most commoners were taken in by the false promises of the DAE that 10,000 jobs would be created by the Koodankulam project and that the locals would gain most. The people of the area also thought that by giving up their land at the low price of Rs. 800-1,200 per acre, versus the typical asking rate of Rs. 75,000 per acre, they would also guarantee their children jobs in the project. The southernmost tip of India has been rife with distrust and animosity between the farming *Nadars* and fishing *Mukuvars*. The peasant leaders tend to think that the nuclear power project is a threat mainly to the coastal areas and fishing communities and hence are not overly worried about it. They took greater interest in the Koodankulam project only when their agricultural interests came to be threatened. For instance, the news that the project would draw water from the Pechipparai dam in Kanyakumari district spurred them into swift action such as street protests and a court case against such a move. The fishing communities
are quite aware of the fact that their rights to life and livelihood will be severely hampered when the nuclear project becomes operational. However, these uneducated, marginalized, and economically disempowered people who are torn by internal divisions and dominated by the Catholic Church are not politically proactive. When they participated in a struggle against sea-sand mining operations at Perumanal village a few years ago, the State unleashed brutal violence and pressed serious charges against many men and women. True to the old adage, “once bitten twice shy,” this “Perumanal incident” still holds sway in the local people’s political psyche and thwarts them from engaging in any direct action. Their inability to do anything meaningful about the indiscriminate sea-sand mining operations and the lack of external sympathy or help with the nuclear power project situation have only compounded their sense of resignation. The devastating tsunami of December 2004 has sealed their fate even more irrevocably.

The student community that has the potential to play an active role in any social movement is also largely apathetic today because of the ever increasing demands for more and more specialized skills and the prove-your-worth logic of the globalized market. Increasing costs of education, heavy competition for educational and employment opportunities, and the peer pressure to do well in life along the “our way of life” American model entices the student community and keeps them occupied. The Private Voluntary Organizations (PVOs) tend to play safe by not engaging in anti-government activities in order not to jeopardize their chances of getting government grants and loans or attract the wrath of the government in the form of scrutiny of their funds and activities. Many NGOs such as the M.S. Swaminathan Foundation in Chennai that manage to project a highly credible image mainly because of their huge funding and elite patronage provide the much-needed ground
support to the Koodankulam project by undertaking support projects such as setting up a ‘green belt’ around the Koodankulam plant at a huge cost. It has also been a trend in the NGO circles in India to pick a fight with soft targets rather than hard ones such as the powerful government departments like the DAE. For instance, at the World Social Forum in Mumbai in January 2004, scores of NGOs from various corners of the country were demonstrating against Pepsi Cola, Coca Cola, World Bank and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Picking on such soft targets, these NGOs maintain their activist profile, secure sufficient funding and avoid unnecessary confrontation with the state authorities.

The leaders of various religions also steer clear of any confrontation with the government as they do not want the government to scrutinize their divine transactions and spiritual escapades. Some of the anti-Koodankulam activists’ repeated request to a Hindu (Nadar) religious sect leader to support their campaign invariably brought disingenuous nods and not-to-be-honored campaign dates as the response. When the activists approached the Thoothukudi Bishop for his support, he said that he would like to invite the Koodankulam authorities also, listen to both sides of the story and then decide if he could extend his and his parish priests’ support. The activists appreciated the fairness of the deal, accepted it without any preconditions and agreed to meet the Koodankulam officials anytime anywhere. However, the agreed meeting dates were always cancelled or postponed and the meeting never took place. Later news reports indicated that the same Bishop was working closely with the Koodankulam project officials on a few projects and functions. The Koodankulam authorities offer free computers to coastal villages, take some villagers on a trip to the Kalpakkam nuclear power station and other nuclear(ized) installations to show how clean and green these power projects
are, and do a public relations stunt at the cost of public money and with media support.

There is hardly any debate in the media about the DAE and its acts of commission and omission. The Sun TV, the most popular channel in Tamil Nadu, conducted a rather long interview with me on the Koodankulam conflict and the larger nuclear power issue in May 2001 for their primetime breakfast show, *Vanakkam Tamilagam* (Greetings Tamil Nadu). When the interview was not telecast for some time, I called the station to inquire about it and came to know that the Managing Director of Sun TV, who was the son of Murasoli Maran, a senior cabinet minister in the BJP-led government in Delhi, and grandson of the DMK leader M. Karunanidhi, had to approve the interview for telecasting. When the 2001 state election results went against the ruling DMK government, the interview was hurriedly telecast the same day without any of the usual pre-show announcements. Similarly, when I tried to take out an advertisement for founding the ‘Green Party of India’ at Nagercoil in October 2001 that, I thought, could provide the much-needed ideological rigor and vision and spearhead the struggle against the Koodankulam project and the larger nuclear issues, the leading Tamil newspapers refused to accept my ad saying that it was against the government. I managed to get the ad in only by exploiting their business rivalry.

When the activists talk to men, women, children, and the elderly in farming and fishing villages, it is often hard for them to explain the complicated scientific concepts such as nuclear fission, spent fuel, and radioactivity etc. Equally hard is to describe the inexplicable events that happened in distant and strange-sounding places like Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Chernobyl and Three Mile Island. Similarly, informing the rural people about the unfamiliar policymaking and decision-making
processes and the different players in the game is also quite cumbersome. Over the years, the activists have developed a knack and the language to get their message across by dwelling on safety concerns, health issues, environmental impacts and so forth. Although these deprived people do not quite grasp the scientific, economic, and political sides of the issue, they are certainly aware of the health hazards in varying degrees. They are worried about the possibility of losing their livelihood; they fear for their children’s safety; they are concerned about the prospects of being (forcefully) relocated from their ancestral homes and villages; and they are simply scared about what is in store for them. Most women often lament, “What do we, illiterate women, know about anything?” And they would earnestly appeal, “You educated people should do something about this menace.” The activists’ exhorting them to use their political power, organize themselves and engage in nonviolent activism mostly induces chuckles, sighs, silence and sometimes tough questions. The fishermen are easy to talk to as they are relatively better informed about the ways of the government and the impacts of the nuclear and other ‘development’ projects, especially on the sea. Many of them agree that there is a close connection between nuclear power and bomb programs and that the Koodankulam project is a highly dangerous one for them and for the entire region. But they are quite confused about what and how to do anything about the conflict.

The State and Anti-Nuclear Opposition Encounter

When all is said and done, nuclearism is an ideology, a mindset, a worldview dominated by an amalgamation of fears and insecurities, bigotry and prejudices, and misplaced conceptions of the self and misperceived notions of the Other. Nuclearism attempts to look innocuous by encompassing notions such as nationalism (national security, national pride, military virility etc.), scientism (advanced science and
technology), and developmentalism (energy security). When this paranoid mindset reigns supreme without any ethical and moral considerations, the resultant socioeconomic-political values and interests are quite hypocritical and deceitful. For instance, the nuclear establishments around the world insist on differentiating between civilian and military nuclear programs but quite strangely, the civilian programs of Iran somehow become unacceptable to the nuclear powers. The Indian nuclear establishment has always held their “atom for peace” flag aloft. But now it has switched from the cheap and clean power promises to greater national security and energy security assertions to ensure continued funding, power and prominence.

Reacting to the US-India nuclear deal signed in July 2005 which requires opening up the Indian civilian nuclear facilities for international inspection, A. N. Prasad, former director of the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) told *The Hindu* that segregation of civilian and military facilities in the nuclear field in India is “impossible.” Pointing out and problematizing the stockpiling logic/bias of the agreement, Prasad said the Indian deterrent is maintained by “incremental efforts” from existing “civilian” nuclear facilities around the country and not just the two research reactors at BARC, Dhruva and Cirus. According to Prasad, “We produce what we need for the military programme at any given time and leave the rest for civilian use.” Agreeing to IAEA safeguards has the country’s fast breeder program at stake and the eventual third stage of utilizing India’s huge reserves of thorium that will allow energy security “for the next 300 years.” Prasad fears: “Allowing IAEA inspectors and signing the Additional Protocol means throwing open not just your reactors but the entire chain, the whole fuel cycle. This is the crux of the whole issue.” Prasad argues that the fast breeder program “is sacred for us in the long-run. Once we get into thorium, no one can
touch us. If we do it and succeed, we will be on top of the world. But to reach there, we need full freedom to do our research. Nobody should be breathing down our necks.”

As a result of this thinking, Indians and Pakistanis were about to be on top of the world on a mushroom cloud in May 2002. All the defense bodies were put on alert in India and it was announced that an integrated battlefield shelter had been developed to provide protection from nuclear as well as biological and chemical agents and to ensure retaliatory attacks. On May 25, an Indian minister said that India would use nuclear weapons if Pakistan used them. On May 31, 2002, the Pakistani ambassador to the United Nations held out the nuclear threat. He said that they would use nuclear weapons even if India stuck to conventional weapons. As our “leaders” were playing so thoughtlessly with the lives and futures of some 1.6 billion people, many Americans, Australians, Germans, French, British, and UN workers were leaving India and Pakistan in a hurry. On May 28, the American intelligence agencies announced that some 12 million Indians and Pakistanis would be killed and up to 7 million could be injured in a nuclear war between the two countries. These were just immediate casualties. And the subsequent casualties could not even be assessed. The “ordinary” Indians and Pakistanis were reading the newspapers every morning to see what their fate was going to be that day.

Capitalizing on the general and nuclear illiteracy that prevail in the country, and hiding behind the notions of national security, energy security and economic development, the Indian nuclear establishment manages to create an impression that theirs is a progress-oriented program and that there is no opposition to their doings. The Indian nuclear establishment does have a method to its madness. It keeps its cards close to its
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chest and keeps the people of India in the dark about its intentions and activities. No one outside the top leadership of the nukedom and the government is ever informed of anything directly. In March 1999 there was a leak of heavy water at Kalpakkam but the AERB dismissed the incident by saying that “the release to the environment is maintained well within the limits specified by the AERB.” Another leak that affected workers at the Kalpakkam Reprocessing Plant in January 2003 was met with complete silence, but after persistent media reports and pressure from eminent scientists and public figures, the DAE acknowledged the accident six months after the event. Some of the installations at Kalpakkam are outside the reach of even the AERB or any other authority because they carry a strategic tag. Similarly, Tamil daily Dinakaran reported on January 20, 2005 that there was widespread fear of radiation leak at Kalpakkam and that foreign experts would arrive on January 24, 2005 to fix the problem, but the DAE authorities maintained that there was no radiation leak whatsoever.

Another characteristic of the Indian nuclear establishment’s functioning is to explain things away without ever assuming any responsibility. When people expressed concerns about the impacts of tsunami on the Koodankulam power plant, the project director S. K. Agrawal claimed in a press meet (as reported by Dinakaran on January 14, 2005) that they had already studied the possible impacts of a tsunami on the plant, and that the tsunami waves in that area were estimated at 5.44 meters above Mean Sea Level (MSL) and hence the minimum grade level of the site had been designed as 7.5 meters MSL. Similarly, the DAE chief Anil Kakodkar and the chairman of NPCIL, S. K. Jain allayed the fears of natural calamities affecting the Koodankulam reactors by saying that “the reactors at Koodankulam, safeguarded by strong dykes, were situated at an appreciably elevated site.” Yet another
feature of the Indian nukedom’s functioning is to leak information by bits and pieces and never revealing the complete plan to the outside world in a straight-forward manner. A good example for this sneaky behavior is the way the number of power plants in Koodankulam complex is increased incrementally and the way the information is shared with the local people.

The DAE’s "temples of science and technology” (to use Russian President Putin’s words) provide the middle class scientists and engineers stable job, steady income, and comfortable living. But what 400 million poor people of India get out of these nuclear power projects is a big question. Most of them are not even aware that the hardnosed blind elites are taking them for a ride. And they remain tongue-tied. As the blind have their eyes fixed on the power, prominence, professional careerism, and profit that the nuclear idiocy fetches them, the politically lame are tied down by poverty, illiteracy, political centralization, and social oppressions. With their own truth-claims summarily rejected and their dignity trampled, the “ordinary citizens” are denied the basic necessities of life, meaningful education, appropriate technology, sustainable development, and access to the corridors of power. Having been deprived of these entitlements, and denied the inalienable right to envision their own futures, the “ordinary citizens” are rendered lame. The national development journey then becomes the hardnosed blind leading the tongue-tied lame to a singular nuclear(ized) salvation. The informed sections of the civil society in the southern tip of India do challenge in vain the state elites’ understanding of development and doubt the nuclear scientists’ unmitigated truth-claims, copy-cat science and technology, aversion to TAP (transparency, accountability, and people’s participation) and
their undemocratic scheme of taking us all to a Western-type ‘Brave New World.’

When the interactive approach that focuses on the interactions between the state and the anti-nuclear movements is employed to study the Koodankulam conflict, we find out that little is achieved within and around different conflict arenas. Because of the Indian nukedom’s culture of secretiveness, evasiveness, sneakiness and the totalitarian tendencies, it is quite hard to pin them down and they are also closed to debate. Although the state elites have not been too tolerant or flexible in their conflict-handling style and have employed intimidation tactics like the police firing in May 1989, they tread very carefully and avoid provoking the local people into action by indulging in any high-handed behaviors or actions. On the other hand, the anti-nuclear movement has been rather non-confrontational and nonviolent. It has neither achieved any significant mobilization of the civil society nor posed any challenge to the polity during the ongoing conflict. Consequently, the encounters have been rather indirect and remote. Because of the weak encounter dynamics, the actual impact of the anti-nuclear movement on decision-making and policy-making is also quite negligible. The movement has not achieved any of its goals. It is pertinent to note that the anti-Koodankulam movement attained strong momentum when the Pechiparai dam water that is so valuable for the majority and powerful farming (Nadar) communities was at stake. But the movement went into dormancy when only the minority fishing (Mukuvar) communities’ interests were threatened by the Koodankulam project. With the majority Nadar community’s leaders beating a retreat and the marginalized Mukuvar community failing to develop a strong leadership, the movement has now become more of a sophisticated intellectual campaign.
While the scope of anti-nuclear movements is not very different from other social movements, their nature is vastly different as the anti-nuclear movements take on the sensitive national security and development issues and confront the top echelons of the state elites with big money and bigger powers. The conflict parties here are not exactly individuals or institutions but different understanding and prioritization of security and development and hence the conflict could actually be turned into a healthy and constructive dialogue process for the betterment of the society. Unfortunately, the practice of democracy and governance in the contemporary world has a very long way to go before we attain such maturity and fairness. As a result, the anti-nuclear movements are not necessarily seeking resolution of the conflict; in fact, the power differential between the state elites and the movements is so high that the elites do not even bother about the movements. The anti-nuclear movements, if sincere to their principles and values, cannot attempt any meaningful conflict transformation efforts also because the basic beliefs and convictions are so starkly different that they could not possibly see eye to eye with the state elites. So ‘conflict persistence’ is more of an appropriate idea here. Delineating the basic foundational principles such as ecological wisdom, social justice, grassroots democracy, nonviolence and so on, the anti-nuclear movements must persist with the conflict and keep telling their side of the story strongly and stubbornly. There are inherent dangers of harassment and hardships, intimidation and even extermination in some stray cases, but then this is a fight for principles and the future of the Earth and the humanity. The anti-nuclear activists embrace the dangers and risks but they do not become the sources of the same. Success in a socioeconomic-political conflict may not be defined as achieving what the activists and movements actually wanted. Problematizing the issue at hand
and embarking on the journey of critical thinking and dissenting is half the success. Success is a relative concept here and even ‘failure’ is a kind of success as the anti-nuclear movements conscientize a considerable number of citizens. Since there can only be a beginning but no clear end for this principled journey, the anti-nuclear movements had better persist with the struggle as long as they can and as much as they can.

A recent book, *Prisoners of the Nuclear Dream*,\textsuperscript{28} sums up the current predicament in the southern tip of India succinctly. The authors, Ramana and Reddy, rightly point out that the battle between the weapon-supporters and weapon-opponents (by extension, nuclearists and anti-nuclearists in general) is a battle for the soul of India and the final choice that “ordinary citizens” face is one “between education and catastrophe.” So the anti-nuclear movements should do three things: educate, educate, and educate a bit more. The basic operating principle of this education should not be ‘Us vs. Them’ but ‘Us vs. Then,’ all of us facing the common future. This education should focus on seeing the sea as humanity’s food basket, the atmosphere as our collective external lung, and the future a hope of sustainable joy.

References
For detailed information on the Koodankulam nuclear power plant, see S. P. Udayakumar, ed., *The Koodankulam Handbook* (Nagercoil, India: Transcend South Asia, 2004).

For instance, Group for a Peaceful Indian Ocean (GPIO) organized several leaflet campaigns in 1987-89 on nuclear disarmament, the superpower nuclear rivalry in the Indian Ocean and declaring the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace etc and opposed the Koodankulam nuclear power project.

I started with an occasional email digest on the Koodankulam issue, co-founded the *Anumin Nilaya Ethirpu Iyakkam* (Nuclear Power Project Opposition Movement) and associated with the People’s Movement Against Nuclear Power (PMANP) along with senior and more experienced friends such as Y. David, George Gomez, and R. S. Lal Mohan.


Some of us use the name People’s Movement Against Nuclear Energy (PMANE) now.


T.V. Sathyamurthy, "State and Society in a Changing Political Perspective," *Economic and Political*
“Pokhran II agony or ecstasy?” *The Hindu*, November 15, 1998.


The High Court bench in Madurai has just ruled in August 2005 that the 1976 Tamil Nadu GO (that recommends that the people who give up their lands for government and public sector projects should be given priority in employment) be implemented earnestly.


