

## **ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT AND THE MEDIA IN DAKSHINA KANNADA**

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### ***Abstract:***

*Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts are situated on the west coast of Karnataka. Fishing is one of the major occupations in the two districts. Undivided district is called as the cradle of Indian banking industry and educational hub. The sea port, the airport, railway network and national highways have helped growth of industries in the region. As number of large industries increased in the district their environmental consequences were also felt. Thus affected groups, residents and environmental groups launched an agitation against anti-environment industries in the district.*

*Environmental movements need communication strategies and media coverage in order to mobilize people for action. Media coverage is important to influence political decision-making with regard to environmental issues. This study analyses use of communication media in the environmental movements of Dakshina Kannada district.*

*This study is based on interviews and content analysis of booklets, pamphlets and newsletters that the environmental groups have brought out.*

***Keywords:***

*Communication strategies, environment movements, agenda setting, policy making, alternative media, opinion leaders*

Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts, situated on the west coast of Karnataka, were one district until 1997. The two districts have geographically, economically, socially and culturally distinct place in the state. With a coastline of about 160 kms fishing is one of the major occupations in the two districts. Thus the export of sea food brings in valuable foreign exchange. Apart from the modern New Mangalore Port, there are seven other minor ports. The undivided district is called as the cradle of Indian banking industry as four major nationalized banks<sup>1</sup> were founded here.

The presence of banking industry has helped the growth of several industries including traditional industries. Coconut, rice, cashew, arecanut are the major agricultural produce of the region. According to 2011 census the percentage of literacy is 88.62 and 86.29 in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts respectively while the state average is only 66.64 percent (<http://www.census2011.co.in>). Educational institutions including universities, colleges and research centers have been attracting students not only from other states in India but also from several foreign countries. Higher levels of literacy

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<sup>1</sup> Canara Bank, Corporation Bank, Syndicate Bank, Vijaya Bank and Karnataka Bank.

and education have provided human resources needed for the growth and expansion of manufacturing and service industries. The sea port, the airport, railway network and national highways have helped growth of industries in the region.

The unique features of the undivided district attracted huge industrial investment in the 1990s<sup>2</sup>. As the number of large industries increased in the district their environmental consequences were also felt. Growing industrial pollution has created an apprehension in the minds of people about the ecology of Western Ghats, the effect on coastal ecosystem and fish production, the effect of high rainfall and wind on fly ash, the effect on soil due to pollution from industries, the availability of resources like water and the overloading of traffic networks (Government of India, 1987:1).

All these concerns about the environment of the district brought together like minded people in the district leading to a movement that sought measures for sustainable development. A federation of NGOs with more than 3,000 volunteers formed a network to spread environmental awareness in the district. The NGO network established *Parisara Jagruthi Samithi* (Environmental Awareness Committees) in a few villages and launched mobilisation programmes to form a mid-level taluk committee in each taluk and an apex district environment awareness committee. The Dakshina Kannada Fisher folk environment protection

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<sup>2</sup> These industries include Mangalore Refineries and Petrochemicals Ltd (MRPL), BASF, ELF and GAS. Besides, information technology majors started locating their facilities in Mangalore. Over the years, Dakshina Kannada has grown rapidly into a rich industrial zone. The Oil and Natural Gas Corporation's (ONGC) multi product SEZ (Special economic Zone) with an investment of over Rs. 35,000 crore also took up its road corridor and pipeline works here

committee and *Parisarasaktha Shikshakara samithi* (Environment Federation of Teachers) also came into existence.

Those directly affected by the industries and the environmental groups launched agitations against building of petrochemical complex, petroleum pipeline project, thermal power project, barge-mounted power project, violation of coastal regulatory zone and pollution of the sea. But most of these agitations did not succeed in stalling the projects (Rai, 1999).

### **Media and the environmental issues**

The media have been found to be a significant source of information to the public about environmental issues. Media coverage of the environment issues has a positive correlation with audiences' personal knowledge (Yao, 2008: 265). The media play an important role when a group or individual tries to trigger public concern and, finally, influences policies because the media shed light on certain issues and aspects among competitive alternatives (Moon& Shin, 2010: 52). Media have a relatively strong ability to draw 'pictures in audiences' heads'' with regard to environmental issues (Moon& Shin, 2010:61).

The media role in influencing policy circles and public opinion has been pertinent in the second half of the twentieth century, particularly from the 1980s when environmental issues gained more visibility in the public sphere (Miyase, 2010: 4). The agenda setting hypothesis suggests that the mass media have the ability to influence the priority of issues on the public agenda (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Agenda setting is concerned with the connection between the mass media, occurrences in the real world, and how people construct these events in their own

minds. It is premised on the assumption that audiences, apart from learning about public issues through the media, also determines how much importance to attach to an issue or topic from the emphasis the media place upon it. It also implies that news and information from the mass media reflect the content and order of issue priority and that this representation of issues exerts an independent effect on the nature of issue content so that the public come to believe in their importance (Aidoo, 2001:522-523).

Essentially then, what the agenda setting hypothesis suggests is that the mass media have the ability to influence which issues people think about. Media can get people into thinking that, those issues are important. In other words, audience agenda priorities are influenced by the agenda priorities of the media (Aidoo,2001: 523).

Studies have shown that the number of times a story is reported in news affects how people perceive the importance of the story irrespective of what exactly is said about the topic . Apart from providing cues about the salience of topics and issues, the mass media also tell people how to think about the topics and issues.

### **Literature Review**

Several studies have found agenda-setting effects in the relation between media coverage and public opinion on environmental issues. Researchers found ‘positive correlation between the prominence given to environmental issues by the media and the salience assigned to those issues by the media and the salience assigned to those issues by the public ‘(Aidoo,2001: 524).

In a study on the Finnish major press and public opinion about environmental issues, researcher P. Suhonen concluded that for most of the 15 year period that he examined in his research, the proportion of those expressing concern for the environment varied according to the amount of press coverage devoted to it (Suhonen,1993).

In another study conducted in Canada, Parlour and Schatzow also concluded that public concern about environmental issues occurred only when these were registered in media .

In a study on the coverage of environmental issues in Bangladesh newspapers Reza & Haque, (2011) found that newspapers prioritized three subjects, protecting the rivers, stopping deforestation and minimizing pollution level as top agenda of the local environment. Local environmental issues did not disappear from the newspaper coverage even though global climate change related agendas received much attention. This was the strategic move by the media to draw the attention of policy makers. The aim of the coverage was to create awareness and to persuade key policy makers to take appropriate measures to protect the local environment.

In a study on role of `communication in climate change and sustainable development'(Yadav & Rani, 2011), researchers discussed the role of different communication tools such as print media, electronic media, folk media, Interpersonal communication channels, amateur radio, mobile technology and web based technology in educating and enlightening the masses. According to them media plays a pivotal role in creating awareness and bringing the positive behavioral change among people in mitigating the anthropogenic climate change. Hence the role and the responsibility of communication and mass media are immense in climate change and development communication.

The paper on 'The Media and Environmental issues in Hongkong' tests the agenda setting hypothesis for the environmental issues in Hong Kong from 1983 to 1995.

The media agenda was determined in a content analysis of three prominent newspapers. Secondary analysis of opinion surveys provided the public salience for the environment issue.

Five issues (including water pollution and sewage treatment, air pollution, environmental education, solid waste disposal, and green group activities) were most frequently reported in the press. They contributed to over 50 percent of the total number of items analyzed.

It was found that the agenda-setting hypothesis was supported for the initial period of five and a half years. In the subsequent period of seven and a half years, despite the increased media coverage of the issues, there was a significant drop in the perceived salience of the environmental problem. This may be due to the dilution of public attention as a result of diversity in the news agenda and reporting of local environmental problems as 'soft' news.

It was also found that the environmental issue failed to compete with other prominent issues directly affecting the public. The mass media played a much less important role in keeping the environmental issue on the public agenda at the later stage.

### **General Objective**

Environmental movements need communication strategies and media coverage in order to mobilize people for action. Media coverage is important to influence political decision-making with regard to environmental issues. Without media access, social movements experience political marginality. This study

analyses use of communication media in the environmental movements of Dakshina Kannada district.

**Specific Objectives:**

1. To examine the communication strategies the environmental groups used to reach out to people and to the media.
2. To study the presentation of issues in the booklets and pamphlets brought out during these movements.
3. To analyze the role of press and journalists during environmental movements.
4. To examine the coverage of environmental issues as perceived by activists.

**Methodology:**

This study is based on interviews and content analysis of booklets, pamphlets and newsletters that the environmental groups have brought out. The activists interviewed for the study were those who were key leaders in struggles against MRPL, Cogentrix, MSEZ and UPCL.

Public Interest Litigations and petitions submitted by activists and the affected persons have also been used as sourced for gathering data on the environmental movement.

**Environmental movements in the district**



Because of higher levels of literacy and mass media use<sup>3</sup> people are generally aware of environmental issues. People's participation in Save Western Ghats *Padayatra* that passed through the district in the late 1980s laid the foundation for future environmental struggles. Later, several organizations such as '*Dakshina Kannada district Parisarasaktha Okkuta*' (Dakshina Kannada district Environment Federation), '*Dakshina Kannada Parisarasaktha Meenugarara Sangha*' (Dakshina Kannada District Fishermen Environment Protection Committee), '*Dakshina Kannada Krushikara Vedike*' (Dakshina Kannada District Farmers' Forum), *Janabhivruddhi Vedike* were established. These organizations have launched several forms of protests against harmful consequences of setting up of mega industries.

Although the environmental movement in the district did not continue to be vibrant in all years of the last three decades it was the media coverage that kept Dakshina Kannada environmental movement alive (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 1997).

Despite the fact that environmental groups have utilized the media to considerable advantage in advancing their cause the media houses did not explicitly take positions on these issues.

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<sup>3</sup> With the highest literacy rate in the state the district has a very large newspaper-reading public. The Hindu, Deccan Herald, The New Indian Express, Times of India, state level dailies including Prajavani, Kannada Prabha, Vijaya Karnataka, Samyuktha Karnataka, Udayavani and Vijayavani have their bureau and print their Dakshina Kannada and Udupi editions at Mangalore. National level English Newspapers dedicate two pages for covering events of the district. State level dailies carry 2 to 3 pages of news from the district and a four-page local supplement that focuses on local news. Local dailies including Karavali Ale, Hosadigantha, Vartha Bharathi, Magalore Mitra, Jayakirana, Canara Times (English), Mangalore today (magazine, English) and Daiji world website are also popular in this region.

The Mangalore harbour project which was commissioned in the year 1964 laid the foundation for industrialization in the district. As many as 17,800 families which were mainly engaged in cultivation of paddy, sugar cane coconut were affected. The project also displaced hundreds of fishermen families. In the absence of awareness and organizations, this massive displacement did not face the challenge of sustained resistance (Government of India, 1987).

According to the activists (Ranjan Rao, Personal Communication, November 14, 2012) there were not many newspapers in the district during the late 1960's. Since development was the major concern of the few newspapers the harbor issue did not make news.

History of the environmental movement in Dakshina Kannada district can be traced back to 1983 when Belthangady taluk was hit by Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD). In three years the Kyasanur disease affected more than 10,000 people and killed hundreds of them. According to the experts, the root cause of the problem was destruction of forest (Hiregange, 1999). Felling trees forced monkeys to leave the forest. Monkeys which were infected with the disease passed it on to domestic animals grazing on the edge of the forests and through them the disease was transmitted to human beings.

Kyasanur disease resurfaced in Dakshina Kannada district again in the year 2004 when trees were felled for the Mangalore-Bangalore pipeline project. While deaths were reported the causes of the disease were ignored. As people could not see the link between Kyasanur disease and deforestation, there were no public protests in the district.

In the 1980s, building of a dam across the river Kumardhara and a thermal power project were opposed. The struggle against dam across the Kumardhara

river did not develop into a mass movement but the media attention kept the issue alive for decades.

In the year 1989 the Karnataka Power Corporation Limited (KPCL) notified a 2 x 210 MW coal based thermal power station at Nandikur. The Ministry of Environment and Forest (MOEF) rejected this project on environmental grounds. The KPCL then handed over the project to the National Thermal Power Plant (NTPC) in 1989. Though the Ministry of Environment and Forest cleared the project with stringent conditions the project could not get clearance from the cabinet committee for economic affairs. Following cabinet committee's decision the NTPC was forced to abandon plans despite sinking crores of rupees into the initiation of the project. The Karnataka government invited Cogentrix Energy in 1992 to build a thermal power plant in the district.

But there was an immediate outcry against the project at all levels both on ecological and economic grounds. Protest against Cogentrix was also a struggle against liberalisation process which protected inefficiency, increased corruption and entrenched deep political systems within the power sector (Saldana, 2001:11).

Ron Somers , Managing Director of the Cogentrix gave huge donations to local youth clubs, sports clubs, conventions, temples and student unions in order to gain their support for the project. Newspapers criticized Ron Somars for making donations to clubs and Kannada literary convention (Manjunath Bhat, Personal Communication, December 10, 2012). The Cogentrix issue occupied a major share of news in the newspapers when compared to the other environment issues of the district.

The High Court of Karnataka in early 1998 ordered a Central Bureau of Investigation ( CBI ) inquiry based on allegations of corruption leveled against the

promoters of the project by consumer activist Arun Agarwal. As Cogentrix did not want to face a CBI inquiry it pulled out of the project ( <http://www.downtoearth.org.in/node/18786> ).

National television channels such as Star TV carried the news about the strategies of Cogentrix Energy and how Cogentrix had to pull out of the district (Uendra Hosabettu, Personal Communication, November 17, 2012).

After NTPC and Cogentrix shelved their projects Nagarjuna company entered the district to build a thermal power project at Nandikuru. Later Lanco Infra Tech Limited also joined its hand with Nagarjuna Company. Now it has become Udupi Power Corporation Limited (UPCL) a joint venture of Nagarjuna and Lanco.

Though the Nagarjuna company began its construction work in the same area which was earlier earmarked for Cogentrix, it failed to gain media attention. The project area came under Udupi district after division of the Dakshina Kannada district in 1997 and the new small district with only three taluks did not have strong media presence. The newly started district editions of state level newspapers ignored the Nagarjuna issue. Due to lack of leadership, the movement against the project could not prevent acquisition of land. People are still facing the consequences of surrendering their lands.

The publications (booklets and pamphlets) brought out during this period were mainly aimed at creating awareness among the general public. NGOs such as Nagarika Seva Trust, Nandikuru Janajagruthi Samithi played a major role in bringing out publications. Denmark and Indian government jointly conducted a study on environment sustainability of the district in 1993. While DANIDA (Danish International Development Agency) studied environmental sustainability of the district the Karnataka Centre for Infrastructure Planning analyzed industrial

and economic development. Highlights of the reports were included in this booklet. This study mainly recommended setting up of action committees at different levels to protect the environment.

Nagarika Seva Trust brought out a pamphlet 'Karavaliya Badukige Buldozer'(Coastal life bulldozed) with the objective of sensitizing people about the eco sensitive zone of Dakshina Kannada. Nagarjuna Virodi Horata Samithi (Anti Nagarjuna Agitation Committee) brought out pamphlets to create awareness among the general public. Carrying capacity of the district, the Impact of thermal power plant on fishing industry, agriculture and Western Ghats were the focus of one of the booklets.

In another pamphlet details of land acquired for different proposed projects were provided. Along with Cogentrix, nearly 37 industrial projects were proposed in the district with a total capital of Rs 35,000 crores within a radius of 60 km (Assadi, 1996:2130). But finally out of 37 only two companies i.e. MRPL and BASF managed to build their plants. Activists questioned the sustainability of the projects mainly through letters.

A project which created an uproar in the district after the exit of the controversial Cogentrix Energy was Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Limited (MRPL). Considering the growing demands for petroleum products in South India and the available port infrastructure for crude oil import, the refinery was located at Kuthethur, a village 26 km from Mangalore city. The project was conceived in 1988 and commenced in 1993. MRPL's plans to dispose effluents directly into the sea, was opposed by the fishing community and environmentalists. The fishermen argued that the effluents of refineries posed serious threat to the fishing breeds and fishing grounds.

Despite stiff opposition, the pipeline was laid with the police protection on December 21, 1995, the fishing community under the banner of Dakshina Kannada meenugarara parisara samrakshana samithi (Fishermen environment conservation committee) decided to launch a massive agitation and called for a district-wide bundh. Whole villages poured out on the streets as men, women and children gathered to physically block the laying of the pipeline and remove those sections that had already been laid.

When the police fired at the protesters who were holding a demonstration violence erupted. More than 100 people including some policemen were injured in the violence. A bundh was observed against the police atrocity on the protesters across the district including major towns Mangalore and Udupi. Violence broke out in many places (Nisarga Sandesha, 1995: 7) . Following this struggle the government constituted a committee of fishermen to test the waste water of MRPL near Chitrapur seashore before discharging it into the sea .

After this agitation, Dakshina Kannada has not witnessed any such massive environmental struggle. The MRPL is now discharging the treated effluent with lined pipe and diffusers into Arabian Sea at about 650 meters from Chitrapura seashore According to journalist Manjunath Bhat<sup>4</sup> there were reports in favour and against the MRPL. A few journalists took personal interest and wrote reports on the environmental consequences of the MRPL effluent pipeline. Other than state and national level newspapers, a local Kannada newspaper “*Karavali Ale*” with its extensive coverage of the issue became the voice of the

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<sup>4</sup> Mr. Manjunath Bhat , a senior journalist was with local dailies of Dakshina Kannada *Karavali Ale*, *Mungaru* and *Udayavani* dailies who advocated environmental causes.

anti-MRPL agitation. The paper tried to educate people about the environmental effects of the project and false promises of the company about providing employment to the members of the affected families.

According to activist Natesh Ullal (Personal Communication, November 16, 2012), the national media focused mainly on Hindi speaking belt and ignored serious environmental issues of South India. Though MRPL firing was a significant incident in Dakshina Kannada and in the history of environmental movement, the national media failed to give adequate coverage to it. The state newspapers rarely looked beyond Bangalore and hardly paid any attention to the issues of the district. But the local newspapers did play a significant role in explaining different aspects of the issue to the readers.

In order to mobilize community participation Interpersonal communication channels involving opinion of leaders were effectively used. To create awareness among Mogaveera community, the youth organizations organized talks by consumer activist Ravindranath Shanbhag<sup>5</sup> in the villages of un-divided Dakshina Kannada. He addressed villagers on environmental hazardous, water scarcity and health problems. With the help of a projector he explained to them about the possible bleak future the district faced.

Poems that characterized MRPL and Cogentrix Energy as monsters appeared on the pamphlets

After Cogentrix Energy and MRPL the fishermen resisted building of the Thaneebhavi Power Project. Two barge-mounted power projects namely SMITH

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<sup>5</sup> Environmentalist and consumer activist who created awareness about environment issues of the district through his own journal 'Balakedarara Shikshana' and talks in the thickly populated fishermen communities. He also filed Public Interest Litigations against use of Endosulfan as a pesticide.

CO-GENERATION near Bengre and Euro-Canara in Tannirbavi (on the river itself) were to come up but had to be abandoned after public hearing and massive protests. The print Media provided extensive coverage to the issue by highlighting public hearing and by carrying investigative stories about the construction being taken up without the knowledge of public.

But the GMR barge mounted power plant managed to set up its plant here. Though the naphtha-based project was originally commissioned at Mangalore in 2001 it was moved to Kakinada in Andhra Pradesh in July 2010. But before shifting base, the project had already caused enough damage to the estuary. When the fishermen came to know about the shifting of the plant they brought dozens of boats to block the movement of the barge-mounted power plant demanding immediate clearing up of the siltation. With the intervention of Deputy Commissioner the company promised to undertake complete dredging work and to provide bank guarantee in case of its failure to complete the dredging.

The Mumbai based Hindusthan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL) planned to lay a pipeline between Mangalore and Bangalore to transport its petroleum production. The pipeline, was to pass through 241 villages in Dakshina Kannada, Chikmagalur, Hassan, Mandya, Tumkur, and Bangalore districts.

As the pipeline had to pass through dense forests in the Western Ghats environmentalists warned that it could pose a serious threat to bio-diversity. Bangalore based Indian Institute of Science (IISc) and Asian Elephant Research and Conservation Centre conducted a study on the effect of installation of HPCL Pipeline on elephant migration. Apart from this study Engineers India Ltd, New Delhi, in association with Coimbatore based Saleem Ali centre for Ornithology and Natural History have also studied the impact of pipeline on bio diversity (Nisarga Sandesha, 1999).



The studies showed that pipeline would affect the movement of elephants that travel long distances to find food and water. The Bangalore based Indian Institute of Science (IISc) and Asian Elephant Research and Conservation Centre also concluded in their report that the HPCL Pipeline would seriously affect elephant migration from one reserve forest to the other (Nisarga Sandesha, 1999 : 6-7).

Despite opposition from farmers' and activists, Mangalore-Hassan-Bangalore HPCL pipeline project was commissioned on 01-08-2003. Media highlighted the possible dangers of HPCL, local opposition and alternatives suggested by the activists. But as it was not an issue related to only Dakshina Kannada district it did not receive due coverage. Several cases of breaking of pipe and contamination of water bodies along its path have been reported.

Even as the people of the district were getting reconciled to the inevitability of living with the environmentally harmful projects another threat arrived in the form of Mangalore Special Economic Zoan (MSEZ). It was in the year 2001 that Kanara Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) floated the idea of Mangalore Special Economic Zone (MSEZ).

After receiving the green signal, from Union Ministry of Commerce 1800 acres of land was acquired through notifications under MSEZ Phase I. Nearly 800 families ([http://www.dajjiworld.com/chan/exclusive\\_arch.asp?ex\\_id=920](http://www.dajjiworld.com/chan/exclusive_arch.asp?ex_id=920)) of hapless villagers whose sole dependence was on agriculture were evicted from their lands simply by declaring that most of their land with shrubs was useless for cultivation. They were given a paltry sum of eight lakh per acre as compensation.

All the villages earmarked for MSEZ phase II unanimously opposed land acquisition for MSEZ in the *Gramasabha* organized by the Deputy

Commissioner. A public consultancy meeting also ended abruptly amidst pandemonium (The New Indian Express, 2007).

Finally Chief Minister Mr. B.S. Yeddyurappa directed the Karnataka Industrial Areas Development Board (KIADB) to stop acquisition of land for Phase II of the Mangalore Special Economic Zone (MSEZ) <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/article2222716.ece>.

According to activist Vidya Dinker (Personal Communication, November 16, 2012) evening newspapers contributed more to the issue. They carried articles along with the news and helped activists reach the affected people.

To educate the people, the Nagarika Seva Trust brought out a booklet<sup>6</sup> that described SEZ as a monster detrimental to the interests of the poor.

Another booklet<sup>7</sup> refuted the claims of MSEZ about the benefits it would bring to the district. A pamphlet<sup>8</sup> of the Karavali Karnataka Janabhivrudhhi Vedike tried to educate the people about the MSEZ and PCPIR project.

The activists enacted street plays to explain the harmful effects of MSEZ. Students from Ujire also joined anti-MSEZ campaign with their own street play.

In the play a couple sell their farm land to promoters of the project who in turn convert the village into a toxic wasteland. The play ends with the death of

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<sup>6</sup> Titled “SEZ emba pedambootha” (a monster called SEZ), the booklet on MSEZ was authored by a professor-activist B M Kumaraswami.

<sup>7</sup> Titled “Karavalige Banda Kedu” (The danger that came to the Coast) the booklet was published by Karavali Karnataka Janabhivrudhhi Vedike.

<sup>8</sup> Titled “Karavalige kalitta bhasmasura echchara echchara” (a monster has entered to coastal area, be careful) explained the environmental hazards involved in allowing MSEZ and PCPIR project

their child after drinking water from a polluted well. The simple narrative of the play was punctuated by folk songs and dance.

The Kalasangama<sup>9</sup> troupe staged a play titled *Kode, ini, elle* (Yesterday, today, tomorrow) to throw light on the issues involved in setting up SEZs. This play has featured the united struggle by the people against the SEZ and has been staged 56 times.

Using 'Gandhigiri' as portrayed in the Hindi film *Lage Raho Munnabhai*, the protesters tried to convince the Special Land Acquisition Officer that they were not willing to sell their land. The villagers reached the Karnataka Industrial Area Development Board (KIADB) office on 23 July, 2008 with flowers and vegetables grown on their lands along with the greeting cards made up of photos of their agricultural land.

To promote investment in Petroleum, Chemicals and Petrochemical industry sector which offered a wide scope for development the government decided to set up Petroleum, Chemicals and Petrochemical Investment Regions (PCPIRs) .

A total of 74 villages were identified in Bantwal, Karkala, Udupi and Mangalore taluks . Even as the government went ahead with its plan, the protests against PCPIR in ecologically sensitive coastal district got stronger. The state government took a decision, although delayed, not to pursue its claims for the PCPIR project mooted by the Centre

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<sup>9</sup> Tulu theatre groups led by Mr. Vijaya Kumar Kodialbail, Mr. Naveen D. Padil and Mr. Devadas Kapikad were in the forefront in staging shows in Dakshina Kannada.

According to activist Vidya Dinker the victory for the struggle against PCPIR came without the help of media. ``We activists created awareness through visiting villages. "In villages we went to temples, masques and churches. There we left pamphlets. Every Sunday three or four of our activist-groups including local people used to visit every village. There they used to organise meetings in which we spoke. Every Sunday in Church we used to start prayer with our talk about PCPIR. We trained the local people to speak about these issues. Talks were held at local schools and panchayaths. We countered politicians too in a face to face situation on stage. Without the support of media we won it. The Chief Minister of Karnataka came to know about it through his intelligence sources and decided to cancel it'' says Vidya Dinkar. Face to face communication was much more effective than the media. The level of intimacy achieved through the use of local language Tulu contributed to the success of the campaign. This kind of local touch was absent in the mainstream media. The local small land holders and auto rickshaw drivers were used as spokesperson to educate the general public in PCPIR issue. It enhanced confidence level in local people to oppose the project.

Like Kerala's Kasaragod, villages in Belthangady taluk of Dakshina Kannada suffered the consequences of spraying of endosulfan on cashew plantations. While the endosulfan issue in Kasaragod grabbed media spotlight leading to banning of the pesticide, victims in Karnataka are still struggling for compensation and justice.

When compared to the other environment issues the endosulfan issue received adequate media attention. Media took initiative in analyzing different aspects of the issue. Udayavani described deaths in affected villages as 'endosulfan death', suggesting that endosulfan had indeed caused deaths although the pesticide lobby had argued that deaths were not caused by endosulfan. The

initiative that media took in the endosulfan issue was absent in the media in case of other environment issues.

According to 'Karavale Ale' editor B V Seetharam<sup>10</sup> it was the electronic media which raised the Dakshina Kannada endosulfan issue at the national level for the first time. It was only later that state level and regional media took interest in this issue. News channel TV 9 took initiative and did a campaign about endosulfan victims between September and October 2012. It helped endosulfan victims by collecting 'Endosulfan victims' welfare fund'.

### **Alternative media**

Besides using conventional media, non-governmental organizations of Dakshina Kannada adopted several communication strategies for dissemination of information.

Out of concern about rapid industrialization plans and their social and environmental impact several groups and individuals launched save Dakshina Kannada Campaign. In 1995 the campaign succeeded in generating enough momentum to raise local community concerns and the key issues

Creating environmental awareness amongst the people in all the villages, and motivating them to collectively undertake protection of soil, water, air, forests were the main objectives of the campaign.

Along with this, the Federation has decided to take up a door to door campaign for saving Dakshina Kannada district from environmental destruction.

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<sup>10</sup> B V Seetharam is an editor in charge of Karavali Ale group. His daily Kannadajanantharanga, evening newspaper Karavali Ale and English local daily Canaratimes provided an immense contribution to the environment struggles of the district.

Seminars, workshops, conferences focusing on environmental concepts have been organized to discuss about an appropriate development model for the district (Nisarga Sandesha, 1996).

The NGOs of the district publish newsletters dealing with issues related to rural development and consumer awareness . `Nisarga Sandesha', a magazine brought out by the Nagarika Seva Trust provides in-depth analysis of environmental problems.

This widely circulated magazine has been carrying on a campaign for ecologically sensitive development in the district. By reporting activities of village level environmental committees, protests by fishermen and farmers, programmes of environment awareness the magazine has been a chronicler of the environmental movement in coastal Karnataka. Another fortnightly `Balakedaarara Shikshana' (Consumers education), brought out by activist Ravindranath Shanbhag, has provided a forum for debate on environmental issues involving villagers.

Street plays, poster campaigns, pamphleteering, jathas, video projections were organized across the district. More than 70 street play shows were held between November 1995 and February 1996. Over 30,000 audiences watched this play. Well known writer Amrutha Someshwara wrote three *Yakshagana*<sup>11</sup> *Prasangas* (stories) `Prakruthi Vijaya' (victory of the nature), `Nisarga Vijaya' (victory of environment) and *Mareesha Kalyana* (*Mareesha's wedding*). All these three *Yakshagana Prasangas* were of two hours duration each.. An amateur troupe *Kalagangothri* performed these *Prasanga's* to bring awareness among the

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<sup>11</sup> A popular folk form of southern Karnataka

public about the environment issues of the district (Amrutha Someshwara, Personal Communication, May 19, 2013).

Environmental groups have also used videos and documentaries to explain the causes and extent of environmental destruction. A documentary film on 'environmental conditions and concerns of Dakshina Kannada', directed by Natesh Ullal<sup>12</sup>, presented the unique features of the district's environment. The film was screened in several places and widely discussed. As a part of 'Save Dakshina Kannada District' Campaign, Dakshina Kannada Parisarasaktha Okkuta organized training camps across the district on methodology of communication and on environmental awareness. Networking the local support, coordination of various programmes and encouraging women's participation were the main objectives of the camp.

### **The role of mainstream and alternative media**

There are diverse opinions among activists and journalists with regard to media coverage of environmental issues of the district. According to consumer rights activist Ravindranath Shanbhag there was no support from the media for environmental causes in the early 1980s. He launched a newspaper of his own when the newspapers refused to publish his letters on environmental issues. With its circulation rising to 50,000 it became an alternative medium. Journalists, who were skeptical about the environmental issues began writing about them later. After journalists and media houses were convinced about the seriousness of the environmental problems they began publishing Shanbhag's articles.

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<sup>12</sup> Natesh Ullal is an activist and documentary film maker. He has also worked with the Bangalore based Environment Support Group which helped environmental struggles of the district get wider attention and support from several organizations.

As there was no legislation guaranteeing right to information during that time it was a herculean task for activists to get documents and information. People's representatives did not support activists. It was with much difficulty that activists obtained documents such as Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) between the government and companies promoting industries in the district.

According to activist Ranjan Rao, newspapers' stated editorial policy and real editorial policy were different when it came to environmental reporting. Most media houses and reporters ignored the issues raised by the activists. Some journalists who tried to give adequate coverage to environmental issues were transferred from Mangalore to other places. Some reporters were asked to tone down their reports and directed to report only news. This effectively prevented journalists from presenting the cause of activists. As media organizations began appointing journalists on contract basis creating insecurity, the commitment among journalists towards any cause weakened.

According to Mr. Varadesh Hiregange an academician and a former journalist, media houses did not take any position with regard to environmental issues. In his opinion "Newspapers did cover the news and not leave out anything. But analytical articles and editorials were lacking. There was a contradiction. Reporters tried to report on project affected people and displacement but media houses looked at the commercial interest. In many cases the media houses generally favored the industry."



Expressing a different opinion activist Upendra Hosabettu<sup>13</sup> newspapers encouraged and supported activists and made them 'paper tigers'.

The editor in-charge of local daily 'Karavali Ale' Seetharam was once approached by Cogentrix Energy and MSEZL for a deal to stop him from writing against their projects in. While he rejected it others did not. Corporate houses knew how to manage journalists (Seetharam, Personal communication November 16, 2012)

Some journalists are of the view that those who work at district centers do not have enough time to study the issues in-depth. Even those journalists who are interested in environmental issues are unable to write on them as they are preoccupied with routine reporting of events (Vidya Dinkar, Personal Communication, November 16, 2012).

Both activists and journalists feel with the publication of district editions the regional news rarely appears in all editions of newspapers. And, while writing editorials media houses give priority events that occur in and Bangalore and ignore issues in the districts and taluks.

Journalists who worked for local newspapers had greater freedom to write on environment issues than those who worked for state level newspapers. The gatekeepers at the state level newspapers would not allow all that a reporter at the district level filed.

## **Conclusion**

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<sup>13</sup> A leader of the fishermen community he played a key role in environment struggles of the district and mobilized fishermen community's support for the movement. He is the founder for Dakshina Kannada Parisarasaktha Okkuta.

Different strategies worked for different struggles in the district. In the movements against MRPL, Cogentrix Energy and PCPIR face to face communication, interactions, talks and pamphlets proved more effective than media of communication. Policymakers felt the heat of agitation against anti-environment projects in the district only after fishermen's entry into the struggle. Instead of community leaders or public figures, small land holders, Dalits, tribals and women became leaders of movement against MSEZ. Agitation against MSEZ transcended caste, class and gender barriers. Though exploiting religious sentiments of the people led to several debates, this strategy worked positively in the movement.

The alternative media played a vital role in the environmental movement of the district. They took initiative in educating the masses while the mainstream media were preoccupied with corporate interest than the environmental interests. Though the mainstream media provided good coverage to the issues they did not set the agenda. Views, editorials and analytical articles were missing in the pages of mainstream media. It was only the alternative media supported the environmental cause helped environmental groups mobilize people for campaigns. The reach of local dailies and the regional flavor in their language helped strengthen the movement.

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