Disaster scripting in India’s anti-nuclear landscape

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Research Questions

• How do villagers become anti-nuclear activists, and come to see themselves as knowing, democratic citizens?

How does a community of drunkards and wife-beaters turn into the poster children of Gandhian activism, and come to see themselves as democratic citizens, through their engagements with nuclear energy?

Why is this kind of transformation not happening at other site-specific anti-nuclear protests around India?
Theoretical Guideposts

- **Sociotechnical imaginaries** *(Jasanoff and Kim 2009)*
  - imagined forms of social life and social order that center on the development and fulfillment of innovative scientific and/or technological projects”

- **Science on Stage** *(Hilgartner 2000)*
  - The practical and theoretical work a social movement undertakes to realize its vision. Movement intellectuals spread social change.

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  - Representation is a dynamic mediated process that can lead to mutual transformation of both representatives and constituents.
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Disaster Scripting

• The historically, culturally and experientially-grounded scripting processes through which communities imagine disasters.

• Disaster scripting processes in back and front stages (e.g. collective identity building, strategic framing of disaster narratives) can lead to transformations in political subjectivities.

• Scriptings of how disasters will unfold, or are already in progress, are iterative and anticipatory, and created through strategic negotiations between the backstage and front stage of performance. The “success” of disaster scriptings depend on how well representatives and other actors mediate the strategic domain of front and back stages.

• Disaster scripts are not always mobile as they travel through the public sphere.

• Disaster scriptings are not necessarily collective— the degree to which they are collective depends on if representatives are seen as credible and legitimate by constituents.
Village of Idinthakarai agitating against Koodankulam Nuclear Power Plant
Koodankulam Nuclear Power Plant Protests
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Movement Intellectuals

S.P. Udayakumar

Father Jeyakumar

Church of Idinthakarai
People’s Movement Against Nuclear Energy
Struggle Committee

Police *lathi* (baton) charge, September 12, 2012

Sacred Spaces: Shrine to Movement

Children in Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine have been suffering from the effects of the radiation released in 1986. The Red Cross orphanage in Belarus has been caring for the hope of salvation of sick children.

Photo Credit: Julien Bishop/Chernobyl Children's Project

The reactor disaster in Chernobyl took place on April 26, 1986. The reactor was encased in a temporary shelter to secure the site for only 20-30 years.

Photo Credit: Julien Bishop/Chernobyl Children's Project

Nearly handicapped children exposed to radiation.

Photo Credit: Alex Emery/Blacksmith Institute

Solidarity with the people in Japan.

Photo Credit: Julien Bishop/Chernobyl Children's Project

Fukushima Mahnnt: Alle Akws Abschalten
Socialist Alternative (SAV) Germany condemn the state terror unleashed on the peaceful protesters of Koodankulam. We demand the immediate withdrawal of the police force. We demand that the government heed to the sane voice of the anti-nuclear movement and immediately stop the killer project which is bound to put the people, flora and fauna, the fragile environment and the other species in irrevocable danger.

Lucy Redler - Spokesperson of Socialist Alternative (SAV) Germany

We fully support the courageous struggle against the nuclear power station in Koodankulam. In Denmark the resistance against nuclear power was strong and well organized and today Denmark is free of nuclear energy. Our resistance was able to close the nuclear power station Barsebäck in Sweden close to Denmark.

Christian Juhl, Member of Parliament and spokesperson, The Red-Green Alliance, Denmark

Nuclear energy is a very dangerous initiative, particularly in countries like India, which has had more than its share of industrial disasters, Bhopal being the most famous. I would like to express my support for the courageous people’s movement protesting the opening of the Koodankulam Nuclear Power Plant.

Noam Chomsky

“I stand in complete solidarity with the villagers of Idinthakarai who are resisting the fuel loading of the Koodankulam nuclear reactor. I happened to be in Japan in March 2011 when the earthquake damaged the Fukushima reactor. After the disaster, almost every country that uses nuclear energy declared that it would change its policy. Every country, except India.

Our Government has shown itself incapable of even being able to dispose of day to day garbage, leave alone industrial effluent or urban sewage. How does it dare to say that it knows how to deal with nuclear waste?

And that nuclear reactors in India are safe? We know how the Government has colluded with Union Carbide (now Dow Chemicals) to ensure that the victims of the Bhopal Gas Leaks will never get justice. But no amount of compensation can ever right a nuclear disaster. I do believe that what is being done in Koodankulam in the name of Development is a crime.”
Organizational Activities
Movement Intellectuals Learning with Constituents

“We have to be with the people or they will leave us.”

-Father Jeyakumar

https://www.facebook.com/spudayakumar1?fref=ts
Vigil, Hiroshima Day, August 6, 2012

Photo: Amirtharaj Stephen, Dianuke.org
Jal Satyagraha, September 12, 2012
(insistence on truth by water)

http://kafila.org/2013/06/19/from-koodankulam-an-open-letter-to-the-indian-media/
Relay Fast, September 19, 2012

Peaceful Siege, October 9, 2012

Photo: Amirtharaj Stephen, Dianuke.org
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Stage Management Hurdles

- Supreme Court as arbiter of justice vs. delay tactic
- Tamil Nationalism vs. Indian Nationalism
- The Foreign Hand—foreign NGOs vs. foreign corporations
- Christian vs. Hindu anti-nuclear movement
- Lazy partiers vs. active community bonding
- Brainwashing vs. conscience-raising
- Fractured movement vs. continuous movement
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**Front Stage**
- Sitting Protests
- Relay Fasts
- Peaceful Sieges
- “Fill the Jails”
- *Jal Satyagraha*
- People’s Tribunal
- People’s Charter Against Nuclear Energy
- Official Facebook posts
- Letter writing

**Back Stage**
- Classrooms
- Planning Activities
- Making pamphlets
- Informal land surveys
- Community organising

**Off Stage?**
- Informal conversations during farming, cooking, after work hours, mealtimes that talk about a rise in rapes from migrant workers
- Science off stage
Acknowledgements:
The American Institute for Indian Studies (AIIS),
Clark Miller (adviser)
Anti-nuclear activist network of India

Koodankulam Nuclear Power Plant Construction, Jan 2010,
Southernmost tip of India