

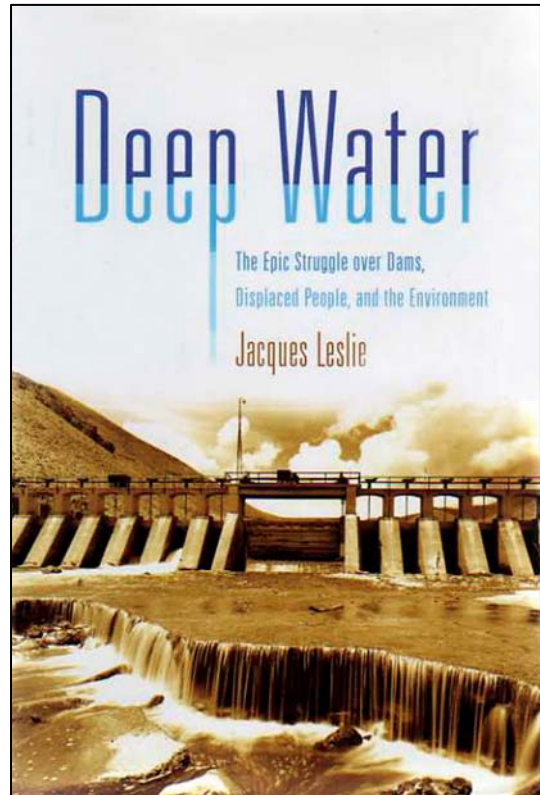
*title*           **Deep Water – The Epic Struggle over Dams, Displaced People, and the Environment**

*author*           **Jacques Leslie**  
<http://www.jacquesleslie.com/>

*category*       World Water Issues - Effect of Dams on People and the Environment

*publisher*       Farrar, Straus and Giroux  
2005 hardcover edition, 352 pages  
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<http://www.fsgbooks.com/>

*of note*         Won the 2002 J. Anthony Lukas Work-in-Progress Award  
<http://www.journalism.columbia.edu/cs/ContentServer/jrn/1165270069782/page/1175295288187/simplepage.htm>



*who should be interested in this book?*

Readers interested in the effects dams have had on displaced people and the environment presented in a travelogue format with area history and ecology.

*why read this book?*

A very detailed and look at how dam construction has affected people and the environment through three individuals in three countries – an anti-dam activist in India, a resettlement anthropologist in Southern Africa, and a water manager in Australia. Leslie's is quite a different approach to world water issues, providing a very personal look at specific issues through the eyes of these three individuals to highlight the broader concerns of dams.

[Book Overview](#)           by Lance Brown, [vistadelsol@telus.net](mailto:vistadelsol@telus.net)

This book looks at dams and their impacts by concentrating on three individuals and countries: Medha Patkar, an anti-dam activist in India, and the effect of World Bank-financed dams on indigenous people; Thayer Scudder, an expert in resettlement of people displaced due to dams in Southern Africa, and Don Blackmore, CEO of the Murray-Darling Basin in Australia, and the difficulties of water management in a drought-prone region. Detailed accounts of Leslie's travels background these journalistic stories including overviews of the history and ecology along with the effects of the dams.

Prologue

- from the 'primal dam' Hoover, to construction of 45,000 large dams worldwide in 140 countries at a cost of \$2 trillion, many World Bank financed
- authors goal "... to see dams whole, and in doing so to glimpse the fate of the earth"

### Part 1: India – The Struggle is to Live (Chapters 1 – 5)

- Sardar Sarovar Dam project being built in western India on Narmada River, India's fifth largest
- India has world's largest water deficit, 3 to 4 times second place China's
- India (third after US and China in large dams – 4,300) is now world's most prolific dam builder
- Medha Patkar, a Gandhi-type activist protests the World Bank financed S.S. Dam
- protest led to early 90's World Bank review of S.S. Dam; Canadian Thomas Berger was deputy writer – forced Bank to back out of project
- development of dams helps “omnivores” (those in consumer economy) while omitting “ecosystem people” (those who rely on local environment) and “ecological refugees” (those displaced as a result of development)
- activities of activist Medha Patkar
- anti-dam activists and others discuss Medha Patkar and her politicization

### Part 2: South Africa – One Good Dam (Chapters 6 – 10)

- Professor Thayer Scudder, anthropologist and leading dam resettlement authority
- resettlement problems with 1950's Kariba Dam on Zambezi River (then Africa's largest dam and world's largest reservoir at 175 miles long)
- Scudder's study on effects on Tonga people
- Katse and Mohale Dams redirect the flow of the Orange River
- for resettlement to be successful Scudder believes dam-affected people should be first beneficiaries (irrigation, electricity, fishing rights, etc)
- anthropologists and developments; World Bank-style developments; the “good dam”
- Okavango delta – proposed dams, dredging, people, wildlife
- Scudder outlines many world dams and their resettlement issues

### Part 3: Australia – A Healthy, Working River (Chapters 11 – 23)

- Australia has 500 large dams
- Murray-Darling Basin has most of Australia agriculture, 84 large dams, 650,000 small farm dams, more than 1,000 diversions
- Murray River is one of the most intensely managed rivers in the world
- Chowilla floodplain; Australian drought
- Hume Dam built in 1936, raised in 1961; Dartmouth Dam in 1978; Murray River weirs
- times of drought bring water use reforms
- rehabilitating (“healthy, working river”) Murray River with releasing “environmental flow”
- reservoir capacity is about 3x the basin annual water diversions
- integrated catchment (watershed) management - reduce water use - increase river flow
- Barmah Choke – an ancient land rise split the Murray River flow
- Mitta Mitta valley affected by upstream Dartmouth Dam; irrigation then needed
- different water use and crops in the three states of the Murray River
- rice production is a high water user with much leaching chemicals into ground water
- Stockyard Plain salt-interception project; Coorong lagoon
- “we're got multiple causes and effects, yet many people want a single cause and a clear effect”

## Epilogue and Acknowledgments

### [other reviews](#)

#### **From Publishers Weekly**

This worthy but difficult book looks at large dams and their consequences through the eyes of three members of the 1990s' World Commission on Dams. Indian activist Medha Patkar planned to drown herself to protest the Sardar Sarovar dam's displacement of several hundred thousand people. Thayer Scudder, a dam resettlement expert and consultant to the World Bank, stopped a dam that would have destroyed Botswana's Okavango Delta. Don Blackmore, in Australia, where dams are a virtual necessity, has to regulate "the dozens of variables that affect the health of a river basin" during an acute drought. Leslie's (*The Mark: A War Correspondent's Memoir of Vietnam and Cambodia*) intent was to "see dams whole," and he conveys the complex, disheartening issues surrounding them. Whether the reader can see dams whole is another question. Leslie is capable of both punchy and lyrical writing. But with the flood of detail, from the mechanics of dam financing to the water sources for African villages, the book becomes a hard slog. A draft of this unquestionably informative and eye-opening book won the J. Anthony Lukas Work-in-Progress Award, but it will need a devoted reader to get the last drop of good out of it.

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#### **From [Booklist](#)**

During the twentieth century, 45,000 large dams were built in 140 countries, complicated projects that are now being recognized as major environmental and humanitarian disasters. Add to that the fact that freshwater is the most precious and endangered resource on the planet, and journalist Leslie has chosen one hot topic. His extensive research and demanding journeys to controversial dam sites around the world result in solid documentation of the often-corrupt finances and politics of dam building and the cruelty and injustice of the displacement of (usually) indigenous communities and the submergence of their land. Leslie also offers lucid explanations of how dams cause aridity, erosion, extinction, and pollution. Indelible portraits of three dedicated individuals put a human face on the subject. Medha Patkar, India's leading antidam activist, has put her life at risk to protest the forced displacement of tribal communities. Anthropologist Thayer Scudder is "the world's leading dam resettlement expert." Don Blackmore is devoted to rectifying dam-related problems in Australia. Leslie's edgy, potent, and in-depth inquiry unveils the drastic, unintentional consequences of dams and exposes yet more evidence of the catastrophic results of allowing greed and politics to trump science and justice. *Donna Seaman*

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