

Micro-Movements in India: Towards a New Politics of Participatory Democracy

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Introduction

Just when the global discourse on democracy has become unidimensional, purveying the neo-liberal model of market democracy as the one and universally desirable model, and when the Indian State has begun to link itself to the vertical hierarchy of global economic and political power, strong countervailing political and social movements have emerged in India at the local and regional levels. These micro-movements, led by grassroots groups of social activists, have been active in different parts of India for over three decades working on disparate issues, albeit all concerning struggles of the economically marginalized and socially excluded populations of the poor. But lately, i.e., in the decade of the 1990s, many of these micro-movements have aligned together and have formed larger alliances to protest against the Indian state on the issue of globalization even as they get in direct confrontation with the institutions and organizations representing the global economic and political power.

In this process of opposition to globalization the micro-movements in India have begun to raise a new discourse on democracy and invent political practices, expanding the arena of politics much beyond the representational institutions of elections and political parties.

Thus, although the micro-movements have been fighting politically on several issues concerning the poor much before they joined the debate on globalization, it is the challenge of globalization that has brought many of them together on common political platforms at the provincial and national levels, making issues of participatory democracy a part of their ongoing struggles. It is in this emergent context of globalization that this paper analyzes the discourse and politics of micro-movements, and their role in reinventing participatory democracy as a form of social action and political practice, creating new spaces and infusing deeper meaning to democracy in the globalizing world.

The Micro-Movements

The micro-movements in India represent a varied and much complex phenomenon. They are described in the literature on movements variously as 'grassroots movements', social movements, non-party political formations or processes, community based or mass-based

organizations, and as social-action groups and movement-groups. In this paper I shall use these terms interchangeably but the reference is specifically to a particular genre of social movements which became visible and acquired political salience in the mid 1970's and have since been active on a variety of issues which, in their own perception, are—directly or indirectly—related to what they see as their long-term goal of democratizing development and transforming the society. (Kothari, 1984; Sethi, 1984; Sheth, 1984) These movement organizations differentiate themselves sharply from the welfare, philanthropic and such other non-political NGOs. Although there is no systematic survey, compilations made from different sources by researchers and guesstimates provided by observers in the field suggest a figure of about 30,000 micro-movement groups in the country. (Kapoor, 2000)

In order to understand the terms in which the movement groups conceive and articulate the idea of participatory democracy, it is important to know the context in which they emerged and the challenges they confronted in the initial phase of their formation. A large number of them existed as fragments of the earlier political and social movements—movements which had their origins in the Freedom movement, but were subdued and dispersed soon after Independence when the liberal, modernist (Nehruvian) ruling elite began to dominate the public discourse in India. These were the groups which had their lineage in the Gandhian, socialist, communist and social reform movements but, by and large, had stuck-out as groups of party-independent social and political activists. (Sheth and Sethi, 1991) They worked in small, stagnant spaces available to them at the periphery of the electoral and party politics. But within three decades of Independence new social and political spaces opened up for them as well as for several new groups of social activists. This was made possible by the decline of institutional politics which began in the late 1960's, giving rise to several mass-based movements of protests. (Kothari, 1988a) The issues of protests varied from price-rise to corruption. The protest movements, however, acquired a big momentum in mid-1970's, the largest and politically most high-intensity movement among them was the JP movement, known by the name of its leader Jayaprakash Narayan. Seen in this context, what we recognize today as movement-groups, emerged and were consolidated in spaces made available to them by the decline of the mainstream institutions of representative democracy: the legislatures, elections, political parties, and trade unions. This decline, although had begun in the late 1960's became visible when the Emergency was imposed (1975-1977) by Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India.

The role of political parties in inducting new groups into politics through waging struggles for their legal and political rights got considerably reduced. Their ability to politically process issues arising in the economy, society, and culture declined greatly. They also ceased to attract young, idealist youth to mainstream politics. The parties having failed to convert the economic demands of the poor and the deprived into effective political demands, often tended to take recourse to ethnicizing and communalizing economic issues for electoral gains. The result was that the political process, which in the 1950s and 1960s had worked for inclusion of ever new groups in the electoral and party politics got halted in the mid 1970s, keeping large sections of ex-untouchables, the tribal peoples the occupationally marginalized and economically

extremely poor groups from among the ritually low-ranking Hindu castes, and the other poor and landless among the minorities on the periphery of the mainstream of Indian politics. Of course, this did not affect their electoral participation, but it did reduce their political sense of citizenship as their struggle did not find articulation in the representational arena of politics. (Sheth, 1986) The populations involved in this process of political alienation were however dispersed and fragmented on many dimensions besides that of class. For that reason their struggles did not find a political language even in the discourse of the Left parties. They were seen simply as unorganizable masses with unagragable votes. In sum, the political parties having given up prematurely, soon after Independence, the "movement" aspect of their activities increasingly became electoral machines operating with make-shift arrangements at the grassroots at election time. The consequence was, among other things, the emergence of mobilizational politics of popular movements outside the institutional politics of representation, often taking recourse to direct action politics for registering their demands on the government. (Kothari, 1988b)

The trade unions, which to begin with were like labour wings of the political parties, with little autonomy of their own, became virtually bargaining counters between the people of the same class, supposedly representing different interests. The unions showed a complete incapacity to expand their activities in the growing informal and unorganized sector of the economy. Workers in the unorganized sector had little to offer, either electorally or in membership fees. Tired after long years of struggle, the union leadership had got used to a cushy lifestyle and to a mentally non-taxing bureaucratic mode of functioning. (Pansey, 1981) The result was formation of many new activist-groups championing the cause of workers in the informal sector of the economy. They addressed not only the issue of wages but problems of health, education and child-care of workers' families; their larger objective being to raise in them the awareness of their rights and build organizational capabilities to fight for their realization.

The legislatures too reflected the decline in the wider politics. Gone were the days when a socialist leader like Ram Manohar Lohia could raise and sustain a protracted debate on poverty, in the Indian Parliament. The political discourse in the legislatures began to be increasingly dominated by narrow legalistic positions held by the executive and often endorsed by the law-courts, rather than being informed by issues emerging from democratic politics. The Indian Constitution which was conceived not only as an instrument of governance but also an agenda for Independent India's social and political transformation, was now treated as a document sanitized from the flesh and blood of movements-politics, representing democratic aspirations of the people. It is in this context that in the decade following the Emergency several movement-groups began to take recourse to public-interest litigation and provide free legal-aid services to citizens whose rights were being violated both by law and order and development administration—in the process, infusing activism even in the law-courts.

The decline of institutional politics led to revitalization of the old social movements. More importantly, in the period between the mid-1970's and 1980's it gave rise to thousands of *new* micro-movements in the country. These movements were led by young

men and women, with quite a few of them leaving their professional careers to join them. They took up issues and constituencies abandoned by political parties and trade unions, and those ill-served by the bureaucracy. The organizational form they evolved for themselves was not of a political party or a pressure group. It was that of a civil-associational group, leading political struggles on issues articulated to them by the people themselves. The key concept they worked with was democratizing development through empowerment of the people. (Sethi, 1984) It is thus significant to note that the politics of grassroots movements emerged outside the institutional politics of representation and at the interface of society and politics, involving people directly in struggles for reshaping their social and political lives.

The Discourse of Globalization

In the early 1990s the grassroots movements confronted an entirely new set of terms justifying the hegemony of the newly established post Cold-war global order. Earlier, i.e., till the end of the Cold-war, a significant section of grassroots movements in India were active in protesting against the exclusionary, elite-oriented Development Model--a model that was conceived and sought to be made uniformly and universally applicable the world over by the post-war II Brettonwood institutions and their sponsor countries. These protests were however articulated largely in the context of the discourse developed by new social movements in the West where the nuclear and environmental threats that the Cold-war had produced for the whole world, were more poignantly felt. It was through this process that the idea and the campaign for 'alternative development' grew in the West. Although this idea was propagated and practiced in India for long by the activists of the Gandhian movement, it was pushed on the periphery of the development discourse after Independence, dominated by the India's modernist ruling elite.

The whole discourse on development, however, suddenly changed, globally and in India when the notion of alternative development was analytically formulated and propagated by the various global groups, clubs and commissions. Some concepts developed by these proponents of alternative development became buzzwords for activists of the new social movements: appropriate technology, small is beautiful (a la Schumaker) pedagogy for the oppressed (a la Paulo Freire), eco-friendly life-styles, limits to growth (a la the Club of Rome) were only a few among them. This discourse raised by new social movements in the West found a great deal of resonance among the social activists in India; particularly for the a-political and westernized ones among them it almost had an emancipatory effect. It gave cultural meaning to their activism and even helped them re-discover their own alternativist, M.K. Gandhi.

The idea of alternative development found new votaries even at the consumerist core of Western societies during the Cold-war, when the threat of nuclear holocaust loomed large and access to the world's fossil-oil resources was threatened to be interrupted by what was then described as the "oil crisis". Concerns were expressed on world policy forums about "Third World poverty". Strange though it may seem today, deep anxieties were felt and expressed especially about the growing consumption habits of the middle classes in these countries. For, it was feared that combined with the hunger and poverty of their

masses, they may lead to state-policies resulting in rapid depletion of the world's natural resources. The conventional argument for development was now made with several caveats, sourced from the theory of alternative development. Thus, *sustainability* became a key word and consumerism a 'challenge' to cope with. Saving energy and finding alternative energy sources became an important consideration for policy makers of development.

All this changed as the Cold-war ended, effecting a big rupture in the (global) politics of discourse. And this, when the idea of alternative development was just about acquiring wider acceptability and had even begun to inform policy processes at the national and global levels. A new discourse descended on the scene engulfing the political spaces, the new social movements in the West and the grassroots movements in India had created for themselves through working for decades on such issues as of peace, and pro-poor and eco-friendly development. The new discourse made its entry rather dramatically as a triumphalist grand-narrative that, among other things subsumed within it the old idea of Development. (Wallgren, 1998) Its immediate, even if temporary, effect was to make protests of the grassroots movements against the hegemonic Cold-war model of Development and their assertions for alternative development sound shrill and cantankerous, if not vacuous.

This was the discourse of Globalization. Conceived and led by the victors of the Cold-war, it claimed to establish a new global order which would put an end to the old one that had kept the world 'divided'--economically, culturally and politically. In its place it not just promised, but communicated a virtual experience (as if that world was upon us!) of the world becoming *one* economy, (possibly) *one* culture and (eventually) *one* polity! Such a world could do, globally, without the messy institutions of representational democracy, even as such institutions were to be made mandatory internally for every individual country. It assured that this new global order would be managed by a set of global institutions (served by experts and freed from the 'cumbersome' procedures of representational accountability), which, being set-up and controlled by the world's few 'self-responsible' and 'advanced' democracies, would guarantee peace and order to the whole world. Moreover, since the monopoly of violence (including its technology) will be withdrawn from a large number of individual and often "irresponsible" nation-states (whose *natural* location is in the South) and be placed collectively in the hands of a few nation-states, which also are 'responsible' and 'civilized' democracies, (whose natural location is of course in the North) it not only will eliminate international wars, but alleviate poverty wherever it exists. These outlandish ideological claims of globalization made and propagated globally by the world's most powerful (G-8) countries have been lapped up by large sections of the Indian middle-class and the media, as if they represented a policy package offered by some really existing and democratically legitimate World Government!

The Counter Discourse of Movements

The grassroots movements took quite some time to recover from the ideological onslaught of Globalism and devise their own terms of discourse to counter it. This was

mainly because by the end of the Cold-war and two decades after the Emergency the movement-groups were by and large fragmented into almost an isomorphic existence of each group fighting independently its own little battle. Quite a few had lost the élan of social transformation, having acquired for themselves a fairly stable and comfortable financial base. Much larger quantities of funds were now made available to them by the international donor agencies who had their own agenda for influencing the politics of discourse in the peripheral countries. Most movement-groups had thus become routinized in their activities and functioned as NGO bureaucracies. In short, in the early 1990's the scene of grassroots movements in India was marked by a widespread feeling of pessimism among the observers and participants of the movements. (Kothari, 1989) There indeed were some groups, largely of the Gandhian and Left and social democratic lineage, who stuck-out and kept fighting their battles for rights and socio-economic reconstruction at the grassroots, thus tenaciously retaining their character as *movements*. They however did not function at their earlier high levels of energy, and remained starved of funds as ever.

All this changed, almost suddenly in the mid-1990's, when protests against globalization led by the few movement groups, who had kept the tradition of struggles alive during the period of drift, acquired momentum, as different sections of the poor in India began to acutely feel Globalization's adverse impact. It got a big philip as many more groups responding to the pressures at the grassroots, returned from their NGO existence to the fold of movements. This produced a high degree of convergence among different types of groups and movements on a wide range of issues concerning globalization. It revitalized the entire spectrum of grassroots movements in the country, giving rise to a new discourse and politics aimed at countering the forces of hegemonic globalization. (Sheth, 1999; Kothari, Smitu, 2002) What follows is an account of terms in which the movements view and resist Globalization.

First, activists of the grassroots movements see Globalization as incarnation of the old idea of Development (with a capital D), but representing politically more explicitly the institutions of global hegemonic power and creating new forms of exclusion socially. Globalization thus has intensified and expanded the destructive forces of Development—forces which disrupt communities, cultures and livelihoods of the poor without offering them any viable and dignified alternative. Similarly, Globalization, like the Development Establishment did during the Cold-war, works for the constituent elements of its power structure—the techno-scientific, bureaucratic, military, managerial and business elites and a small consumerist class.

Second, a section of social activists, particularly those who were relatively a-political but active in the alternative development movements earlier, have become acutely aware of the role *politics of discourse* plays globally and nationally, in influencing policy choices of Governments and inter-national organizations. Consequently, some of them now are participating actively in shaping the terms of discourse globally on such issues as biodiversity, global warming, construction of big dams, regulations concerning international trade and intellectual property rights and so on. In this process, they have become active in a variety of global 'conventions', forums and campaigns opposing the

policies of the global hegemonic power structure as well as in building more durable trans-national alliances with similar movements in other countries of the South as well as in the North. (Kech, M. and K. Sikkink, 1998) In performing this 'global role' they often explicitly, even if discursively, articulate their long term objective in terms of building and sustaining institutional processes for global solidarity. To put differently, their aim is to create global politics of popular (civil society) movements with a view to building an alternative institutional structure of global governance, based on democratic principles of political equality, social justice, cultural diversity and non-violence, and ecological principles of sustainability and maintaining biodiversity. Leading this discourse globally, a group of Indian activists interpret global solidarity in terms of the ancient Indian principle of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakan* (Earth is one family) and link it to Gandhi's vision of *swaraj* (self-governance) and *swadeshi* (politics of establishing peoples' own control over their environment—economic, social and cultural). (Pratap, 2001) It is in this context that the movements differentiate between the two types of politics they engage in: politics addressed to establishing global solidarity and of opposing contemporary Globalization, a distinction that has been conceptually aptly captured by Boaventura de-Souza Santos as the hegemonic vs. counter hegemonic globalization. (Santos, 1997)

Third, another type of movements representing largely the Left and social democratic strands referred to earlier, see Globalization as intensifying further the already existing economic and social inequalities in the country. (Sainath, 1999) Thus while the votaries of Globalization celebrate the growth of the middle class, the social-activists engaged in the struggles for social justice and equality see this phenomenon quite differently. In their view policies of economic liberalization which are being conceived and implemented as a part of Globalization package have consolidated and enriched the old middle-class. The 'growth' of this class, in their view, largely represents the rise in the purchasing power of the small middle-class that emerged during the colonial rule and expanded during the initial four decades after Independence, covering largely the upper and middle strata of the traditional social structure. The Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP), implemented in the name of economic reforms—the recipe dispensed by the global financial institutions uniformly all over the world—far from improving living standards of those belonging to the lower rungs of the society, have pushed them further down the social and economic ladder, and below the poverty line. (Kumar, Arun, 2000) Indeed some fragments of the traditional lower social strata have entered the 'middle-class', but this has been due to the long existing social policies of the State—like that of affirmative action. In fact, with the state shrinking in the process of globalization, there has been a reversal of this process.

The few avenues of upward mobility that the policies of the Indian state had opened up for the disadvantageously located populations in the traditional social structure are now narrowing. The market is increasingly becoming the only avenue for upward mobility, but that too is monopolized by the upper strata of the society, using their traditional status resources. Thus economic globalization offers ever increasing standards of living to those entering the market with some entitlements usually available to members of upper castes using the traditionally available resources to them: land, wealth, social privilege and education. For the large segment of population waiting outside the charmed circle of the

market, and occupying disadvantageous locations in the traditional social structure, it means malnutrition, semi-starvation, disease and destitution. This relationship of traditional social structure and globalization is emphasized by the movements but is, strangely, ignored in the academic debates on globalization.

The movement activists thus find it astounding that an economy in which the colonial-type exploitation of primary producers (the vast populations of tribals, artisans, small and marginal farmers and landless labour) by a small urban-industrial elite, and their cognate groups of upper-caste rural elite persists, even thrives, in the so called open economy of the market. In brief, in India the market-economy, instead of making a dent on the iniquitous social structure is being absorbed by it.

Fourth, the movements reject the claim of the Indian state that in the process of globalization, it has been playing a positive role for the poor, giving a 'human face' to economic reforms. Far from enabling the poor to enter and find places in the market, the state undermines their (the poor peoples') rights to hold on to whatever sources of livelihood that are still available to them. In view of the leaders of some urban movements for citizen rights, in fact, the Indian State systematically and blatantly discriminates between the rich and the poor in the implementation of economic reforms (Kishwar, 2001). The result is, a vast population affected adversely by the market-led model of economic globalization is today unable to make a forceful enough demand in the mainstream politics for their survival, let alone 'development'. As the market moves from the fringes of the polity to its centre, the democratically conceived political authority is giving way to new notions of economic and political 'order'--notions that are being derived from principles of corporate organization, which by their very nature are not in accord with the democratic principle of representative accountability.

Fifth, the combined impact of this emergent social-economic and political situation i.e., the State in retreat and the economy getting globalised, is that the poorest among the poor are neither able to become full wage-earners in the economy nor even full-fledged citizens in the polity. For them there is no transitional path-way in sight that can lead them into the market. Nor can they return to the old security of the subjugated, which they arguably had in the traditional social order. They even have lost the claims on the State which the bureaucratic-socialist state at least theoretically conceded. In short, the social-systemic nature of their exclusion continues under Globalization as it did under Development. State policies which, until recently, aimed at removing the structural barriers facing the poor and bringing them in the mainstream of political economy are now being discarded as 'market-unfriendly'.

Finally, the new ideology of globalization has in view of the movements, made issues of poverty and social deprivation in the peripheral countries of the world ever more unintelligible in the global discourse. Even more, it has blunted the transformative edge of the new social movements which were once at the forefront of the alternative development movement in the West as well as globally. In effect, the agencies of hegemonic globalization have been able to produce *new* terms of justification for the old Development project, i.e., of retaining the political and economic hegemony of the few

rich and militarily powerful countries globally and of a small metropolitan elite within the country. The result is, today, unlike during the Cold-war, development is seen and measured in terms of the extent to which a country can 'integrate' (read subjugate) its economy to the world economic (capitalist) system.

The Global discourse of Protests

A significant shift has also occurred in the way the movements in India relate to the global discourse of protests. The increasing focus on issues of 'governance' in the current global discourse has in their view, reduced the importance of issues pertaining to social and political transformation. This has resulted in the agencies of hegemonic globalization seeking, simultaneously, to depoliticize development and undermine democratic movements by co-opting, financially and politically, some protest movements in the developing countries and in the global arena. In the process such issues as environment, gender, human rights and even democracy are being redefined in terms radically different from those that were developed by the grassroots movements in the earlier paradigm of alternative development. For example, the issue of environment is no longer seen as the one involving a political process (and movements) for re-organizing the economy and social cultural life locally and globally on the basis of *primary* ecological principles. Instead, ecological issues are being recast in constantly shifting terms of 'tolerable limits' and 'admissible costs' of environmental damage that is expected to occur increasingly in higher proportions with escalating rates of economic growth—which also are expected and considered desirable. If any 'politics' is involved in this redefinition, it is about transferring environmental costs from one sector of the economy to the other or, even worse, from one region of the world to the other.

The issue of human rights is being viewed in terms of economic and foreign policy considerations of the rich and powerful countries. These considerations pertain not only to establishing their oligopolistic rule over the world, but also to guaranteeing 'smooth' functioning of the multi-national corporations in the peripheral countries. This is sought to be achieved by compelling governments of the peripheral countries to yield to conditions and terms the MNCs dictate and think are necessary for such functioning. In the process the multinationals have emerged as powerful global actors—in some cases even more powerful and wealthier than many nation states—which often undermine fundamental human rights (rights to livelihood, habitat and culture) of the poor in peripheral countries, but remain non accountable to any agency of global governance or a nation-state for their human rights violations.

Even some 'international' human rights groups today seem to act as political pressure groups on behalf of the hegemonic global forces, seeking to prevent the peripheral countries from making certain policy choices in areas such as land-use, labour legislation, exports and so on. Although this is done in name of universalizing human rights, selectivity of issues and the targeting of particular countries often betray their particularistic nationalist (Western) bias. The result is that in this new hegemonic discourse the thinking on human rights has been dissociated from such issues as of removing poverty, fulfilling basic human needs and social justice. Poverty is increasingly

seen as the poor peoples' own failure in creating wealth, not as an issue involving rights of the poor or even a moral issue. In other words, the global discourse on human rights has ceased to be a discourse regarding social and political transformations; it has, instead, become a discourse about what conditions should the powerful 'developed' countries impose over other countries, awedly for bringing about a global-legal regime of rights.

In this discourse on rights it is conveniently assumed that the institutions of *global civil society* endowing global citizenship (political equality) to all, and the mechanisms of global governance ensuring accountability of trans-national organizations, and the rule of law in international behaviour, have already evolved and are *in situ*! Such an assumption has made it easy for the global hegemonic powers to target some poor, peripheral countries 'not playing balls' with them for human rights violations, even as they ignore similar violations by governments of the countries pliable to their hegemonic designs. It is a measure of their dominance over the global culture of protests that despite practising such double standards, the global hegemonic powers are able to claim 'commitment' to universalization of human rights and, at the same time keep the trans-national corporations outside the pale of the global human rights regime.

In the discourse on democracy, the idea of global governance is gaining ground but, paradoxically, democracy still continues to be viewed as the frame-work suitable for internal governance of nation-States and *not* for global governance. Hence it is not difficult for an organization like the WTO to function without reference to any principle of transparency or representational accountability, and also autonomously of the United Nations institutions, even when it sits on judgement on issues that fall in the purview of international law and representative bodies such as the ILO. The institutions of global governance are thus supposed to be *self*-responsible, not accountable outside their own ambit. They are 'accountable' only to their sponsors who often are the few militarily and economically powerful nation-States.

In the global feminist discourse, sensitivity about the social structural, economic and cultural complexities faced by women in poor countries in securing their rights has vastly receded; in its place the legalist and metropolitan concerns about women's rights in a consumerist society have acquired prominence. Thus, there is little doubt in minds of the grassroots activists in India that the agencies of hegemonic globalization are bent upon monopolizing the global discourse of protests, with a view to legitimising the hegemonic global order and undermining the processes of social and political transformations.

In this globally homogenized culture of protests some movement-groups in India find it increasingly difficult to join international campaigns, even though they may be addressing issues of great concern to them. In their view such campaigns often seek to undermine the country's national sovereignty and, in their global articulation of issues they show insensitivity to the historical and cultural contexts in which the issues are embedded. As a result, these groups often even refrain from articulating their opposition to the Indian state in such terms and forms which in their view may deligitimize the role of the state in society. This is done not so much for 'nationalist' considerations as for the fear that it would undermine the by now established tradition (democratic political

authority) of the state protecting the secular and democratic institutions in the country.

On the whole, the movements-activists in India view globalization as a new, post cold-war, *ideology* justifying the rule of a hegemonic *structure of global power* seeking to establish monopoly of a few economically rich and militarily powerful countries over resources of the whole world. As such, they find globalization to be inimical to basic democratic and ecological values: liberty, equality, diversity and sustainability. Its impact for the poorer countries has been, in their view, to produce new and more dehumanized forms of exclusion and inequality--worse than those created by the Cold-War model of Development and earlier by the colonial rule. For India they are particularly concerned about its adverse impact on democracy. For, when the poorer classes have found long-term stake in democracy and have begun to acquire their due share in governance, the power of the state (elected governments) itself is being denuded and undermined by the global power structure in collaboration with the country's metropolitan elites. Put in simple terms the grassroots activists see globalization as a force that undermines, in fact delegitimises, institutions of democratic governance by establishing supremacy of the market over the economy, society and culture. It is a force which, in their view, seeks to undo India's democratic revolution.

The New Politics of Movements

As we saw above, in view of the movements the discourse of globalization by privileging the idea of governance over that of social transformation has emptied development of its political content, i.e., has de-politicized both, the concept and practice of development. At another level, the politics of globalization, by using the financial and military clout of the few powerful countries of the world, has begun to bring the institutions of democratic governance and popular sovereignty of peripheral countries in the relationship of subordination to the global hegemonic power structure. Based on this assessment of globalization's adverse impact both for development and democracy the grassroots movements conceive politics and their activities in the direction of achieving two interrelated goals: (a) repoliticizing development and (b) reinventing participatory democracy.

Repoliticizing Development

The main effort of the movements today is to keep the debate on development alive, but to recast it in terms which can effectively counter the structures of hegemonic power, nationally and globally. They are thus formulating old issues development in new political terms, although their objective remains the same as before, namely, those at the bottom of the pile find their rightful place as producers in the economy and citizens in the polity. Accordingly, they now view development as a *political* struggle for peoples' participation in defining goals of development and in devising means to achieve these goals. Their view of development is thus a non-hegemonic, pluralistic process, in articulation of which they use inductively arrived insights and criteria evolved by them through their own struggles. In this process they increasingly relate the globally debated issues such as feminism, ecology and human rights to the economic, social and cultural

specificities of India in which these issues are embedded. Consequently, their politics is about making development a bottom-upward process, directly relevant to and an edifying experience for the poor and the oppressed. Thus, rather than altogether 'opting out' of development they now seek to change the *power relations* on which the conventional model of development is premised. In the process some *new elements*, which are essentially political in nature, have entered in the grassroots movements' thinking and practice of development.

First, the old post-colonial critique of development which invoked pre-modern nostalgia has ceased to appeal a large section of the grassroots movements. Although that kind of critique still remains a hobby-horse of some esoteric groups of activists and academic clubs it finds little resonance in the changed aspirations of India's poor. Thus, at one level the movement groups see the power elements of the old Development model being encoded in the hegemonic structure of Globalization which they oppose. But at the level of national politics they see the idea of development as representing political and economic rights of the people who have been denied access to it because of their disadvantageous locations in the power structure. Hence they problematize development in terms of creating a politics for changing relations of power in the society. This change in perspective was effectively articulated by a well-known social activist Aruna Roy when she left a development NGO in mid 1980's to found a movement-group. According to her the need of the time was to "redefine the paradigm of development—to see the whole process of development from a different perspective". And such a change in perspective would, she held, enable social activists to see development for what it really is i.e., a political process. In her words: "Development is politics and there can be no development without political will.... In fact all acts of social and economic living are determined by the nature of politics." (*Lokayan Bulletin*: 13.1, p. 51).

Second, the change in perspective was also a response to the change in the post Cold-war global politics of development. The movement-groups in India now have a better understanding of the global politics of development. With the global development establishment having openly and officially given up its old promise of universalizing development for *all*, they are now able to see the real face of global hegemonic power. They are, therefore, not surprised that it has dismantled the Cold-war structures of aid and assistance, and in their place a new global economic regime of trade and fiscal control has been set up. The movements see this change as representing a new political agenda on the part of the global power structure which, in their view, aims at dispersal of state control over the economies of the peripheral countries on the one hand, and centralization of global political and military power in the hands of the world's already rich and powerful countries on the other. This, in their view, forms the basis for global hegemony today, through which these countries seek to maintain international economic and political stability under the continuing, rather intensifying, conditions of inequality among and within nations.

This awareness has led some movement-groups to form trans-national alliances aimed at democratising the global power structure. For example, quite a few movement-groups in India have been actively associated with such counter hegemonic global initiatives as the

Convention on Biodiversity, Agenda 21, World Commission on Dams, Alliance for Comprehensive Democracy and so on. These initiatives are on their part not just confined to the transcendental global space. They are concretely embodied in their activities at the national and local levels in the form of disseminating awareness and activating organizations at the grassroots level to identify and oppose specific policies, programmes and legislations meant to expand hegemonic global power.

Third, all types of grassroots groups today, including even some conventional development NGOs, articulate basic issues of development in the framework of rights. For example, they no longer view poverty purely as an economic problem. They see it as a function of social-structural locations of the poor by occupying which they are excluded from the world of development (which is guarded by the legal, political and economic immunities and insulations it provides to its insiders) and imprisoned in the world of poverty (the world constituted of vulnerabilities and exposures to exploitation for its politically unorganized and economically marginalized inhabitants). They, however, do not perceive the division between the two worlds in unidimensional terms of polarization between two economic classes. Their mobilizational strategies, therefore, focus on the new social-political formations which conflate the category of class with those of caste, ethnicity and gender.

Let me illustrate this point briefly with reference to three major types of movements: the human rights, the ecology, and the women's movements. The issue of human rights as viewed by the activists of several human rights groups is not limited to the conventional legal notion of civil liberties; it extends to situations in which individuals and groups are denied satisfaction of their basic needs. It is in this context that they articulate the issue of poverty in terms of rights and entitlements (e.g., right to work) the poor must have as citizens and as human beings. The politics of micro-movements, therefore, lies not merely in fighting particular infringements of legal rights of citizens, but in creating and expanding new political and civic spaces for them by converting the survival and development needs of the poor and the deprived into struggles for their economic, political, and cultural rights and these not only of individuals *qua* individuals but of groups and communities surviving on the margins of the civil society. In the process, the activists of the movements link rights of access to and benefits from the development process with the issues of ethnic identity and human dignity, and view the satisfaction of material needs as a pursuit not detached from the spiritual and cultural aspects of human existence. This is why, several social-action groups whose self-image is not of being human-rights groups, almost routinely take up issues of rights and cooperate with larger human rights movements.

Similarly, the ecology movements at the grassroots do not view ecology as merely a cost factor in development, as some development specialists do. Nor are they interested in specifying tolerable levels of ecological destruction necessary for achieving higher levels of economic development as do the policies of hegemonic Globalization. Instead, they view ecology as a basic principle of human existence, which, if reactivated, can yield higher level principles for reorganizing the economy in a humane way and refocus development in terms of well being, in which, to use Gandhiji's well-known phrase,

"everyone shall have enough to satisfy one's need, but not greed".

The activists of the women's movements have lately been defining their problem not merely in terms of achieving equal benefits and access for women, in the present system. They self-consciously take up such issues mainly for finding entry points to the submerged world of Indian womanhood; but their long-term goal, as they put it, is to change the working of the gender principle itself in the economy and society, such that both society and economy become more just and humane. They find the ecological world view of the movements more aligned with the feminine principle. The fusion of the ecological and gender principles, they argue, is conducive for a more humane economic and political organization of the society than that of Development which, in their view is founded on the principle of male-domination over all aspects of human life and nature. (Shiva, 1988) Their project, often working in tandem with the human rights and ecology movements, is thus to change the forms of organization and consciousness in society.

Guided by this broad perspective, these movements are often able to forge links with each other in fighting for issues at the grassroots. It is not accidental that ecology movements like the Chipko movement have large participation of women, and that in the Bodhgaya movement for the rights of the landless in Bihar had women playing significant leadership roles. Women are in the forefront of the movements fighting for the rights of the population displaced by development projects especially in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. Similarly, human rights organizations often team up with women's organizations on issues of dowry, *sati* (self-immolation of a widow by burning on her husband's funeral pyre), rape, and equal wages. Similarly, activists in women's groups an active role in mobilizing and assisting the victims of the Bhopal chemical disaster. At no time in independent India in the movements led by the parties and trade unions, was there ever such a high degree and such a sustained level of participation by women as one witness today in the non-party political movements at the grassroots.

Fourth, the movements now see more clearly that the roots of rural poverty lie in the pattern urban growth has followed in India. This has, among other things, led to greater interaction and building of new organizational linkages between the city-based and village-based social action groups. Further, the movements now realize inconsequentiality of the established wisdom of "inputs" serving as a major factor in rural development. This in their view only represents a partial and lopsided understanding of the problem of rural development. For, making "inputs" available to poor farmers is more a political, than economic problem. The experience so far is that it has not helped a large majority of the poor who lack economic and organizational capacity to receive and use inputs such as credit, seeds, fertilizers, irrigation and so on. These inputs are simply swallowed up by the upper stratum of the rural society. So, the focus of their activity is now on creating capabilities of self-development among the rural poor, even as they fight for their rights to create and secure resources for collective development.

Thus, by redefining issues of development in *political* terms the groups working separately on different issues such as gender, ecology, human rights or in the areas of health and education are now conceiving their activities in more generic terms—as a

form of social and political action aimed at countering hegemonic structures of power at all levels—locally, nationally and globally. One important consequence of this change in perspective was that the grassroots movements which were in a state of fragmentation and low morale at the end of 1980's, began to regroup and come on common platforms, on the issue of globalization. In the mid-1990's this led to launching of several new nation-wide campaigns and to formation of organizationally more durable coalitions and alliances. Among many such initiatives the most effective and widespread one in the recent years has been the campaign for *Right to information*—a series of local level struggles for securing correct wages for labourers working in public construction works for draught relief, culminating into a successful nation-wide campaign for right to information. The older, ongoing movement of the 1980's the Narmada Bachao Andolan (a movement to save livelihoods, ecology and cultures sustained by the river Narmada and threatened to be destroyed by the project of building big dams on it) got a new boost and gave birth to a broad based alliance of a number of social movements and organizations active at different levels and in different parts of the country. This alliance, known as National Alliance for People's Movements (NAPM) has been launching, supporting and coordinating several campaigns on a more or less regular basis, protesting against programmes and projects of the government and the MNCs, representing the policies of hegemonic globalization. There have been many more such initiatives, but more recent ones among them include: A Campaign for Peoples' control over Natural Resources comprising of several organizations active in rural and tribal areas covering about thirteen Indian states; the movement called There Is An Alternative, led by among others, two previous Prime Ministers of India; The Living Democracy Movement for linking local-democracy decision making to maintaining biodiversity; the movement for nuclear disarmament called, Indian Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace and so on. Although some of the above movements will be described in some detail in the next section, the point of just mentioning these ones here is to show how the challenge of globalization has politically revitalized the scene of social movements in India which by the end of eighties was losing both, momentum and direction; more interestingly, how it became possible for the leaders of these movements to sustain their politics at a higher level of intensity, in the process, recovering the hope of initiating a long-term politics of non-cooperation and withdrawal of legitimation to the prevalent dominant structures of power.

To sum up, the politics of different groups and movements which began to converge in mid-1990's have acquired a common direction and a fairly durable organizational base. The convergence has been attained on the point of resisting the ongoing efforts of the bureaucratic, technocratic and the metropolitan elites to support policies of globalization and depoliticize development. For, in the view of the movements it is only through politicization of the poor that they can counter the negative impact of globalization and make development a just and equitable process, and a collectively edifying experience. Thus, by establishing both conceptually and in practice, linkages between issues of development and democracy the grassroots movements have begun to articulate their politics in terms of participatory democracy.

Reinventing Participatory Democracy

In theoretical discussions and in practice of representational politics participatory democracy has been treated, respectively, as a para-political idea and a peripheral political activity—a desirable but not an essential characteristic of a modern democracy. It is in the politics of grassroots movements, where the scope of democracy is being actively searched and expanded through their everyday political struggles, that participatory democracy is conceived as not just desirable but a necessary organizational form and political practice. Under conditions of Globalization, where the national level institutions of representation are being subordinated to hegemonic global power with the structures of political and economic decision-making becoming more remote—even alienated—from people, the movements' continuing politics of participatory democracy has acquired a new relevance.

Participatory Democracy and Political Theory

In contemporary democratic theory the notion of political participation is articulated in terms of political obligations and legal-constitutional rights of citizens with respect to electing representative governments and ensuring their democratic functioning. (Almond & Verba, 1963; Milbrath, 1965). By conceiving participation in passive terms of limiting citizen role and activities to the institutional arena of elections, parties and pressure-groups the theory secures (or at least seeks to provide justifications for securing) the decision making procedures of representative governments from the high-intensity politics of mass-mobilization and direct-action, which the occasionally surfacing popular movements generate in a representative democracy.

This indeed has succeeded to a large extent in lending institutional stability and political legitimacy to liberal representative democracy, making it appear as if it is the only natural form that democracy can have. But it has, at the same time, bogged down the theory's political imagination to pragmatic concerns of the old, 'actually existing' democracies of the West. In the process, it has pre-empted options of the new and growing democracies to evolve and experiment with institutional alternatives for deepening democracy and choosing forms appropriate to their own respective cultural and historical contexts. Even more, the theory, by treating persistently and for long the liberal representative democracy as an ultimate form of democracy, has encouraged the view that in it the human kind has achieved the highest state of political development beyond and outside which no democratic possibility exists. This even emboldened a North-American political thinker to see the arrival and universalization of liberal democracy as heralding the end of history! (Fukuyama, 1992)

This high-intensity discourse sustained throughout the Cold-war has, ironically, produced an array of theoretical arguments which has succeeded in keeping representative democracy at the level of what Boaventura de-Souza Santos aptly describes as low-intensity democracy—which probably also suits the contemporary politics of hegemonic globalization. (Santos, 1999) This however has resulted in a major theoretical casualty, i.e. of pushing—if not altogether discarding—the concept of participatory democracy on

the margins of democratic theory.

Keeping democracy a low-intensity national-level operation may be conducive to integration of the world (capitalist) economy, for, it helps national governments of the peripheral countries to disperse and dispel popular democratic movements opposing implementation of structural adjustments and other policies handed down to them by the global power structure. But it is precisely for this reason that the peripheral countries of the world undergoing the process of globalization need to create a strong infrastructure of democracy at the grassroots, without which their democracies cannot survive at the nation-state level, worse, it may even endanger the very survival of their poor citizens.

Two moves made by the theorists of representative democracy have made it possible, on the one side, to incorporate the concept of participation within the theory's structural-functional paradigm (i.e., participation conceived as a particular form of political behaviour of citizens through which they elect governments and are expected to keep their functioning on a democratic track by working through their representatives), and, on the other, to treat participatory democracy either as an archaic form of governance or an impractical ideal which if actually practised—or even experimented with—is fraught with dangerous consequences for democracy itself.

The first argument is elaborated through historicizing democracy in linear, evolutionary terms. It traces the history of democracy from its origin in the Athenian city state where it functioned as a direct, participatory democracy through successive forms it assumed, till it acquired a complexly evolved form of representative democracy—making it possible to function at a much larger scale as of a nation-state (sometimes the state of a continental size). This transmutation has in its view equipped representative-liberal democracy to function even at a global scale and carry out a plethora of programmes and policies pertaining to every aspect of lives of its citizens. (Dahl, 1989: 1-24)

The point of this exercise, it seems, is to show that the beliefs and practices historically associated with the participatory democracy of a city-state have no relevance today for a democracy located in the nation-state and even less for tomorrow when it is likely to encompass the whole globe as its territorial domain. Participatory democracy, the theory concedes, is indeed a noble idea and some of its elements ought to be functionally incorporated in representative democracy. But it is a regression to think of citizens directly controlling and participating in governmental decision making and may even turn out to be a recipe for disaster in today's world. In the derivative theoretical discourse of Indian democracy this fixing of participatory democracy to the dead and gone past of the West has delegitimised any historical-theoretical exploration premised on its existence in India's past. Hence the idea of democracy as symbolized in the concept of village republic is treated by the Indian political theorists as an atavistic idea, not deserving any serious theoretical discussion.

The other argument—unlike the previous one which views democracy's history in structural-functional terms—is made in normative-analytical terms. It seems to be based on the fear of romantic appeal (utopian images) that the idea of participatory democracy

evokes. In view of those advancing this argument, propagating the ideal of participatory democracy often promotes simple, populist ideas about democracy. They further argue that the proponents of participatory democracy fail to recognize the fact that modern governments have to routinely depend in their decision-making on specialists and professional experts; the issues involved are so complex and technical in nature that they are beyond the grasp even of elected representatives, let alone ordinary citizens. Concepts like direct or participatory democracy only serve as a distraction to theorization of democracy for the globalizing world. (Schmitter, 1999) A section of Indian elites who believe in meritocracy as providing a better form of democracy and good governance, has always sought political support for their position in this argument. They vociferously argue that for preserving institutional norms of representative democracy it is necessary to strictly limit, procedurally and structurally, the powers of elected representatives through the legal-rational institutions of bureaucracy, and the judiciary. In their view giving legitimacy to the idea of participatory democracy would only further expose representative institutions to majoritarian and populist pressures, often making for bad and irrational decisions which usually are not in public interest. Dominance of this discourse in India during the initial decades of Independence made for consolidation of the hegemonic rule, albeit democratically consented, of a small social-political minority consisting of urban and English educated members of the upper-castes. They occupied a large number of positions in different sectors and institutions of the State in India especially in higher bureaucracy and judiciary, for over forty years after Independence. What had become an established, common-sensical view of governing India, however, began to be challenged by the end of 1970's when the movements of subaltern classes gained strength both in electoral politics and in the civil-society. (Sheth, 1995)

The Movements' Politics of Participatory Democracy

The idea of participatory democracy was central to Gandhi's political thinking and practice, and had inspired many activists of the freedom movement. He articulated this idea through the concepts of *swaraj* (self-governance) and *swadeshi* (community's control over resources) and by invoking imagery of the 'village republic' (*gram swaraj*) as representing India's democratic tradition. These formulations were however stoutly refuted and virtually banished from the mainstream political discourse after Independence, as representing Gandhi's impractical idealism. The idea of participatory democracy has, however, not only been kept alive but developed conceptually and in practice by a section of grassroots activists who liberally draw on Gandhi's economic and political thinking—although quite a few of them may not want to wear the Gandhian badge. (Bakshi, 1998)

The first comprehensive statement on participatory democracy came from Jayaprakash Narayan (J.P), a popular socialist leader of Independence movement who about five years after India achieved Independence, joined the Gandhian movement. He raised the political profile of the movement high when in 1954 he made a public pronouncement of dedicating his whole life to the movement, or, in his words, to 'the Gandhian way'. The issue of deepening democracy was central to his agenda for the movement, without which, he believed, only the elite rule will perpetuate in the name of democracy. This

resulted in publishing of his treatise on non-party democracy in 1959. (Narayan, 1959) He critiqued the idea of representation by political parties and argued for a more participative and comprehensive form of democracy constituting a broad democratic base from where the power will flow upward to units using power allocated to them by the units below, on conditions of accountability and transparency. The amount and kind of power to be allocated to a higher unit will be as per the requirement of the unit. J.P.'s thesis however made little impact then beyond the Gandhian circles. It in fact drew sharp criticism from the liberal democratic theorists as well as the party politicians who saw it as a naïve exercise of an idealist, unaware of its dangerous consequences for democracy itself. (Kothari, 1960) The document was virtually 'withdrawn' from public discourse, but within two years J.P. came up with a politically more potent and a comprehensive statement on the issue of participatory democracy. (Narayan, 1961) Here J.P. rebutted arguments of his critiques and elaborated his basic thesis by theoretically and historically establishing the need for a comprehensive democracy in India where both the economic and political power is primarily held *and* exercised directly by the people from the base of the polity. It did not take very long for his vision of democracy to find a powerful political expression. He launched a massive movement in early 1970's with the aim of, in his own coinage, restoring peoples' power (lokshakti) in democracy. (Narayan, 1975) This idea of peoples' power fired the imagination of many young women and men, which besides upstaging the Government in Delhi gave rise to a new genre of micro-movements, celebrated and characterized by the theorists now as 'non-party political process'. (Kothari, 1984) This genre of movement groups that emerged from what became known as the "J.P. movement" has since been working at the grassroots. They articulate participatory democracy in terms of empowerment of people through everyday struggles for their rights as well as through harnessing their collective efforts to developing local resources for collective well-being.

The most remarkable in this genre was the movement launched by Chhatra-yuva Sangarsh vahini (a student and non-student youth organization for social and political transformation) in 1978, known as the Bodh Gaya Movement. It has since served as a source of inspiration nationally for many movement groups. This movement succeeded in seizing about 10,000 acres of land from the religious establishment in Bodhgaya, a district in Bihar, through non-violent direct action. The land was legally redistributed among families of tillers who were attached to the land for generations. In the course of redistribution, legal entitlements to land were given equally to women and men. More important than its outcome in the form of land redistribution was the process of change through which the movement's larger objectives and values of political and social transformation were kept alive, communicated and, even if partially, institutionalized affecting lives of about 3000 participant households in the area. In fact the movement-group ensured that the *dalits* (ex-untouchables) for whose land-rights the movement was launched remained in the forefront and among them the women performed crucial leadership roles. The movement created a new hope among social-action groups all over the country about the efficacy of using non-violent militancy as a means for social and economic transformation.

Another, and equally significant movement of the same genre in recent years, has been

the one led by Tarun Bharat Sangh (Union of Young Indians). It is known to the outside world through its Magsaysay award winning Leader, Rajendra Singh. He joined and has revitalized the organization through his work since 1985 in the villages of Rajasthan. He and members of his group started work with a deep conviction that the people have the knowledge and the capacity to develop and manage their affairs collectively for their own well-being (that is how he saw J.P.'s message of 'power to the people'), provided they stopped looking to the Government for help and become motivated to work on their own. To put in Singh's own words: "...our fight (is) against the state for communities to have a say in their development... administrative system... tries to foist its own vision of development on communities, without bothering to find out what people need. In fact, it is a myth that development is for people, it is actually anti-people... Schooled in the ideals of Jayaprakash Narayan and Acharya Vinoba Bhave working for social change was an obvious choice (for us)".

Beginning their work in mid-1980's this group of social activists was able to establish, in the course of a decade and a half, a self-governing system of land and water management in about 700 villages in the perpetually draught affected and poverty-ridden villages of Rajasthan. This was achieved through reviving recessive knowledge and skills of the people themselves of building water harvesting structures known locally as Johads. In this process the villagers not only went ahead and built a network of chek-dams and small reservoirs without government help but took decisions, bypassing the Government, on land use in the area, built boundary walls around common lands and afforested a huge barren land-mass. This became possible due to social confidence the people could recover with the water becoming available to them by their own efforts. The old forms of economic interdependence and social cooperation were now recovered and imbued with new economic and democratic-political meanings. In the eyes of Singh this is a small, perhaps a short-live achievement. He sees a long political battle ahead for achieving real democracy for the people. In his words: "Unfortunately, the state in India does not appreciate communities trying to help themselves. If people start participating in development and questioning the money that ostensibly is being spent on them, it makes difficult for those who run the system. For a bureaucracy schooled in the colonial tradition of ruling rather than working with people, grassroots democracy is an alien concept. So instead of development being a collaborative effort between people and the state, it is actually people versus the state."

But the Government saw all this quite differently: an encroachment on its territory and usurpation of its functions. The administration slapped on the movement-group and the villagers hundreds of legal cases and threatened them with demolition of the dams as they were built without the Government's permission and the guidance of experts ('civil engineers'). Here is where the grassroots-group's politics of mass mobilization and joining larger alliances helped; it became possible for the group along with the villagers, to withstand the pressure and ultimately get the government endorse to the mode of self-governance they had evolved through political struggles on the ground. Again, Rajendra Singh sees this as a temporary reprieve obtained by winning of a battle, not a war. In his words: "Unless the communities are empowered and encouraged to develop stakes in

development, winning the war is going to be difficult".

In the process of countering hegemonic globalization, the movements have added another dimension to their politics. This is about making Law an important site of social and political action/struggles. In the course of implementing the Structural Adjustment Programmes and other globalization related policies the state has been actively assisting the Indian and multinational corporations to acquire land and other resources of the villages in India at a nominal cost. This involves withdrawing constitutional guarantees given to tribals (i.e., not allowing alienation of their lands), and, in effect, extending such guarantees to MNCs as making land, water and forest-resources available to them cheaply, but at a great cost to the livelihood of the people and ecology of the area. Enactment or implementation of such legislations and Government orders are now challenged by the movement-groups not just in the courts of law but in the larger arena of civil society. The proceedings of public interest litigations which earlier had remained by and large confined to the courtrooms as contentions between the State and the social-legal activists, have now become matters of direct concern and involvement for the people themselves, constituting everyday politics of the movement groups.

In the process, new participatory forums have been evolved such as documenting effects of specific Government policies and legislation on the people through participatory surveys and studies carried out jointly by social activists (including some professionals among them) and the people themselves, and disseminating results to the wider public, including the media. The most effective and innovative mode of consciousness raising and of political mobilization developed in this process and which by now has become a common political practice for movement groups all over the country, is of organizing big walkathons (*Pad yatras*). The *Pad yatras*, literally marches on foot, are usually organized by activists representing organizations from different parts of the country but sharing a common perspective on and concern for a particular issue they together wish to highlight for mobilizing public opinion. They walk long distances along with the people drawn from different locales but facing a similar problem—e.g., a threat posed to their livelihood by the project of the Government or MNC—in a specific area. In the course of the walk they take halts in villages—interact with people, show films, stage plays--all highlighting the issues.

One among many such cases is the movement against bauxite mining in tribal areas of Vishaka in Andhra Pradesh. In 1991 a walkathon, known as the *manya prante chaitanya yatra*, a consciousness raising walk of the area facing ecological destruction was organized by a couple of movement groups active in the area. Over 50 other social-action groups joined the march and prepared a report on ecological destruction they saw and experienced during the march. The report described how the region had come under severe threat to its ecology and to livelihood of people inhabiting it and how if the damage was not controlled could cause ecological disaster for the entire peninsula of south India. The report also spoke of the displacement of 50,000 tribals, the massive deforestation and the problem of flash foods and silting that resulted. (Report by P. Sivaram Krishna of SAKTI, (Mimeo) a movement-group which organized the march

along with others; also a report in Newstime, 13.3.1991).

This *Chaitanya yatra* (peoples' study and consciousness raising march) has since served as a basis for a decade long and still continuing, movement for legal and social action in the state of Andhra Pradesh. During the last five years it has widely expanded, covering many other similar issues and movement groups working on them from different parts of the country. What is of interest here is the kind of politics the movement has developed for expanding its activities and sustaining itself for so long. At one level, through taking the issue of threat to peoples' livelihood to the law-courts it has created a nation-wide alliance of similar movements, thus garnering a wider support-base for its activities. Working through the alliance it has been able to project its work in the national media and contribute to building solidarity of movement groups. At another more crucial level the movement, through its mobilizational and consciousness raising marches and myriad other activities, has been able to motivate people of the area to build their own organizations, which now assert self-governance as a right, and the preferred way to protect and develop the means of their livelihood and culture.

To resume the story, the Chaitanya yatra was followed up on a sustained basis by two activist groups SAMTA and SAKTI through creating a network of social-action groups in the Vishaka district under the banner of Visvasamakhya (a forum for world equity). It organized several such marches in other areas of the state, and prepared reports highlighting how usurption of tribal lands by corporations, ostensibly by legal means, deprived the people of their livelihoods, identity and culture. In preparing reports and disseminating information and analyses contained in it, help was sought from well-known organizations, movement-leaders and activist-professionals, active in the state as well as in other parts of the country.

It was in the background of sustained struggles which the groups in the area carried on for about a decade that it became possible for one of them, i.e., SAMTA, to go to the Supreme Court of India with a plea to close the Calcite mines in the area as it threatened to uproot the local population of tribals and endangered the ecology of the area. Since the tribals were protected by the Schedule Five of the Constitution against alienation of their lands and the mine threatened to destroy their livelihoods, even more, violated their fundamental right to life given by the Indian Constitution to all citizens, SAMTA pleaded that the mine should be closed. Largely accepting the SAMTA plea the Supreme Court of India gave a 400 page judgment in 1997, outlining the steps which needed to be taken to make the tribals *partners in the development* of Scheduled areas (i.e., constitutionally protected areas populated by tribals). The court ruled that all private and public sector organizations functioning in these areas should give not less than 20 per cent of jobs to local people and an equal amount of seats to their children in educational institutions. The court also stipulated that each industrial unit in the area part with 20 per cent of its profit and make it available for the kind of development that would be in the interest of the local people.

In essence the court recognized the local people as legal stake-holders in the development of the area they live-in. It made the people's participation in development necessary, and

their claim to a share in the benefits of development legitimate. This land-mark judgement is known all over India as SAMTA judgement i.e., by the name of the movement-group which took the case to the court. It has since become a rallying point around which many struggles are now waged jointly by action groups in the country: first, to secure implementation of the court's mandatory rulings as well as its recommendatory provisions. Second, to test and expand legal and juridical meanings of the judgement for wider application; third, to use it politically for creating a bullwork of resistance to prevent implementation of the Government policy which, as a part of globalization package and under pressure from multi-nationals, seeks to withdraw guarantees given by the Constitution to the people under its Fifth Schedule.

In the course of four years, i.e., since the Supreme Court gave its judgement in 1997, in the SAMTA vs. State of Andhra Pradesh case, a number of marches, demonstrations and conventions have been held in different parts of the country on a more or less regular basis by social-movement groups involved in the larger movement of making development directly relevant to the people. These efforts have now culminated in forging a nation-wide campaign, joined by nearly a hundred movement groups and a number of actively inclined intellectuals and professionals in the country. It is organizationally assisted by SAMTA in Andhra Pradesh and SETU in Gujarat. The campaign organization is known as, Campaign for Peoples Control over Natural Resources. It has adopted for itself a comprehensive mandate of working out strategies to oppose the Government policies designed to assist forces of hegemonic globalization in India. These policies pertain to land acquisition, displacement and rehabilitation of projects affected people, biodiversity, forests, aqua-culture, agriculture, management of water resources, amendments to Fifth Schedule and so on; all directly undermining rights and livelihoods of the subaltern classes—the ex-untouchables, tribal people, marginal farmers and landless agricultural labour, pastoralists and fisher-people. (Action Plan of the campaign for people's control over Natural Resources passed in its meeting held in Delhi, 1-2 December, 2000, mimeo, available at SETU, e-mail: setumail@wilnetonline.net)

Different from the above campaign for preventing the Government to make certain kind of legislations, there is a movement which seeks to compel the Government to implement its own rules and regulations honestly and efficiently. Its politics centres around holding public hearings and peoples' courts with a view to creating political and social sanctions for the local government administration to compel it to observe and make public the rules and regulations by which it is governed in implementation of development programmes. It began as a struggle launched by a mass-based organization in a village in Rajasthan founded by Ms. Aruna Roy who gave up her job in the Indian Administrative Services (IAS) "to work with the people". The organization was named Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS)—organization for harnessing workers' and farmers power. The struggle was addressed to the problem most acutely felt by the people themselves, i.e., of preventing government officials from cheating labourers working on government construction sites, by not paying them minimum wages fixed by the Government. Besides being underpaid, the people in the area did not get work for enough number of days in a year. This was because the development programmes sanctioned by the Government

often remained on paper, with the allocated money finding ways into the pockets of government officials and elected leaders. Since all this was done in the knowledge of the 'higher-ups' no amount of petitioning helped; only direct action by the people was seen as a possible remedy. In December 1994-95 several public-hearings, *Jan Sunvai*, were held by MKSS where the workers were encouraged to speak out their problems with bureaucracy—especially narrating specific details of underpayment of wages and the development schemes which remained unimplemented—in presence of local journalists, and people of surrounding villages from different walks of life. It took several public hearings to persuade some among the accused parties—the contractors, engineers and local elected leaders—to accept the MKSS invitation asking them to avail the opportunity of their self-defense by responding to peoples' charges of corruption in implementing development programmes. All this had little impact on the administration and for people outside the local area until a big 40-day sit-in, a *dharna*, was organized in a near by town of Bewar in 1996, followed by another series of public hearings, demonstrations and processions. This compelled the Rajasthan Government to amend the local government act (Panchayat Raj Act), entitling citizens to get certified copies of bills and vouchers of payments made and the muster-rolls showing names of labourers employed (for, payments were often made by forged bills and shown against names who never worked on the site). This grew in a state level campaign, demanding that the Rajasthan government pass a comprehensive legislation granting citizens and organizations the right to information. This culminated in organizing a nation-wide campaign—National Campaign for People's Right to Information—which prepared a model legislation for Right to Information. By extensively canvassing a model bill, the campaign succeeded with about half a dozen Indian States passing similar legislations in their respective state assemblies. The Indian Parliament is at present in the process of passing such a bill for a nationwide application.

In short, the innovative politics of the movement group, MKSS—as well as of many other such organizations not reported here—working explicitly on the principle of making democracy participatory and responsive, has initiated a larger and long-term political process by which people can effectively participate in making laws by compelling legislators at the local, state and national-level to formulate legislations the people want—in some cases even making the legislatures adopt drafts of laws prepared by the grassroots movements based on the information and insights gained through their own struggles and through wider consultations on different civil-society forums.

There are numerous other cases of the movement-groups articulating different elements of participatory democracy in the course of their struggles for democratising development. (Kothari, Smitu, 2000) For lack of space, only a brief mention could be made of a few. For example there are city-based movement groups like SEWA in Ahmedabd (Self-employed Women's Association) founded and led by Ms. Ela Bhatt with a long and formidable track record of work among self-employed women for their economic and political empowerment and social emancipation. (Rose, 1992) There is another recently founded organization, Manushi Forum for Citizen Rights, in Delhi, by Ms. Madhu Kishwar. Both these organizations have been running campaigns for protecting economic rights and expanding freedoms of self-employed urban poor—such

as street hawkers and cycle-rickshaw pullers. (*Manushi*, 2001: Nos. 123, 124) As part of the campaign documentary films are made and exhibited on several forums in the civil society, showing how government officials harass them not so much for implementation of rules as for collecting corruption money. Public hearings are held revealing how implementation of economic reforms blatantly discriminate between the rich and the poor and arguing why the rules and regulations preventing people to exercise their right to make a living need to be amended, if not done away with. (*Manushi*, 2001: No. 124).

There are the movements for empowering village assemblies (gram sabhas) to manage through direct participation of people the affairs of their own villages. (Kothari, Smitu, 2000). One such movement, for example, explicitly conceives of participatory democracy as an 'antidote to globalization'. Its politics is about giving organizational shape to Gandhi's ideas of *swaraj* and *swadeshi* at the grassroots level. Led by an activist trained in the J.P. movement, Mohan Hirabai Hiralal, the movement has motivated people to establish their own governance, to begin with, of forests in the area. Today, the villagers themselves maintain the forest-ecology and make judicious use of forest produce (Deshpande, Vivek, May 21, 2000). The self-governance movement is now being expanded to many more villages, covering other areas of collective life. The movement's credo is: *we* are the Government in our village and there shall be *our* Government in the region, the nation, and the world. Interestingly, this movement-group has also theoretically worked out a 'blue print' of organizational structures required for a participatory democracy from the village to the global level, specifying the long-term objectives and values by which they should be informed. (Hiralal, 2001).

Conclusion

The distinctive feature of the movements-politics is, thus, to articulate a new discourse on democracy through a sustained political practice. This is done at three levels: (a) at the grassroots level through building peoples' own power and capabilities, which inevitably involve political struggles for establishing rights as well as a degree of local autonomy for people to manage their own affairs collectively; (b) at the provincial and national level through launching nation-wide campaigns and building alliances and coalitions for mobilizing protests on larger issues (against "anti-people projects and policies") and creating organizational networks of mutual support and of solidarity among movements; (c) at the global level, by a small section of movements-activists who in recent years have begun to actively participate in several transnational alliances and movements for creating a politics of counter-hegemonic globalization. In all this, the long-term goal of the movements is to bring the immediate environment (social, economic, cultural and ecological) the people live in, within their own reach and control.

Such politics of movements, however, often brings them into confrontation with the state, the bureaucracy, the law and order machinery, the local power structures, and now increasingly with the multinationals penetrating the rural and tribal spaces in India. The micro-movements sometimes come in conflict also with political parties and established trade unions. The activists of movements, however, view such confrontations as an aspect of the larger, long-term struggle for political and social transformation, and not as means

of competing with political parties in the arena of representative politics, for acquisition of the state power. They thus view their everyday struggles as a process of expanding political spaces trans-locally through raising people's consciousness and building their own organizations. In the process, in the areas they have been active, they contribute to creating a political culture, of participative democracy.

The movement activists have developed their own critique of the prevalent macro-structures of political representation as well as a view of local politics. Their critique is not theoretically derived; it has emerged from, the experience of day-to-day political struggles on the ground. In their view the representative institutions have imprisoned the process of democratisation in the society. The way out from such impasse is the spread of their kind of politics—the politics of micro-movements. Movements, they believe, by involving people deeply in politics will in the long run, change the terms of justification for the state for holding and using power. This probably explains their epistemic preference in articulating their politics in terms of 're-construction of state', rather than of 'acquisition of state power'.

Although the movements usually work in local areas they invariably define local issues in trans-local terms. Theirs is thus a new kind of local politics which, unlike the conventional politics of local governments, is not linked vertically to the macro structures of power and ideology, either of a nation-state or of the Global Order; nor is this politics parochially local. It expands horizontally through several micro-movements of people living in different geographical areas and socio-cultural milieus, but experiencing the common situation of disempowerment caused by mal-development and contemporary forms of governance which are imperiously distant, yet close enough to feel their coercive edge.

Thus viewed, the long-term *politics* of movements is about withdrawal of legitimation to the hegemonic and exclusionary structures of political power and horizontalizing the vertical structures of social hierarchy, through strengthening the parallel politics of local, participatory democracy. In this process, the micro-movements address, on the one hand, the problem of making institutions of governance at all levels more accountable, transparent and participative and, on the other, create new political spaces outside the state structure, in which the people themselves are enabled to make decisions collectively on issues directly concerning their lives. Though, I have no penchant for coining new terms, I think it will be more appropriate to characterize this new politics of movements as 'societics'.

All this however, does not mean that grassroots actors and organizations define the politics of movements in direct opposition to the institutional framework of Indian democracy. In fact they view institutional democracy as a necessary, though not sufficient condition for pursuing their parallel politics of movements through which they seek to raise social consciousness of people and democratise the hegemonic structures of power in society. In that sense, their politics is about working around and transcending the prevalent institutional structures of liberal democracy—rather than confronting them

directly with a view to capturing State power.

In a nutshell, the movements conceive participatory democracy as a parallel politics of social action, creating and maintaining new spaces for decision-making (i.e., for self-governance) by people on matters affecting their lives directly. As a form of practice, participatory democracy for them is thus a long-term political and social process aimed at creating a new system of multiple and overlapping governances, functioning through more direct participation and control of concerned populations (i.e., of those comprising these governances). It is envisaged that through such politics the almost total monopoly of power held today by the contemporary (totalist) state would be dispersed into different self-governing entities but, at the same time, the macro-governance of the state, albeit confined to fewer nationally crucial sectors, would be carried through democratically elected representative bodies, at one level overseeing the system of micro-governances and at another, being responsive and accountable to them.

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