

# THE NON-PARTY DOMAIN IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

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## The Non-party Domain

At the outset, we must note that the term “non-party domain” or the “non-party political domain” is not a conceptual category that refers to any specific set of processes, movements, institutions or practices. It is a category that has been descriptively deployed in the Indian context by a group of scholars, to refer to a series of movements and social struggles that burst forth on the scene in the 1980s, broadly speaking. In the specific sense in which this category was used by these scholars, it was meant to refer to a series of responses to problems in the formal political process that prevented the interests of a whole range of social groups and many significant issues from getting translated into the electoral calculus of party politics. Of late, the term that has gained some currency in political discourse and is being used widely to refer to a range of movement-type as well as institutional initiatives, is the notion of “civil society”.<sup>1</sup> This category is increasingly used as a self-description even by those groups who would have in an earlier period used the category of “non party political domain”. Even though the current use of this concept of “civil society” too is quite vague, it has at least the advantage of being used as a normative category to demarcate a sphere of non-state activities that keeps the state’s excesses in check and attempts to influence policy in the direction of greater transparency and accountability.<sup>2</sup>

In contrast, the term *non-party domain* is a purely descriptive term (that is, it has neither analytical nor normative content), and could be used to include anything and every political expression that is outside the formal structure of party-politics, including what political science of an earlier era would have called ‘interest groups’, ‘pressure groups’ and ‘lobbies’. Such interest groups and lobbies could include organizations like manufacturers’ or industry associations like the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) or the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) at the all India level or their numerous less powerful and ‘lower order’ versions that operate as traders and manufacturers associations, *vyapar sanghas* or *udhyog bharatis* in different parts of the country. Arguably, one could include even the army (since the term “non-party” does not necessarily imply “non-state”) or organizations like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which claim to be non-party and technically stay away from electoral politics.

Associations such as these could technically be included within the rubric of non-party political domain, but not without emptying it of all content. In order to avoid transforming it into an entirely vacuous category, we shall restrict the use of this term to broadly cover the kind of phenomena that it was meant to indicate by its authors in the first place.<sup>3</sup> Since the inclusion of organizations like the FICCI/ CII or the RSS here calls for a much more extended discussion than is possible within the space of this paper, that is an additional reason for leaving them out of our discussion. If one were to thus articulate a single criterion of inclusion, one could say that organizations, movements and initiatives that seek to bring in concerns that have been marginalized or excluded from the formal political domain, are the ones that give the non-party domain its specificity.<sup>4</sup>

For the purposes of this paper, then, I shall use the term ‘non-party political movements’ or non-party-political formations’, primarily to refer to such organizations or movements that are also alternatively called ‘grass roots movements’, ‘new social movements’ or simply ‘social movements’, ‘social-action groups’ and ‘movement groups’. I will also include within this rubric, a whole range of other mass movements, but especially movements for regional political autonomy, in this rubric as these have had a very significant impact on the political process and the functioning of Indian democracy. I shall also be briefly concerned with another set of organizations and formations that are quite often conflated with such social movements and are seen as critical parts of this ‘non-party political domain’ - or more fashionably, ‘civil society’ organizations. I am referring here to the series of funded institutions called NGOs (non-governmental organizations), which present an especially complicated case, for one the one hand, unlike social movements that are answerable to their constituency, and to the larger public that they appeal to, most such NGOs consider themselves primarily accountable to their respective funders. Many of these large NGOs are plush with funds and their functionaries maintain fairly high standards of living and have swamped a large part of the voluntary activism of the earlier period. Yet, there are also funded NGOs which have been carrying out very significant work in different arenas and have maintained a fair degree of public accountability in their practice. From the standpoint of the functioning and vibrancy of India’s democracy, these need to be considered more carefully. Apart from these, I will also briefly discuss under this rubric the impact of organizations like trade unions and farmers’ movements. While most of the workers’ and peasants/farmers organizations are directly affiliated to political parties, there have been occasions when movements of these sections have burst forth outside the framework of party politics.

## Social Movements

By and large there is agreement among scholars that the new-ness of what have been called "New Social Movements" (NSMs) has to do with the fact that they effect a break, in some significant way, with the old kinds of political mobilization, especially those based on class, and with old frameworks of representation based on the institution of the political party (Guha 1989; Omvedt 1993). This, in fact, emerged as a significant point of departure and was recognized even by other scholars like Rajni Kothari, DL Sheth and Harsh Sethi, who were among the earliest to theorize the emergence of these new kinds of movements. However, Kothari, Sheth and Sethi have, by and large, avoided using the category of NSMs to identify these movements. Their preferred term has been the well-known "non-party political formations" or "non-party political process", which was meant to emphasize the fact that their emergence had something to do with the *crisis of the party system/s* (Kothari 1984, 1988; Sheth and Sethi 1991; Sethi 1993a, 1993b). On the other hand, there are some broadly *class-based movements* with a very significant mass following, like the farmers'/peasants' movements - if one could see the entire peasantry as a class - of the 1980s (led by Sharad Joshi, Mahendra Singh Tikait, Nanjundaswamy) which scholars like Gail Omvedt prefer to count among the Indian New Social Movements (Omvedt 1993). While this seems to run against the notion of NSMs as movements associated with the decline of class politics, to which Omvedt subscribes, strictly speaking, in her framework this is not so as in Omvedt's reading the farmers/peasants i.e. small commodity producers, struggling against the state and the capitalist market do not actually constitute a class. Here we need not go into the marxist debate on the "differentiation within the peasantry" that capitalism introduces and how, strictly speaking, the interests of the rural proletariat (the agricultural workers and the poor peasantry who work most of the time as wage workers on others' land) and the rich peasantry (or the rural bourgeoisie), really have no common ground. This is the conventional marxist position that Omvedt contests in her defense of these struggles as new radical movements, while positing a 'non-class' notion of an undifferentiated peasantry pitted against the state and capital. However, it is interesting to note that Omvedt's own position then becomes a variation of the one that posits the 'rural' (the undifferentiated peasantry) versus 'urban' contradiction as central to contemporary India. Such an understanding, we know, has been the staple of a lot of populist politics both in India and elsewhere. What should however, be underlined here is that the really problematic part of this notion of the undifferentiated rural emerges, even more starkly in relation to the issue of caste in contemporary India and the ways in which this leads to new ways of subjection of the Dalit castes by the middle/ dominant castes who are also the rich and middle peasants who were getting organized under the banner of these movements.

There is a further complication here if one chooses to stick to this definition, for as Ramchandra Guha rightly asserts, in India, class based movements both, "within the factory and over land", continue to have a significant place in politics (Guha 1989: 15). This was certainly true in 1989 when Guha wrote this; it remains so today - though not to the same extent and maybe in a different way. We may add that such class-based struggles could be of both kinds: those led by political parties, as well as those that arise spontaneously outside the framework of party politics. However, Guha seems less inclined to include some of these class-based mass struggles within the rubric of NSMs. For our part, we will include all kinds of non-traditional, radical initiatives that arise outside the framework of institutionalized politics within this rubric of social movements, which will include class-based movements/ initiatives like those discussed under the rubric of "new trade unionism" later. In that sense, our reference point is the one identified by Kothari, Sheth, Sethi and others, namely, movements and struggles arising as a consequence of the decline of institutional, party-based politics. For our purposes then, it makes more sense to consider the whole range of new kinds of assertions that have sought to find expression outside the framework of established parties and old modes of doing politics. These would actually include a wide array of struggles and movements, ranging from environmental struggles and movements against displacement to the long drawn out trade union struggles of the kind led by Datta Samant in the Bombay textile industry and later, in his wake, by Lalit Maken in the textile industry of Delhi - both in the early to mid-1980s (though it is not possible to discuss all of these separately). These would also include the more sustained new forms of trade union movement, symbolized for instance, in the Chattisgarh Mukti Morcha (CMM), the National Centre for Labour (NCL) and the more recently formed, more ambitious, New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI) on the one hand and the spontaneous mass struggles like those of Gujarat and Bihar in the 1970s, on the other.

It is not within the scope of the present paper to enter into an elaborate discussion of the proposition that there has been a decline in institutional and party politics. However, as this assertion seems to fly in the face of all empirical evidence of the increased participation rate in elections over this same period, we need to bracket this question for a separate discussion. For the present, let me suggest that this empirical evidence of increased participation need not necessarily indicate a heightened legitimacy of the electoral or the institutional political system. What might be a critical issue for investigation here is the very ways in which the contemporary Indian voter relates to the electoral and party process: It seems to be the case for example that the present-day voter is far more of an active player who has learnt to 'play' the electoral system the way s/he has learnt to play, for reasons of survival, many other mechanisms of the state. This 'play' may have less to do with 'legitimacy' of institutional politics and may in fact, be a consequence of recognizing it as a given, as something that cannot be very easily changed. 'Tactical voting' is generally more noticed among the minority community voters but it seems, this might be a more pervasive, paradigmatic question to explore in this context. More importantly, what we might have to reckon with here, is that there is no homogeneous category that goes by the name of 'the people' any more and that only certain kinds of issues can be raised through such large electoral/democratic constructs as 'the people'. Most issues raised by the social movements actually cannot even begin to be articulated through representational categories such as 'people', given the sectional nature of these questions.

Scholars like DL Sheth have traced the genealogy of such non-party "micro-movements" back to the great mass struggles of the 1970s like the JP-led movement. Thus, according to Sheth, "what we recognize today as movement-groups emerged and were consolidated in spaces made available to them by the decline of mainstream institutions of representative democracy: the legislatures, elections, political parties and trade unions" (Sheth 2004: 46). In his early intervention theorizing the non-party movement, Kothari included in his list "movements launched by the non-traditional Left", among which he listed movements like "the Chipko, the miners' struggle in Chhattisgarh, the Ryot Coolie Sangham in Andhra Pradesh, the Satyagraha launched by the peasants movement in Kanakpura in Karnataka against the mining and export granite, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha" and such other struggles (Kothari 1984: 220). Also falling within the ambit of the social movements in the nonparty political domain are some other very important movements like the women's movement or the struggle for caste equality.

Clearly, the range of struggles that fall under the category of social movements is so large that it is impossible to draw up an exhaustive list - leave alone do justice to them in the space of a single paper. For this reason, the discussion that follows should be taken merely as a broad treatment of major trends of these movements.

Periodization is always a hazardous enterprise and it is really difficult to find any common thread among movements or practices, simply because they belong to the same time period. Nonetheless, since there are some overarching developments in response to which many of these movements emerge, we can broadly identify - with this caveat in mind - certain common features. We can broadly see two such moments when certain overarching developments have impacted upon the nature, form and concerns of the movements in the respective periods they inaugurate. We can broadly call them the movements of the 1980s, and the movements of the 1990s. To be sure, these are shorthand expressions and what we refer to as the 1980s, is actually a period that has a much longer span. We could more accurately refer to it as *the post-Emergency period*, that is the period from 1977-78 onwards. Similarly, what we are calling the 1990s, is a period that continues into the present (2005). Moreover, many of the movements that began in the 1980s too continue well into the present. Further, there are significant continuities between the movements and struggles of the 1980s and those of the 1990s. But there is also a distinct change as we enter the period of the 1990s, marked as this period is, by the rapid global integration of Indian society, with all its attendant consequences, on the one hand and the rise of a revanchist, neo-fascist formation as a powerful political force, that has also been in power at the Centre for considerable lengths of time, on the other. These developments mark a very significant shift in contemporary Indian politics and public discourse and also, not surprisingly, leave their mark on the nature of struggles and movements of this period.

By and large, the movements of the 1980s were responding to the internal logic of marginalization/ disempowerment within the nation-state, heightened by the experience of the suspension of democratic rights and civil liberties during the Emergency. Some of them started by picking up the threads from where they had got broken because of the Emergency. In a sense, the beginnings of the women's movement had been made in the immediate pre-Emergency period (Omvedt 1993; Kumar 1993). Likewise, the beginnings of the Jharkhand or the Chipko movements were made in

the years preceding the Emergency (Omvedt 1993; Guha 2002) and these threads were picked up subsequently, articulated in different ways with newer emergent concerns like ecology. The gradual alienation of the agricultural backward castes from the rainbow coalition once represented by the ruling Congress party came to a climax during the first half of the 1970s and by the time the emergency was over, we see the coming together of these groups (among others) in the new formation of the Janata Party. It is from here that the demands for reservations for backward castes, proposed by the Kaka Kalelkar Commission in the 1950s are revived, which eventually lead to the formation of the Mandal Commission that was to become the banner of lower caste revolt in the 1980s and the 1990s. By the second half of the 1980s newer ecological struggles like the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save Narmada Movement), also arrived on the scene, bringing new vigour into the older environmental struggles and initiating a debate on the destructive consequences of Development as such.

We could broadly list the different currents that emerged with unprecedented vigour on the political scene in this period under the following rubrics:

- a) Civil liberties/ Democratic Rights movements
- b) The Women's movement
- c) Ecological struggles, including struggles against mass displacement.
- d) Struggles against caste oppression
- e) Subnational/ regional assertions
- f) Farmers' movements

Into the 1990s, these concerns acquire a graver character. But more than anything else, it was the rapid pace of 'globalization' on the one hand and the new situation created by the ascendance of the Hindu Right that began determining the shape of things. If the ascendance of the Hindu Right was marked, around the beginning of this period, by the demolition of the Babri Masjid and widespread pogroms and communal riots, its political manifestation was seen in its accession to power in 1998, with the support of a large number of regional parties. The political scenario in the subcontinent changed rapidly after that: the nuclear blasts in Pokhara (11 May 1998), followed by Pakistan's nuclear blasts soon thereafter; the war in Kargil (1999, the first between the two countries since 1965); intensified attacks on minorities, especially the Christians from late 1998 onwards (especially in Gujarat and Orissa); the attacks on the screening of the film *Fire*, and the shooting of *Water* in open instances of censorship by goon squads and finally, the Gujarat killings, marked this phase. After the 11 September 2001 attack on the World Trade Center towers, this new wave of anti-Muslim (and anti-Pakistan) campaigns merged with the 'War on Terror' unleashed by the Bush Administration in the USA.

Given this context, anti-communal struggles acquired a new intensity in the 1990s, with literally thousands of groups across the length and breadth of the country making this question an abiding part of their agenda. The nuclear blasts and the rapid deterioration of relations between India and Pakistan activated fresh non-state and non-party initiatives on both sides of the border. The peace movement, the movement against nuclear bombs and the movement for a solidarity between the South Asian peoples - all merged into one. This rudimentary emergence of a South Asian identity has been greatly facilitated by the availability of new communication technologies - especially the Internet and electronic mail. It was for the first time that during the protests against the nuclear blasts and the subsequent Kargil war, that politically engaged individuals and groups managed to keep in touch and exchange information while their respective governments fought the war. For the first time, critical writings in the media on one side of the border became available to concerned citizens and groups on the other side. And this new possibility certainly had much to do with the fact that these information flows took place in virtual space and were not located in physical spaces where the government of the day could have simply cracked down and shut down such centers of information dissemination and exchange.

Many of the struggles of the 1990s see the emergence of a different set of concerns whose roots often lie beyond the nation-state and of movements whose strategic interventions seem to call for transcending its borders. If the emergence of the rudiments of a South Asian imagination provide one illustration of this aspect, the fact even the partial successes of the Narmada Bachao Andolan, forcing the World Bank to suspend funding to the project, were possible because it became part of a large

international campaign.<sup>5</sup> In the 1990s, the new ecological consciousness has become irrevocably postnational, for it is widely recognized today that the impact of ecological degradation in any part of the world are felt everywhere on the planet. It is worth remembering that it is in the 1990s that this global concern also becomes a matter of acute contestation and conflict between the industrialized countries and the countries of the South: the Earth Summit (Rio de Janeiro 1992) or the Kyoto Protocol (1997 regarding limitations on greenhouse gas emissions) being important landmarks of a fundamentally different phase of global environmental conflict. It is in the 1990s again, that with increasing stringency of environmental regulations in the industrial countries, corporations that were already reeling under the impact of high wage costs, begin closing down operations in the North and moving to the global South. In a word, conflicts of this period of the 1990s had already transcended significantly, the frontiers of the nation-state in more ways than one.

Some of these newer movement that have arisen in the 1990s could be broadly enumerated as follows:

- g) Anti-communal struggles - which acquired a new intensity in the 1990s, given the phenomenal growth of the Hindu Right and intensified attacks on minorities.
- h) Campaigns for Democratic Accountability - especially in the backdrop of the "retreat of the state" - as for example the Right to Information campaign or the various non-party initiatives to monitor the electoral process in different parts of the country.
- i) The Gay - Lesbian movement, or more correctly Alternative Sexualities Movements.
- j) The Peace movement
- k) Urban struggles around town planning (struggles over urban space, housing, transport and such other issues).
- l) Free speech and anti-censorship movements

As I have mentioned above, these are merely broad rubrics, which indicate the range of struggles and movements that have emerged during the last two decades or more. Not only do they not constitute an exhaustive list of all such movements, some of the movements might be difficult to fit into any of the above categories. Certain others like the Chattisgarh Mukti Morcha might be difficult to fit into a single category, given the many-sided character of their interventions. What in fact, this list indicates is the sheer proliferation of networks and coalitions on different issues of common concern - all of them of course, gesturing to the same thing: the complete inability of institutional politics to deal with any of the issues raised by these movements. In fact, of the entire list of types of movements enumerated above, only two issues have found significant resonance among political parties, namely the movements against caste discrimination and subnational or regional struggles. It is also a matter of some significance that when they *have* found a resonance in the parties and the electoral system, they have been rapidly domesticated and appropriated, as had happened quite early in the day with the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) or a section of the Dalit movement and the entire backward castes movement.

### ***Mass Movements and Struggles***

It is seldom recognized that some of the largest and most powerful mass protests and movements have a profoundly non-party character, even if it be the case that they are usually appropriated by well oiled organizational machineries of political parties. In this category of movements we could count the food riots in many parts of northern India in the mid-1960s or what has come to be know as the "food movement" of West Bengal, in the same period. It was in fact the participation of the parties of the United Front (UF) in West Bengal in this movement that turned the tide in favour of the Leftist parties, especially the CPI(M). It was similar participation in such expressions of mass discontent that brought the opposition Samyukta Vidhayak Dal (SVD) governments to power and led to the defeat of the ruling Congress Party in nine states (including West Bengal and Kerala, where the UF won) in the 1967 elections.

It was such popular protest that began as an angry student outburst in an Ahmedabad college over high mess charges, in December 1973 that snowballed into the famous Nav Nirman movement. The movement continued for two and a half months and led, in the event to the resignation of the Chief Minister of the state (Sheth 1977; Shah 2002). It was such a mass movement that went on in Bihar for

more than a year, raising issues of corruption and price-rise and spread rapidly all over northern India. It was the threat posed by this burgeoning movement that became one of the reasons why Mrs Indira Gandhi imposed the Emergency in June 1975. The end of the Emergency and the regime change March 1977 were in a sense, a consequence of these movements. Such movements have of course occurred through different phases in history and do not specifically belong to the period we are discussing.

Apart from such spontaneous mass movements, however, there is another kind that has been an abiding part of the political scene in India. These are what could be called struggles for cultural-political autonomy. What distinguishes these movements from the above type is they are brought into being through the active intervention of a literary/ cultural elite, over a long period of time. This elite begins to mark out its difference from the dominant culture and redefine its relationship with it, as we see for instance, in the course of the Assam movement in this period of the 1980s. The history of the Assam movement of this period is quite inseparable from the activities of the Assamese literati of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and its attempts to define itself in contradistinction to Bengali culture. Many of the aggressive features of the movement of the 1980s, too have a fairly venerable lineage in Assamese history (Gohain 1980a & 1980b; Guha 2002; Baruah 1999). Similarly, the Khalistan movement of this period, draws on a long legacy of the demand for a Sikh homeland that arose during the penultimate years of the nationalist struggle. Later this struggle redefined itself in terms of a secular identity and re-emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, in the shape of the Punjabi Suba movement (Nayar and Singh 1984; Gupta 1997; Kumar and Sieberer 1991). That the Khalistan movement degenerated into pure terrorism and acquired an aggressive religious character once again has to do with other factors that do not concern us here,

Similarly, as we shall see later, the workers' movement in Chhattisgarh too eventually transformed itself into a struggle for regional autonomy, styling itself as the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha (literally, Chhattisgarh Liberation Front). We have mentioned the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM or the Jharkhand Liberation Front) and its struggle for a separate forest state, carved out of parts of Bihar and Bengal, which Rajni Kothari had enumerated as one of the significant struggles that exemplified the non-party political process. The JMM wanted a separate state where the local tribal population would be able to determine its future in relative autonomy of the Centre and the states of Bengal and Bihar. As things stood, all important businesses and jobs right down to those of skilled labourers in the collieries had been cornered people from outside the region - mainly from Bengal, North Bihar, Punjab and Maharashtra. According to AK Roy, the well-known trade union leader of the mine-workers, even the organized working class of the region shared in the exploitation of the Jharkhandi peasantry through the mechanism of what he called "internal colonialism" (Omvedt 1993: 128-29). Another important movement for regional autonomy that emerged with renewed vigour during the 1990s was the movement for a separate Uttarakhand state carved out of the hill districts of Uttar Pradesh. Initially, this demand had been raised by an organization called the Uttarakhand Kranti Dal (UKD, the Uttarakhand Revolutionary Party), which was formed in 1979. However, the UKD's demand for a separate hill state made little impact till the 1990s and the party too fared quite badly in electoral terms. Here too, a separate hill peoples' identity and the distinctiveness of the language and culture of the Garhwali and Kumaoni people were the latent sentiments that eventually assumed a significant form and laid the basis of the mass movement of the 1990s (Kumar 2000: 87, 96).

These movements functioned within a by and large secular framework, unlike the Assam movement, even though they were articulated around identity aspirations. Unlike the Assam movement, which acquired a violently anti-minority stance and saw direct physical attacks on the minorities, most of the movements mentioned above, remained secular and inclusive.

The Assam movement in fact, became the focal point in the early to mid-1980s, of a vigorous scholarly debate on the "nationality question" and the "right to self-determination". Was the movement a reflection of the genuine cultural aspirations of the Assamese people (Baruah 1999)? Was it really a struggle for regional autonomy? Or, was it, as some argued, a case of "little nationalism turning chauvinist" (Guha 2002)? A significant difference between the three movements discussed earlier and the Assam movement was the way in which the latter led to direct physical attacks and pogroms carried out on the linguistic and religious minority community. Even though the concern about the outsiders was very much present in the Jharkhand movement as well, the movement never took the vigilante forms of the kind that characterized the Assam movement which demanded the identification and deportations of "foreigners" - many of whom had been living there for generations.

Almost all these movements, much like their predecessors in the 1950s - the movements for the linguistic reorganization of states - went far beyond the frames provided by the structures of political parties and were organized and led through entirely new outfits like the CMM, JMM and the UKD 7 In

terms of efficacy, it should be noted that at least the first three clearly succeeded in getting their demands for separate states met. Not that this necessarily means any fundamental change on the ground, but the important thing is that with such smaller and more cohesive states, the state and its officials are more within the reach of the people and this, at least in the long run, can lead to significant changes in terms of greater transparency and accountability. There were others like the Gorkhaland movement in West Bengal which managed to secure an autonomous district council within the state, but could not really get a separate state.

### *Citizens Initiatives*

Among the first citizens' initiatives that came into existence was the movement for civil liberties and democratic rights. Acquiring particular salience in the immediate aftermath of the Emergency, this movement comprised a whole range of such organizations that came into being throughout the length and breadth of India. One of the major organizations that was set up in Delhi with the participation of a large number of senior political leaders, lawyers, jurists, journalists and other political and social activists, was the Peoples' Union for Civil Liberties and Democratic Rights (PUCLDR). This platform was set up in 1976, during the Emergency, with the blessings of Jaya Prakash Narayan, one of the most respected leaders and votaries of non-party politics. Others involved included apart from leaders of some political parties, mainly in their individual capacities, VM Tarkunde, a Royist and a jurist who too was a believer in non-party politics. The impetus behind the formation of this platform was of course, the fact that most sections represented in it had suffered in some way or the other, from the violation and suspension of civil liberties during the emergency. At one level, the PUCLDR then became the platform for undoing the wrongs of the Emergency regime and devising constitutional guarantees against such violations in future. At another, it became, especially after the return of Mrs Gandhi to power in 1980, a permanent watchdog, monitoring the state of civil liberties in the country. In some parts of the country the campaign for the release of those political prisoners who continued to languish in jails, especially Naxalite prisoners, was taken up by many activists close to the far Left. The formation of the PUCLDR in Delhi as a breakaway from what remained in its second phase as the PUCL, was one in a string of such formations. In fact, in many states like Andhra Pradesh (the Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee - APCLC) and West Bengal (Association for the Protection of Democratic Right - APDR), the main initiative for the formation of such civil liberties/ democratic rights outfits came from activists linked to the far Left groups.

Civil liberties and democratic rights groups have continued to play an active role in the years since, painstakingly documenting and exposing cases of civil liberties and democratic rights violations. In recent years they have also been actively campaigning against capital punishment. While the initial impulse, as mentioned above, was violations of citizens rights to freedom of expression by the state and such other issues, they have over the last two and a half decades expanded their activities to include violations of such freedoms in the context of caste and sectarian/ communal violence also. Some of them have also taken up questions of the worst cases of exploitation of labour, for instance, which effectively nullify rights and liberties sanctioned by the Constitution to all citizens. It is worthwhile registering here that here we are talking of primarily civil liberties and democratic rights groups which are primarily political in their inspiration and have been formed as non-funded citizens' initiatives. There are, on the other hand, also what are called 'human rights groups' many of which are funded organizations and work in tandem with internationally evolving agendas. Some of these can be quite problematic and can be said to share the entire range of problems that are associated with funded NGOs (see discussion below).

In this context, mention might be made of one of the most significant battles fought by one such citizens' network that was formed with the limited purpose of defending the rights of one particular individual. This was the Committee for Fair Trial for SAR Geelani. Syed Abdul Rehman Geelani, a lecturer of Arabic in a Delhi college, was one of the 'prime accused' in the parliament attack case of 13 December 2001. This attack, which came in the wake of the 9 September attack on the WTC towers in New York, got inserted into the strident 'nationalist' (that is, in this context, anti-Muslim) discourse of those days that drew nourishment from both the existence of the Hindu Right-dominated NDA government on the one hand and the rhetoric of George Bush's 'war on terrorism'. In those days of 2002, when simultaneously one of the worst government sponsored anti-Muslim carnages of post-Independence Indian history was on in Gujarat, possibilities of a fair trial seemed remote. SAR Geelani was not only sentenced to death by a POTA (Prevention of Terrorist Activities) court but also subjected to a media trial that pronounced him guilty even before the court gave its verdict. It was in that situation that this committee took up cudgels on his behalf. Respected academicians like Rajni

Kothari lent their name to the campaign by accepting to chair the committee, while lawyers like Nandita Haksar and others undertook to fight the case on his behalf. Most importantly, this formal effort was backed up by the almost invisible work done by a group of teachers and students of Delhi University, along with other sympathetic people in different parts of the city. Gradually, the committee began scrutinizing the evidence produced by the police and exposing the problems with it, and eventually managed to turn the tables in the case. The citizen's intervention in the Geelani case has far-reaching implications for the future of democracy in India, for it has laid bare the nature of collusion between the police and the elected government, which through the discourse on 'national security' can ever so easily deprive any citizen of her rights and liberties. It has also revealed how a section of the media and judiciary too have been implicated in these kinds of unjust frame-ups, thanks to this perceived "threat to national security". It has shown that it is possible, even in the most adverse circumstances, to exercise public vigilance over the activities of those in power so that common citizens are not treated thus with impunity.

Another set of citizens' initiatives that have come up in the 1990s, has been a whole range of anticomunal groups in different parts of the country. One of the earliest of these was a forum called the Nagarik Ekta Manch, formed in 1984 in the aftermath of the anti-Sikh massacres in Delhi. On the very second day of the pogroms, that is November 1, a peace march of concerned citizens through South Extension, Lajpat Nagar, Bhogal and Ashram, which became the basis for the formation of NEM (Sethi 1985). The next day, at a largely attended meeting at Lajpat Bhawan, the NEM was formed. This was a veritable movement where many different people from different backgrounds and vocations came together to do organize security squads, conduct investigations into the events, conduct relief work in the camps - collecting and distributing relief materials, helping people file claims etc. At about the same time, in 1984, another group, the Sampradayikta Virodhi Abhiyan (SVA) too was formed in Delhi, which focused primarily on public campaigns, attempting to simultaneously find a different language to conduct such campaigns (SVA 1989). Around this period, anti-communal groups were formed in other cities, such as for instance, Hyderabad Ekta (formed in November 1983), Ekta Bombay and Ekta Ahmedabad (Lokayan Bulletin 1986). These could be said to have been precursors to the wide range of new initiatives that came into being in the 1990s, especially in the wake of the demolition of the Babri Masjid. The Peoples' Movement for Secularism (PMS) in Delhi or Communalism Combat in Bombay are some of the forums that came into existence in this period. This was followed by the People for Peace, a coalition formed as part of the resistance against the US war on Afghanistan in 2001. During the Gujarat carnage, it was reactivated under the name of People for Peace and Secularism and was given a Hindi name, Aman Ekta Manch. This was the name by which it eventually came to be known. Perhaps the most significant part of the citizens' actions of the 1990s was that they took up the struggle that was all but abandoned by all political parties - whether ruling or opposition, Right or Left. Through this period, groups have worked silently and diligently throughout India, engaging in a wide range of activities. These have ranged from working on designing and implementing educational programmes, monitoring the media, pursuing the cases in court, providing legal and other assistance to the victims and making every effort to see that the guilty officials and political leaders do not go scot free. This has especially been the case in the aftermath of the Gujarat carnage of 2002. In fact, it was during the long months when the violence was continuing unabated, that innumerable individuals and newly formed groups went to Gujarat, helping in running relief camps, coordinating collections and distribution of relief materials, running schools for children of the victims - and of course, providing the legal support to fight the cases. These efforts could easily comprise one of the most significant chapters of citizens' interventions in post-independence India.

Urbanism could be said to be one of the fledgling movements in contemporary India. Even though issues of the urban poor, (for instance of pavement dwellers, hawkers and vendors, rikshaw pullers) have always been raised by individuals and groups, in different cities like Mumbai and Kolkata, they have by and large been raised as questions of poverty and the "state's responsibility" to the poor. The old Nehruvian state was also much more responsive to this call of responsibility compared to the present-day globalizing one. In cities like Kolkata these issues were taken up more by the Left political parties. It was in the 1990s, however, with India's rapid global integration, that urban space really began to emerge as a highly contested space. Alongside the contests over space, arose newer concerns regarding urban congestion, pollution and consequent concerns about health. The state's response - prodded by a section of environmentalists and the judiciary - was to revive the old modernist fantasy of the ordered and zoned city. It was around these issues that struggles now started seriously erupting in the late 1990s. One of the significant moments of this contestation was the Supreme Court order to close down or relocate 168 hazardous industries in Delhi, which was to be followed in the second and third phases by closure/relocation of some 9000 and subsequently 39, 000 industrial units which would include "non-conforming" ones.<sup>8</sup> The movement against this order gave birth, in December 1996, to a citizens' platform called the Delhi Janwadi Adhikar Manch (DJAM). Possibly for the first time, the

DJAM brought together questions of environment and workers' rights together and linked it up with the larger question of urban planning in the context of Delhi. Apart from mass campaigns, the DJAM probably made the most significant intervention by making urban planning a matter of public debate and drew well-known architects and planners into the debate. The question of a public transport system, road planning and such other questions too came into the ambit of the debate for the first time. In subsequent years, especially after 1998, a broader coalition of concerned citizens and locality based mass organizations and groups came together to take forward the debate on urban planning. This coalition, the Sajha Manch, went further and conducted surveys in 'unauthorized' and resettlement colonies, generating alternative data on the availability and consumption of water, electricity and other amenities in these settlements of the labouring poor (Sajha Manch 2001). In the last few years, such movements have been coming up in different forms in some other cities too.

The Alternative Sexualities movement is another of the movements that came to the fore in the 1990s. Though different kinds of sexual practices have certainly been there for long, it was with the AIDS scare, and the consequent attempts by the government, policy-makers and the media to single out and stigmatize groups such as homosexuals and sex workers that the urgency to come together to oppose such moves became pressing. Later, with the controversy over the film *Fire*, and the moral policing of the Hindu Right organizations, the gay and lesbian (or LGBT, more correctly) groups came together into a more explicitly political movement, especially in cities like Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata.

The Peace Movement too is a relatively new movement. This should not be confused with the various communist-led outfits of the Cold War period, like the All India Peace and Solidarity Organization (AIPSO), or such others, which never really functioned as autonomous peace movements. The contemporary peace movement in India made its beginnings with the spontaneous protests that took place all over India in the immediate aftermath of India's nuclear blasts in May 1998. It was the anti-nuclear bomb movement, which built upon the patient work of small anti-nuclear energy groups like Anumukti that took the form of the present peace movement, drawing into its fold, large numbers of independent leftists, pacifists and people from other movements. Two coalitions came into existence in Delhi alone - the Parmanu Bam Virodhi Andolan (PBVA) and the Movement in India for Nuclear Disarmament (MIND). This fledgling anti-nuclear arms protest led, subsequently, to the formation in of the large all-India Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace (CNDP), which drew groups and organizations from different parts of the country. The coalition also took on the task of mobilization and the resistance against US aggression on Afghanistan and Iraq.

### *New Trade Union Movement*

The mainstream trade union movement, being divided along party lines and organizationally closely tied to political parties, displays practically no autonomy from the domain of party politics and hence is not of much interest from our point of view. Apart from some specific instances like the 1974 all-India Railway Strike, there have been very few instances where unions in any particular industry or sector have made common cause in such a way that all political parties and their unions have had to extend support. Occasionally, there have been struggles like the Bombay Textile Strike in the 1980s, where workers moved with a certain degree of autonomy under the leadership of an independent trade unionist but which turned out to something like the last gasp of a dying industry. Such united sectoral agitations or struggles have been more evident in middle class sectors like banking, insurance, post and telegraph, journalists and university and college teachers and have usually centred around wage-negotiations. There have also been joint struggles in the more working class industrial sectors like coal and steel, but they have been more solidly controlled by conventional party-led unions. Further, traditionally these unions have been almost exclusively focused on the organized sector and within that in the more comfortable public sector industries.

A part of the problem with the old unionism was also that it was so exclusively focused on the workplace that in the face of some of the more aggressive managements these unions could hardly ever manage to hold out. This is not the place to enter into a detailed discussion of the problems of trade unions but one point is clearly brought out by all the documented evidence of attempts to build trade unions in the organized private sector: the managements by and large managed to scotch any such possibilities at the very beginning by throwing out "trouble makers" and encouraging the formation of more docile, management-sponsored unions. In the rare instance, where independent militant unions did come up and survived for sufficient lengths of time, they were broken up - as the case of Mumbai shows - with the help of right-wing proto-fascist organizations like the Shiv Sena.

The decline of the old kind of trade unionism has to do with at least two conditions: (1) Being exclusively work place focused, they were often reduced to fighting with managements in a bipartite situation without any third party involvement. This 'third party' could either have been the government or simply, *public opinion*. No attempt, therefore, could ever be made to appeal to a larger public in support of the workers' issues. And the experience from different parts of the world actually suggests that in such bipartite situations, workers always stand to lose, this being a highly unequal contest. (2) The other significant reason for its decline has been more structural insofar as the very character of industry/ies, their organization and the workforce employed by them, have all undergone rapid transformation. Over and above these, a reason for the relative inefficacy of Indian trade unions has been their overwhelming multiplicity and their division along party lines. As has been noted by scholars, this division has made it difficult for them to act in concert on workers' issues - in contrast to, say the European trade unions (Candland nd: 7).

It is in this context that new kinds of trade unionism have emerged in the last two decades and more. The instance of the Chhattisgarh workers union discussed later, could be seen as one of the early instances of the move away from what has been called political unionism, that is, unionism of the kind discussed above. This move away, as the discussion later will show, can be clearly seen in two areas. First, the resolute prioritization of workers' interests and issues over any party-political interests, as evidenced in Shankar Guha Niyogi's repeated breaks with the different parties and party-unions and the Naxalite group he was associated with. Second, his attempt to take the trade union struggle out of its work place centredness and its transformation into a wider social movement. Such movements have also been referred to as "social movement unionism" in recent literature.

Another direction that the new trade unionism of this period has explored is that of "the creation of workers' cooperatives [as] an alternative form of ownership and control over production" (Thankappan, cited in *Ibid*: 8). The most well-known and early experiments in a workers' takeover of a sick private enterprise is that of Kamani Tubes Ltd in Mumbai. After running losses for over a decade, the company passed into the hands of the workers union, following a legal battle. Within two years of the takeover, the company became profitable again. Many other experiments of this kind followed in subsequent years. In terms of long-term survival as profit-making ventures, these companies do face serious problems of investible capital and market demand for its products. These clearly require more than a mere enterprise level intervention but the initial successes of these units showed that immense possibilities existed in this new experiment.

Candland sees in the historic Bombay textile strike of the 1980s "one of the strongest indications of the frustration with political unionism" (*Ibid*: 7). It is important to remember in this context that one of the major demands of the strikers was the de-recognition of the INTUC-affiliated Rashtriya Mill Mazdoor Sangh (RMMS), which has been the sole recognized union for 60 mills in Bombay and Gujarat (*Ibid*: 7). "The militants involved in this surge of protest were often relatively educated and skilled workers whose politics were not ideologically motivated by the Left" (Pendse 1981; Lakha 2002). The extent to which the workers were possibly fed up of the recognized union is evident from the fact that Datta Samant got the solid support from the workers even when it became clear that the economic gain of the strike might not be much. "Our fate is sealed completely with the RMMS as our union. Even if we do not get a rupee extra, after six-eight months of strike, but succeed in throwing out the RMMS, it would have been worth all that we undergo", some workers are said to have stated (cited in Lakha 2002). This could be a consequence of their specific disgust with the RMMS union but what was clear was that Datta Samant's added attraction was his "scant respect for legal concerns, which the workers had lost confidence in" (Javed, cited in Lakha 2002). This kind of impatience with the endless web of labour courts and tribunals in which workers interest got lost, was a characteristic feature of many union struggles in those days and reflect a deeper dissatisfaction with the institutional framework available for redressal of grievances.

One of the important developments of this period was the fresh attempts to organize the unorganized/ informal sector workers. Important efforts in Tamil Nadu and Delhi began for example, that sought to organize the vast numbers of construction workers. The important thing here was that these were once again, not merely trade union efforts of the old kind that depended simply on workplace mobilization. The very nature of the constantly shifting "workplace" and the fact that most often practically all workers were employed by the contractor rather than the principal employer, demanded a different approach. At one level, the movement began campaigning for a construction board along the lines of the authority that exists for dockworkers. This would be a tripartite board with representatives of the government, as well as of the workers and employers. This board would decide on things like regulating hours of work, holidays/ weekly rest days, medical coverage and such other vital questions concerning the workers. To that effect, it worked and produced a draft legislation The

campaign, the National Campaign Committee for Central Legislation on Construction Labour, became a movement itself as it began mobilizing and receiving support from jurists, lawyers, politicians, academicians, journalists etc. During the period of the United Front government at the Centre, the movement also managed to get larger political support for the legislation (NCCCL 1996). This is only one of the many initiatives that became part of this new social unionism, striking alliances across, with other social movements and different sectors of society. Many of these came together to form the National Centre for Labour as an apex body of unions in the informal sector in 1995. "SEWA, National Federation of Construction Labour, National Fishworkers Forum, Sarva Shramik Sangha, Anganwadi Karmachari Sangam, Kamani Employees Union, Nirman Mazdoor Panchayat Sangam, Ghar Kshetra Mazdoor Morcha - altogether 27 organizations active in the informal sector came together. Leaders like Ela Bhatt, Tom Kocherry, NP Samy, D. Thankappan, Ruth Manorama, Babu Mathew, Ashok Chaudhary and many others joined hands" (Mukul 1995: 52). The very names of the unions involved gives an idea of the range of sectors covered.

As Ashok Chaudhary, convenor of the National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPW) puts it, till the early 1990s small groups helped forest people fight for their rights but really got nowhere in their fight with the forest department and local administration. Gradually, they realized that forests were a national and global issue. Finally, in 1998 the different groups got together to form the NFFPW (Civil Society 2005: 17). Eventually, it was this process that led to the emergence of a new trade union body at the all-India level in December 2001. This body, called the New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI), is probably the largest nonparty center of trade union organizations, which includes unions ranging from those working with informal sector workers to those in the organized private sector. The NTUI seeks to overcome the deep divisions created by political unionism and bring together unions that are not affiliated to any party, in a national federation. It estimates that about one third of the unions are those which have no party affiliation. At the industry level, the NTUI commits itself to the principle of "one industry, one union", that is of insisting on a single representative union/federation in each industry, in order to overcome political fragmentation.

## *Non Governmental Organizations*

The term 'non-governmental organizations' or NGOs was initially used to describe a wide range of initiatives, which shared only one thing in common: they were "non-government" initiatives. These organizations were also referred to as voluntary agencies and relied mainly on voluntary work put in by individuals wanting to engage in some kind of social work. Later, especially through the 1980s and 1990s, with large amounts of funding - the both foreign as well as government - becoming available for such work, the scene came to be dominated by a handful of very big NGOs, which worked with paid professionals in their staff. It is these professionally staffed organizations that have come to swamp the entire "voluntary sector" insofar as public image is concerned. However, as a recent study conducted by PRIA, a sort of 'corporate' NGO, in collaboration with Johns Hopkins University reveals, even today the overwhelming number of such organizations (which the study calls "Non-profit sector") function on a voluntary basis. The study estimates that there are about 12 lakh or 1.2 million such organization or institutions across the length and breadth of India (Srivastava and Tandon 2005). They are engaged activities ranging from "education, sanitation, health, environment, welfare activities like looking after the elderly, the destitute and orphans, peoples' movements, civil liberty and advocacy programmes and even research" (Ibid: 1948). According to the study, almost half of them (49.6 percent) are not formally registered, which means that they have no regular source of funding. Almost three-fourths of the institutions, according to the study, employed one or no paid employee. Many of these were, of course, found to be funded through religious charity money. According to PRIA surveys, "as much as 51 per cent of the total receipts in the year 1999-2000 was self-generated" (Ibid: 1950). On the whole, less than 30 per cent of the revenues came from grants, and merely 7.4 percent of the revenues were collected from foreign sources.

However, when we talk of the NGO sector today, it is the picture of institutions like PRIA, representing 30 percent, especially those representing the 7.4 percent revenues, which come to mind. These NGOs, which are normally very well endowed, present an extremely complex picture. This is so partly because, even though most of them began as social work or self-help voluntary groups, over the years they have evolved into organizations that provide different kinds of expertise required in the field. Beyond a point therefore, mere social commitment was not enough and these organizations/institutions had to start developing their own skills as well as passing them on to community-based field groups. This was especially so where questions of environmental impact of industries or other developmental projects or where questions like occupational health were

concerned. Take for instance the cases of byssinosis among textile workers, which were routinely dismissed as cases of tuberculosis - thereby denying that they had any connection with the occupation itself. Long battles had to be waged to get such occupational diseases recognized and these could not be done without access to adequate skilled knowledge. Thus, in the case of the Ahmedabad textile workers, the Kamdar Swasthya Suraksha Mandal (KSSM) formed with the purpose of raising the byssinosis issue, had to take the assistance of the skills available with the National Institute of Occupational Health (Tandon and Mohany 2002). Over the years, the need for such specialized assistance has given birth to a new kind of organization called "support organization" which does not directly work at the grassroots but only provides support to those who do, in terms of skills and skill development. While some such organizations have done really significant work in their respective areas, it is once again from this kind of organization that some of the really big, corporate NGOs have emerged. In course of time, some of them have even changed their orientation from being support organizations for field-based groups to working in the more comforting company of say, the government or industrial managements. PRIA itself is an excellent example of an NGO that has marked such a transition. So from working with trade unions on the question of occupational health, for instance, it has moved on to "sensitizing managements" on these issues. Important NGOs like the Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) or Development Alternatives (DA), have for example done significant work in terms of spelling out alternatives (say rain water harvesting systems for urban homes, or waste and waste paper recycling mechanisms installed in offices), which no longer have any "grassroots" connection but which are nonetheless important activities. However, in the case of such work, sometimes these institutions have been accused of not being entirely above-board and the CSE, for instance, accused the Mumbai-based Tata Energy Research Institute (TERI) of "vested interests" in opposing its proposal of converting the entire public transport system to compressed natural gas (CNG)

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If this is one kind of big NGO that dominates the scene today, this is not the only kind. There are others like The Other Media or Delhi Forum, for instance, which have continued to provide support to grassroots movement like the fish workers' struggles or the struggles of the displaced people. Others still like the Centre for Education and Communication (CEC) in Delhi have played the role of a support group for workers/ trade union movements on the one hand, and have publicly articulated critiques of the World Trade Organization and the attempts to link the question of universal labour standards with trade, through the "social clause".

It is a point that is not sufficiently recognized that through the 1980s, the peoples' movements have grown and functioned in a complicated relationship with such non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The complication is that at one level, they have had a close symbiotic relationship where the NGOs provided them often vital support, in terms of infrastructure, campaigns and educational materials - often even providing them with activists, while at another, they have never been comfortable with the funding aspect. So, while the peoples' movements fought their battles in faraway rural or forest areas, with little access to the media, it was these NGOs who provided support for setting up and housing the various metropolitan "support groups" whose task it was to approach friendly and influential people in the media, bureaucracy and academia for both advocating the cause of the movement concerned as well as seeking help in further campaigns. The more important aspect of the relationship between the movements and NGOs however, is the fact that for many of the critical questions relating to the movement, say the technical details and research regarding the environmental impact of the Sardar Sarovar Project, it was the latter once again that provided the basic support. In a sense, many of these NGOs functioned throughout this period as think-tanks for the movements, where in principle, theirs was a secondary position in relation to the movement, but which in due course began to appear as the voice of the movements, thus representing them.<sup>10</sup> It is not as if the relationship necessarily gets reversed but for many NGOs this has been the basis of the receiving continued funding. In some of the more well-known cases like the Ekta Parishad (EP) of Madhya Pradesh, for example, the close connections of the EP with many NGOs is quite well-known. Thus, even while the EP never really accepted any institutional funding (not being a registered body), it managed to work out a delicate balance with some of its activists working on lien from NGOs. This is a model that has been tried in some other instances where the grassroots level organizations and movements continue to get fair degree of support in kind from well-funded and friendly NGOs. Similar has been the case with the Aman Ekta Manch, Delhi, formed in the wake of the war in Afghanistan and reactivated during the Gujarat carnages, or for example, the Sajha Manch, a nonparty non-funded platform of urban groups. In both these cases, the platforms continued to function as non-registered movement groups but with critical and vital support from funded NGOs. In fact, the Delhi experience shows that right from the NEM days till the present, non-governmental organizations like Ankur and even groups like OXFAM have been part of citizen's initiatives, at least in times of crises.

Sangeeta Kamat (2002) has discussed one such experiment of a development NGO running side by side with a political organization struggling for workers' rights in Maharashtra. Her study based on an intensive fieldwork shows how this tight rope has to be walked in such circumstances. Her conclusion though is that eventually this does not work and it is the development work that gets the better of politics. It seems, however, that much of her assessment of the relative success and failure of the two kinds of activity has to do with a certain manner of prioritizing "struggle" in some absolute way, over "development". However a more detailed discussion of this dynamic and Kamat's understanding of it is not possible here. What is interesting is that in a different way, non-funded political groups have come to increasingly re-assess the relationship of "development" (which is often the name for "reformist" constructive work) and struggle, in such a way that the two appear actually complementary. I shall briefly discuss this in the next section.

DL Sheth notes however, that in the late 1980s to early 1990s, the scenario underwent a significant change. On the one hand, he suggests, was the exhaustion that had set in among movement groups, after long years of being "by and large fragmented into an almost isomorphic existence of each group fighting its own little battle." In other words they had "lost their élan". On the other, the funding scenario had become such that "much larger quantities of funds were now made available to them by international donor agencies which had their own agenda for influencing the politics of discourse in peripheral countries" (Sheth 2004: 47). The thin line had been breached and as he puts it, "most movement-groups had thus become routinized...and functioned as NGO bureaucracies" (ibid). Many militant peoples' movements in different sectors, including the autonomous women's movement became funded NGOs. However, as Sheth notes, some movement-groups of Gandhian, Left and social-democratic lineage "stuck out and kept fighting their battles, thus tenaciously retaining their character as movements" (ibid).

Sheth also suggests that around the mid 1990s, things suddenly changed as movements got their act together and started coming into concerted actions and struggles against globalization. It is worth noting here, however, that in the early 1990s, it was not just the movements who were demoralized and on the back foot; the parties were more so, especially the Left parties whose world had just collapsed before their very eyes, like a house of cards. The strange thing - and this is where the element of complication comes in - is that in these days of despair the most refreshing critiques of globalization were made by NGOs and NGO leaders like Vandana Shiva and the Gene Campaign. There were others in the NGO sector, like the Delhi-based Public Interest Research Group (PIRG), who produced most of the popular literature that combined old Left critiques of the IMF/World Bank with the movements' perspective that also involved a critique of the development model. Shiva herself has been subsequently responsible for raising many critical issues like water in public debate. We have also noted the active involvement of some of these funded NGOs in anti-communal coalitions or coalitions struggling for the rights of the urban poor. In one instance, many such funded groups were blacklisted by the Central NDA Government, for having called through a newspaper advertisement, for a defeat of the NDA. Despite this, most of these groups have continued to take active interest in vital questions of a political nature. A more detailed and comprehensive assessment of the work of the NGOs that deals with the issues in all their complexity, thus remains to be undertaken.

## Assessing the Impact

In this section, I will briefly examine the context and implications of the emergence of these democratic struggles and discuss their efficacy in terms of making Indian democracy more vibrant and responsive.

One commentator, Ponna Wignaraja, saw the emergence of the "new peoples' movements in the global South as "manifestations of a new pluralistic paradigm of development and democracy" (Wignaraja 1993: 5). While this seems to be an overstatement insofar as none of these movements really had any alternative paradigm to begin with, they certainly did embody a dissatisfaction with, if not outright rejection of, the dominant model of top-down development. As Rajni Kothari noted while surveying these movements in the first half of the 1980s, they were parts of a democratic struggle at various levels, "at a point in history when existing institutions and the theoretical models on which they are based have run their course, when there is a search for new instruments of political action (existing ones being in a state either of complacency or of weariness and exhaustion" (Kothari 1984: 219). It is significant that this reaction to the complacency/ exhaustion of the existing institutions and theories should have taken the form, not of a search for newer radical theories and institutions, but of a *rejection of all existing blueprints* - a move towards the grassroots. If they explicitly rejected the

model of capitalist development, which they directly encountered, the so-called alternative of “actually existing socialism” did not also inspire much confidence either, largely because of its highly authoritarian and centralized structure. What most such movements recognized either implicitly or in some cases, explicitly, was that no model of development that did not place the people at the center of their vision could be democratic. Participatory development and participatory democracy began to be seen as intrinsically linked. This clearly meant, as we shall see below, a *displacement of the state* from the central position that it had hitherto occupied in the imagination of radical movements. This is not to say that the state is no longer important for the struggle but that movements have gone beyond merely placing demands before the state. In fact, as we will see below, even the very concept of the state, as understood in the practice of these movements, seem to have undergone a significant change.

As Sheth and Sethi noted, it was the period between the late 1960s and early 1980s, marked by famines, inflation, devaluation, unemployment and the breakdown of Congress domination, that led to the emergence of militant movements on the one hand, and “impelled fresh thinking and action on the *twin grids of development and politics*” (Sheth and Sethi 1991: 53). Rajni Kothari saw in these developments an attempt to redefine the very content of politics: “Issues and arenas of human activity that were not so far seen as amenable of political action – peoples’ health, rights over forests and community resources, even deeply personal and primordial issues as are involved in the struggles for women’s rights – get defined as political and provide for arenas of struggle” (Kothari 1984: 219-20). We might add that these movements were not only redefining the meaning of politics; they were also redefining development itself. According to Sheth, “the organizational form they evolved for themselves was not of a political party or a pressure group”, it was rather that of “a civil-associational group, leading political struggles on issues articulated to them by people themselves.” “The key concept they worked with was *democratizing development through empowerment of the people*” (Sheth 2004: 46). In the context of globalization in the 1990s, Sheth in fact, sees the movements grappling with the twin imperatives of “re-politicizing development” and “re-inventing participatory democracy” (Ibid: 49). “Re-politicizing development” should be seen here as also redefining it in fundamental ways, such that it would not remain “Development” (with a capital D) in the conventional sense. This redefinition of development, it will be seen, was to eventually move towards fundamental and radical critique of Development itself.

Thus what began with the dissatisfaction with formal institutionalized politics and the consequent search for more “people-oriented” kinds of political structures and institutions, eventually moved towards a realization that it was not simply the authoritarian-bureaucratic nature of development that was problematic; that the very ideology of Development that was so centrally linked to the idea of a centralized power structure and the idea of the nation-state’s sovereignty over its domain (the doctrine of ‘eminent domain’, for instance) had to be interrogated. The question of democratic and decentralized development necessarily raised questions about access to and ownership of natural resources by communities that had traditionally had easy access to them. So, as another important activist of the non-party movements, Sanjay Sangvai puts it, “confronting the state also takes the form of challenging the ‘eminent domain’ of the state” (Sangvai 2003: 8). It was thus that one thing led to another and in a sense, all these movements “made the road by walking.”<sup>11</sup> Most of these new movements thus represented *a search* for a more just and equitable society; they had no “blueprints to which the world must conform”<sup>12</sup>

Thus it was that many of the movements, like the famous Chipko movement in the Garhwal hills, began with no *a priori* ideological agenda. It was rather a movement that originated from a local conflict in 1972. Vinod Raina puts the “bare facts” of the movement as follows: “there was a dispute between the local villagers and a logging contractor who had been allowed to fell trees in a forest close to the village. On that particular day, there was a meeting with the related government officials in their office away from the village and while the men were away for the meeting, the contractor’s workers appeared in order to cut the trees. The women of this village called Reni, reached the forest quickly and clasped the tree trunks, thus preventing the workers from cutting them down (Raina 2004: 4-5). This form of protest spread widely and was also picked up by the media, forcing the government to negotiate with the community. Thus, says Raina, did women begin setting up their communities in the region and articulating larger issues about eco-friendly development. It is however, clear from other accounts that ideas like those of “eco-friendly development” were hardly there in the first instance. Ramchandra Guha for instance, indicates on the basis of a field study of the Badyargarh andolan, “the peasantry was protesting against the denial of subsistence rights [by the state]”. Essentially, he says, “the movement was in response to a perceived breach of the informal code between the ruler and the ruled...” (Guha 2002: 442). It was really the devastation wrought by the floods in 1970, that for the first time established a vague link in the minds of the local population that landslides and floods might have some connection with deforestation (Ibid: 426). In that sense, the

ecological consciousness was the consequence rather than an antecedent condition of the Chipko movement. This aspect became stronger with time, with the intervention of middle class activists who could make the connection between the ecological dimensions of development and the relationship of local communities to forests.

Similarly, the formation of the Chhattisgarh Mine Shramik Sangh (CMSS) and its eventual transformation into the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha (CMM) in 1978, which clearly represents a new kind of trade unionism - a social movement unionism, if one might call it - tells us a similar story. Though its leader Shankar Guha Niyogi is generally presented as a "naxalite" by both his detractors and supporters, the fact remains that his was a completely unconventional intervention in the field of working class politics. He began his political career, when in the late 1960s, he joined the Bhilai Steel Plant as a worker and formed a union called the "Blast Furnace Action Committee". After being thrown out of the job for "security reasons" he left Bhilai and went to work in the forests of Bastar. Learning the local tribal languages, Gondi and Halbi, he did odd jobs ranging from trading in goats to fishing while he was there. (Sail 1998: 18). When the Naxalite revolt took place, he briefly joined the movement, but basically continued to work where he was and the way he was. After a brief association, he broke with the Naxalite group he was associated with because he had sharp disagreements with their attitude to trade union work, which its members thought was 'economism' and 'reformism' (Singh 1977: 40-41). After the Emergency, he returned to Durg and worked in the Dani Tola mines near Dalli-Rajhara, where he began his experiments in "trade unionism with a difference" (Sail 1998: 18). According to Rajendra Sail, he first joined the All India Trade Union Congress and later formed his independent CMSS, which was to initiate a completely novel form of union movement incorporating social reform questions within its activities. From campaigns against liquor to opening educational institutions (six primary schools, a training cum production workshop for unemployed youth) and hospitals, to fight against pollution and for the preservations of forests, this was truly a new kind of politics at work (Sail *ibid*: 19). It is also worth registering here the transformation of this left-wing, working class based movement (Chhattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh) into a movement articulating regional aspirations of the people - peasants and tribals - and organizing itself around a Chhattisgarhi identity. This transformation also reflects a move away from the high ideology of the marxist Left displaying greater accommodation towards a more popular and local sentiment. In fact, Shankar Guha Niyogi's entire trajectory reveals a search, unencumbered by *a priori* ideological notions, for new forms of struggle, which also meant an implicit rejection of existing models.

Such was also the case with the now emblematic Narmada Bachao Andolan, which began with a relatively minor demand of rehabilitation of those likely to be displaced by the dam on the river Narmada. Groups came into existence in the concerned states that began discussing questions of rehabilitation in around 1986, and it was only by 1988, when construction started in full swing that the opposition to the dam too took the shape of an all out struggle. The larger question of the feasibility of large dams in general, however, was again, not the starting point of the struggle (Patkar 1999). It was only later in 1989, with the massive rally in Harsud town (now submerged) that slogans against "destructive development" actually began to be raised. The point here is simple: What eventually emerged as a powerful critique of the development paradigm and began spelling out the outlines of an alternative kind of development, was actually born out of the conjunction of movements taking shape on the ground with newer theoretical and intellectual critiques that had started emerging by this time as a consequence of the awareness of the impending ecological disaster at a global level. Critiques of technological fetishism and the related drive towards centralization of power thus acquired a different resonance in this context.

In fact, such an awareness arising out of the understanding of the ecological costs of development led to the emergence of what was possibly the first big movement and public debate on this issue. This was the well-known debate around the Silent Valley Project in Kerala and, interestingly, the forces arrayed on both sides were those of the Left. While the CPI(M) led state government wanted to push through the plan to dam the Kuntipuzha river in 1978-79, as part of its power generation programme, it was the popular science movement linked to the party, the Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP), that took up cudgels against it, given the fact that this project would have inundated one of the richest rainforests in the country and destroyed its immense bio-diversity. The movement led to the revocation of the plan - though it seems to be on the cards once again, over two and a half decades down the line.

The period since the 1980s has of course, seen some other kinds of non-party movements, some of which embody a very different ethos from that of the ecological struggles or the kind of non-hierarchical, non-authoritarian participative experiment conducted by the CMM. Important among them have been at least three, which require a separate, if brief discussion. These are the women's

movement, the farmers' movement and the movement against caste oppression. The last mentioned eventually morphed into two distinct currents: the Dalit movement on the one hand, which has retained a nonparty character of a cultural revolt, despite a simultaneous party-political expression in the form of the Bahujan Samaj Party, and the backward castes movement that has got completely integrated into the political mainstream as a powerful force in some states.

The women's movement gathers momentum around the end of the 1970s, and one part of it, represented by the autonomous women's groups reflects the same concerns of a search for a non-hierarchical, non-authoritarian and participative politics. However, important sections of the movement were linked to political parties and continued to be organized in hierarchical, top-down organizations. Even though the beginnings of the movement had been made in the initial years of the decade, the imposition of the Emergency put a sort of brake on the process. It was precisely in the period immediately after the Emergency, when the Janata government came to power, that the women's movement really came into its own. Women's groups were formed at least in the major cities and mostly with an explicit feminist orientation (Kumar 1993: 106). While many organizations and groups of an autonomous nature came to the fore, this period also saw, symptomatically, the formation of party-affiliated organizations like the Mahila Dakshata Samiti linked to the Janata Party, or the CPI(M) controlled All India Democratic Women's Federation which until then had only a couple of state level organizations (Ibid: 111; Omvedt 1993:84, 88). More importantly, this is the period when the women's movement acquires a *mass character on specifically gender issues*. Prior to this, there had been women's participation in general social and political movements but gender issues were hardly ever separately articulated. The struggles of the women's movement of this period centred around questions of the growing spate of dowry deaths in the country at large and in Delhi in particular; on questions of rape and custodial rape; sexual harassment and eventually marital rape as well.

The anti-dowry struggle began after an initial investigation by the Mahila Dakshata Samiti, of supposed 'suicides' and 'accidental deaths' of women ('catching fire' in kitchen accidents), revealed that these were in fact pre-meditated murders (Kishwar and Vanita 1984: 31). In early 1978 the Mahila Dakshata Samiti published its findings, which were widely publicized and opened up a whole world of women's oppression *within the family* to public scrutiny. Protest actions followed in major cities. What was really shocking was that many urban women who were reported murdered for dowry were found to be from middle-class and lower middle-class families - quite a few of them even being independent salary earners (Ibid: 32). Their economic independence too, could provide them no protection. Clearly, there were other structures, those of patriarchy that operated in hundreds of different ways that needed to be uncovered.

Thereafter, intervention on specific cases by the various autonomous groups began, joined by party-affiliated women's organizations. This process continued to gather momentum and peaked in the early 1980s. Through the 1980s, the women's movement registered its presence by intervening on major issues of gender discrimination. In fact, if one were to follow the ways in which even the party-affiliated women's organizations were raising these issues, one would be able to see that the impetus came almost entirely from the women themselves. Parties remained male bastions, looking upon the issues raised by their women comrades with a mixture of apprehension and condescension. In most cases, the party-led women's organizations could not go beyond a certain point and in the event, it was the autonomous women's groups that set the agenda. Even a quick look at its beginnings indicates that in the first place, the initiative of the movement had come from outside the formal structures of parties - through the period from the years immediately preceding the Emergency to the years thereafter. It was the 1977-80 period that saw the rise of autonomous women's groups, especially in western and southern India (Omvedt 1993: 84). It should also be underlined that feminism was among the earliest movements to argue that gender issues could neither be subordinated to other questions like class, nor be perennially deferred to be resolved once other, "more important" matters were taken care of. It is also important to bear in mind that being fully aware of the inherently patriarchal nature of all organizations, feminist politics was always deeply suspicious of all such authoritarian and hierarchical structures. In all these senses, the women's movement and its theoretical articulation in feminism carried within it most of the features of the movements of that period enumerated above.

The farmers' struggles that first took shape in the early 1970s, with militant struggles in some pockets of the country, also eventually acquired an all-India character by the end of the 1970s.<sup>13</sup> Most of these farmers' struggles, once again, broke on to the political scene from outside the frame of institutional politics. By 1980, the movement under the leadership of leaders like Sharad Joshi in Maharashtra and Nanjundaswamy in Karnataka took the political class by storm. There is certainly room for disagreement here on whether these struggles for remunerative prices for agricultural produce, cheaper input costs, especially electricity rates, against imposition of new water taxes or "betterment

levies" could really be called peasants' movements in the conventional sense. What cannot be denied, however, is that they represent one very important mass movement, which retained its non-party character and represents therefore a significant moment of the non-party political process. The complexity of the matter really is that while this was one aspect of these farmers' struggles, there was another equally significant one that made them quite suspect in the eyes of the Dalits. This had to do with the fact that the dominant castes that were getting mobilized and organized in these movements, had been the most proximate oppressors of the Dalits. They were also culturally more integrated into Hindu society. So as DR Nagaraj says, the Ryot Coolie Sangham notice disallowing government officials from entering the village was seen by the Dalits as a highly ominous pointer to the possibility of their re-enslavement within Hindu society (Nagaraj 1993: 41). A more direct expression of the anti-Dalit character of the movement was seen in the Kanjhawla agitation in 1979, in the neighbourhood of Delhi, when tens of thousands of Jat peasants got mobilized in opposing the government's move to take over some common lands and give them over to landless Dalits (Omvedt 1993: 109). This is significant because even though there might be very sound reasons why such common lands should not be converted into private property, the fact that as common lands the Dalits had no access to them should not be lost sight of.

However, at the level of struggle against the state, their radical edge can hardly be denied. But they were certainly not self consciously opposed to either the development paradigm or to the bureaucratic structures of the state. Their struggle against the state was more in the nature of opposing specific provisions of the old interventionist policies that disallowed free movement of agricultural produce or administratively fixed prices rather than allowing the market to determine them. In that sense, these movements did not really share all that much with other social movements mentioned above. What they do have in common is the fact that they were a significant part of the non-party political domain.

The struggles against caste oppression fall more generally in the later period, that is to say, in the 1990s, when they assumed a more generalized form. The beginning of the 1970s had seen the emergence of a powerful cultural revolt of the Dalits in western Indian province of Maharashtra, which drew its inspiration from the Black Panther movement in the US. This movement known as the Dalit Panther movement acquired a formal shape in 1973 and continued, with ups and downs, through the next few years till it gradually lost steam. In the 1980s, there was not much of an independent all-India Dalit movement to talk about. In fact, on the contrary, this was a period of the rise of powerful anti-reservations agitations as for example in Gujarat in 1983, and widespread massacres of Dalits in rural areas. Names of places like Belchi, Pipra and such others came into prominence suggesting a new sharpening of rural conflict along caste lines. It needs to be remembered that this was the period of the Janata Party government that had become the vehicle, among other things of the articulation of backward caste (OBC or the 'Other Backward Classes') interests. This was a double edged sword that cut both ways: on the one hand, the renewed demand for reservations for backward castes and the constitution of the Mandal Commission laid the ground for the future assault on the political power wielded by the upper castes; on the other, the increased power of these castes aggravated their conflicts with the Dalits. So, even as the Karpoori Thakur government implemented reservations for the backward castes, open revolt of the upper caste youth manifested itself on the streets of Patna and other places in Bihar. The non-party agitations of this phase were often such upper caste outbursts against reservations. This should alert us against any desire to romanticize the non-party domain.

It was really in the 1990s, especially after the implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations by the National Front government under VP Singh's prime minister ship, when all hell broke loose and the deeply held caste prejudices of even the most modern secular upper caste people stood exposed, that the struggle acquired very significant proportions. Even though the Mandal Commission recommendations related exclusively to the backward castes, so great was the upper caste outburst that it immediately brought the worst sentiments against the Dalits into play. In the name of the Mandal Commission, it was the ire against Dalits that was played out.

How do we assess the efficacy of such movements in terms of their impact on democracy in India? This is not an easy question to answer, as simply enumerating their tangible or visible outcomes can be quite misleading. For instance, have these movements led to the framing of new laws? At least in the case of the women's movement it can be said that its initial successes saw the enactment of a whole series of legislations or significant amendments to earlier ones. Yet, as the experience of the movement and some of the subsequent writings of feminist scholars and lawyers shows, laws often had very different outcomes from what they were intended to produce. We could also point to the utter insulation of the formal political process from the issues raised by these movements and conclude that they were therefore a failure - or at any rate had only a marginal impact. For instance, the fact that

the Narmada issue, that has been one of the big issues of public debate in the last two decades, has hardly been discussed by the Indian parliament at all (Randeria nd: 10). Does this mean that the two-decade long movement has been meaningless? There is little doubt that even in more tangible terms, like enactment of legislations and leading to regime changes, such movements have made significant gains, even if they have been short-lived. However, even though they are short-lived, such transformations unleash forces that operate in a molecular fashion, at the grassroots / everyday level. We have many such instances of groups like the Chhatra Yuva Sangharsha Vahini (CYSV), which emerged out of the JP movement and continued to function, shunning power, even after the subsequent failure of the new regime that the movement had brought into power.<sup>14</sup> In other instances, the issues raised by movements have transformed public discourse in ways that have initiated changes in politics and political life. Such for instance is what has now become an irresistible demand for 33 percent reservations for women in all elected bodies - which has also been made binding in the case of local governments under the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendments. This has generated its own momentum, leading to a much larger proportion of women taking up roles than was ever the case. In order to fully appreciate the political significance of these movements, we must understand, it seems to me, the really important contributions they have made in terms of transforming the way we think about vital questions related to democracy, development and underline the need for new forms - institutional and organizational - that are non-hierarchical and non-authoritarian. By doing so, they have not only made the question of democracy central to all other questions (development, economy etc), thus redefining the political, they have also brought in questions into public discourse that had so far not been recognized. It is important therefore that today, at least in principle, neither the planners and experts nor representatives of the government can deny the moral force of arguments against displacement or say, popular access to resources. In conclusion, I will underline two features of contemporary movements that have immense significance in terms of building capabilities of people such that they can, at least in future, take on their political responsibilities as citizens.

*The revolt against perennial deferral.* It is quite clear by now that most of the peoples' movements have lost faith the old Left wing or nationalist promise of the 'good life' in some unforeseen future for which they are supposed to bear with their 'oppressive present'. The question of the 'here and now' has become critical. If this is true of the ecological movements, it is equally so in relation to both the women's and the Dalit movements, where the impatience with waiting for some far-off future is quite apparent. Feminism was in fact, one of the earliest movements to assert that gender issues could not be put off to some appropriate future time, when class or such other issues had been taken care of; it had to be taken up right now. Something of this nature is now also being articulated by the Dalit movement. In another kind of instance of this refusal to defer, Aruna Roy and Nikhil Dey argue that at least some of these movements "have begun to lay claim to a share of governance by theoretically owning the state, linking livelihood questions to the democratic decision-making process and demanding a responsible and accountable state" (Roy and Dey 2004: 3). What Roy and Dey are basically arguing here is not for "owning" the *present* state as the quote above might suggest but of giving up the "either/or framework" or the "all or nothing" attitude so common amongst the Marxists or Left wing activists, which can only posit an oppositional attitude towards, or a "capture" of, state power (Ibid: 3). What Roy and Dey suggest here then is that it is only 'participation' "in the processes of corrective action" that can become that basis of any useful politics in the present. It is this that the Right to Information movement, for instance, seeks to do by making the processes of 'governance' more transparent and accountable. We might actually refer here to the fact that it was the struggle for minimum wages and the proper implementation of the legal provisions in this regard, that led to the demand for making public the payment registers of the temporary/ casual workers (the muster rolls), that eventually became the spark that ignited the movement. The success of the movement in this and other related matters, and its eventual spread to other places like Delhi in 2003-04 has helped in uncovering the corruption and pilferage of peoples' money in a way that large demonstrations before state assemblies/ parliament that are content with making demands of the state, have never been able to do. We shall leave the interesting theoretical implications of this understanding articulated by Roy and Dey for a rethinking the idea of state power for the present and move ahead.

*Constructive Work.* The position articulated by Roy and Dey is however, only one of the many forms that the refusal to defer gratification might take. The other position, articulated in practice by Shankar Guha Niyogi and his Chattisgarh experiment, and put forward as a possible model by many people subsequently is that of taking up constructive work as a part of radical, transformative political activity. In this instance, the state continues to be an adversary, both because of the ideological predilections of the CMM as well as because of the deep involvement powerful industrial lobbies arrayed against the movement. This is what can be called 'social movement unionism' (Omvedt 1993: 236). Here 'constructive work' appears not merely as an instrumental mobilizational tool but becomes

a key way of improving peoples' lives in the present. Here constructive work is no longer counterposed to political work as reformist but becomes a part of the radical political project itself. As Sangvai puts it, "The New constructive work is potentially political and it sees itself linked with the struggle for justice and equality. Sangharsh (struggle) and Nirman (creativity) have become complementary for social change" (Sangvai 2003: 6). Sangvai also cites the instances of the oustees organizations in Bargi and Tawa and elsewhere who have been pursuing such a path, forming cooperatives and taking hold of their lives. Such constructive work as mentioned earlier, could range from running educational institutions and hospitals to forming cooperatives.

In many ways, all these different forms of the rebellion against certain kinds of high modernist politics, based on the absolute authority of the technocrat/ expert/ bureaucrat, add up to give a certain kind of push to the more radical impulses within Indian democracy. These are important tendencies that continuously work towards decentralization, greater accountability and transparency of the institutions of democratic politics.

### *Relationship with Electoral Politics*

While the movements discussed in this paper have made significant interventions in terms of further democratizing political structures in India, there are certain obvious problems that remain. As stated above, it will be incorrect to judge the impact of these movements in terms of the immediate effects they produce, for much of the impact is a consequence of the transformation of common sense about issues relating to democracy or development, which is necessarily a longer-term affair, and certainly a very significant impact has already been made in terms of transforming the way people think about these questions, as I have explained above.

However, beyond this, the virtual inability of these movements to have any significant impact on the formal political process, has in recent years emerged as a point of immense concern within the movements themselves. Attempts have been made therefore, right from the early 1990s, to find ways of intervening in electoral politics sometimes by fielding candidates locally, or sometimes, attempting to set an alternative agenda. At least attempts have been made to find ways of entering into a dialogue with the formal political process by posing issues of vital concern before mainstream parties and their candidates. So for instance, a *People's Manifesto* was drawn up in 1991, in preparation for the 10<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha elections that were forthcoming. Participating in the exercise of formulating this *Manifesto* were the All Jharkhand Students' Union (AJSU), Jharkhandi Organization for Human Rights (JOHAR), Naga People's Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR), All Tribals Students Union, Manipur (ATSUM), Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Udyog Sangathan (BGPMUS), Bandhua Mukti Morcha, Narmada Bachao Andolan, Jan Vikas Andolan, Nirman Mazdoor Panchayat Sangam, National Campaign for Housing Rights (NCHR), TVS Employees Federation, Ekta and the National Fishworkers' Forum (Lokayan Bulletin: 1991). The Manifesto, which raised the entire gamut of issues that concerned social movements and formed one of the many efforts to open a conversation, of course to no avail.

Such efforts have nonetheless continued over the years and have gradually strengthened the belief that movement groups must themselves directly participate in elections. Finally, during the run-up to the 2004 elections a serious attempt was made to even think of setting up another electoral political outfit - something of a 'movement party'. While there has always been a section among the movement groups, broadly owing allegiance to one of the non-marxist socialist streams, that has underlined the need for a separate party of a different kind, as a "legitimate instrument of social change", others have not quite been so sure.<sup>15</sup> Undoubtedly this is an important and complicated question and requires much more serious thinking and application than has been possible so far.<sup>16</sup>

Whatever be the impact of the non-party domain on the functioning of democracy in India, the experience of the leaders of some of the most significant social movements suggests a certain sense of frustration. At one level, it has been felt for over a decade now that despite the mass mobilizations by the movements and despite their attempts to raise issues marginalized by the formal political process, ultimately the movements become quite powerless because of their inability to access and use the levers of power. In the last instance, it is felt, it is the electoral process and political power that influences the course of events. It has also been felt that the impact that the movements' mobilization is able to make, gets largely frittered away as elections draw close and equations suddenly begin to change. So, as Shamim Modi, one of the founder-members of the Shramik Adivasi Sangathan (SAS) in

Madhya Pradesh, and who herself contested for the state assembly in 2004, put it: “the thought process that led to our entry into politics was based on the recognition that for the last eight years we have been leading dharnas, morchas, and rallies on a range of issues. But as soon as elections come around, the support that we have created on these issues gets fragmented and taken over by the mainstream political process” (Godbole and Vira 2004). This effort of a few groups associated with a socialist group called the Samajwadi Jan Parishad, was a part of a larger realization and was actually preceded by the formation of the Lok Rajneetik Manch (People’s Political Front or the PPF), initiated by Aruna Roy and Medha Patkar and the National Alliance of People’s Movements (NAPM). The PPF statement in fact said in so many words that “(M)any non-party people’s formations have now understood the importance of electoral politics and consequent governance. Corrupt governance has led to the shaping of national policy detrimental to peoples concerns, for the benefit of vested interest groups and the power elite.”

This recognition has posed a very real dilemma. For, the real distinguishing feature and strength of the people’s movements lay in the fact that they emerged and operated outside the formal political process. Thus, even while the movement groups decide to enter the electoral-political arena, there is a deep sense of foreboding: Will they too become co-opted? Cogs in the wheel of the corrupt system?

It is important to note that the recognition of the political party form itself “as a legitimate instrument of social change” has been there among some important sections of the non-party sector; their problem has been with existing political parties. The idea here is that what is required is the “right type” of party. What the above developments point to, is the possibility of such a new type of party, built from the bottom up. This is a tantalizing possibility but will call for entirely different ways of understanding its significance.

## *End Notes*

1. See Tandon and Mohanty (2002).
2. This is a qualified statement being made for the purposes of this paper and I do not personally subscribe to this notion of civil society in its entirety in the postcolonial context. I have elaborated my critique elsewhere and will not repeat it here. See “Civil Society and Its ‘Underground’: Explorations in the notion of Political Society” in Rajeev Bhargava and Helmut Reifeld (Eds.2005). *Civil Society, Public Sphere and Citizenship – Dialogues and Perceptions*, Sage Publications, Delhi and UK.
3. See for example, Sheth (1983), Kothari (1984) and Sheth and Sethi (1991), for the specific sense in which this term was used by these scholars.
4. It need hardly be emphasized that organizations like the FICCI and the CII represent the interests of the most powerful sections of society, whose interests in fact, govern the overall policies adopted by the formal system. Similarly, the RSS is known to represent aggressive majoritarian interests and would not qualify by this criterion.
5. It is not without a certain sense of unease that many sympathizers of such movements noted these developments in the direction of the internationalization of the struggles. So for instance, Harsh Sethi noted with concern that “help was sought from non-Indian groups to lobby globally against policies of international donor agencies that support projects with such potentially destructive implications”. The forging of such coalitions, he went on to observe, raises “serious

questions of political ethics, since extra-national actors are being invited to play a role in what are at one level, national issues..."(1993a: 138).

6. It is well-known that this transformation of the movement has a lot to do with the way in which the central government dealt with the very moderate and inclusive set of demands raised by the Akali Dal in its Anandpur Sahib Resolution (1973). These demands were still articulated on behalf of the entire state of Punjab and not of the Sikhs alone.
7. The movements for linguistic reorganization of states, it may be recalled, were spearheaded by largely inclusive organizations which led these movements like the Visalandhra Movement, the Mahagujarat Andolan, the Samyukta Maharashtra Andolan or the Aikya Kerala movement etc.
8. "Non-conforming" is the term used for industries that are located in areas not earmarked by the Delhi Master Plan for setting up industries. Most of these are very small units located in residential areas and run basically from the homes of the "entrepreneurs", saving as it does on separate establishment costs. For details see DJAM 1997; and DJAM 2001.
9. For details of this controversy see, Awadhendra Sharan (2003), "Governing Technology: The City in the Age of Environmental Crisis", *Sarai Reader 03 – Shaping Technologies*, Sarai-CSDS and The Waag Society for Old and New Media, Delhi/ Amsterdam.
10. Since these are extremely sensitive matters, it is not possible to name either the movements or the NGOs concerned; neither is it possible for the same reasons to reference the information. Most of the information in this section is therefore based on my close interaction with activists of some such movements and NGOs and on some degree of familiarity with their work.
11. This phrase is borrowed from the book of the same name: Myles Horton and Paulo Friere (1990), *We Make the Road By Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia.
12. This reference is to Marx's celebrated remark on the Paris Commune: the workers had no ideals to realize; no blueprints to which the world must conform; they merely had to set free the forces of change that had taken birth in the womb of the old society.
13. This certainly does not mean that the movement acquired an even spread across the length and breadth of the country. In this sense no movement can be said to have ever acquired an all-India character. The point is that by the beginning of the 1980s the issues like those of remunerative prices were becoming issues of large-scale mobilization. Even the Left political parties, which had seen these movements with suspicion in the initial phases, began mobilizing around these issues and massive demonstrations were organized by them and their peasant fronts – both in Delhi and in many state capitals.
14. The CYSV, or simply 'Vahini' as it is popularly known, was formed in January 1975, as a consequence of the Bihar (JP) movement. In September 1978, it became a national organization. Although the Vahini campaigned for the Janata Party in 1977, as part of the anti-Emergency struggle, it studiously stayed away from all electoral politics and was in the forefront of many a militant struggle. Most notable among the vahini-led struggle was the land struggle against the mahant or head priest of Bodh Gaya Math. For details, see Eldridge and Ratan (1988).

15. The expression in quotes is from a conversation with Vijay Pratap, convenor, Socialist Front and a long time activist associated with the non-party sector. I am indebted to Vijay Pratap for his information and insights that have made the discussion in this section possible.
16. In one instance, in one of the major coalitions called "Jan Andolan Samanvay Samiti", when this proposal for forming a party was pushed by the supporters of the socialist leaders Kishan Pattanayak, representatives of the CYSV walked out of the coalition.

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