

Globalisation and New Politics of Micro-Movements

In the process of opposition to globalisation, micro-movements have begun to raise a new discourse on democracy and invent political practices, expanding the arena of politics beyond the representational institutions of elections and political parties. They see globalisation as undermining and de-legitimising institutions of democratic governance and as a force which seeks to undo India's democratic revolution. This paper analyses the discourse and politics of micro-movements and their role in reinventing participatory democracy as a form of social action and political practice, creating new spaces and infusing deeper meaning to democracy in the globalising world.

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Just when the global discourse on democracy has become unidimensional, purveying the neo-liberal model of market democracy as the only universally desirable model, and when the Indian state has linked itself to the vertical hierarchy of global economic and political power, significant countervailing processes have emerged in the form of political and social movements at the grass roots making new, provincial and national-level alliances aimed at countering the state's policies of globalisation. These movements, led by small groups of social activists, have been active in different parts of India for over three decades working on disparate issues, albeit all concerning struggles of the economically marginalised and socially excluded, poorer populations. In the decade of the 1990s, many of them have come together and have joined larger, worldwide alliances and forums protesting against hegemonic policies of the institutions and organisations representing global economic and political power.

In this process of opposition to globalisation, the micro-movements have begun to raise a new discourse on democracy and invent political practices, expanding the arena of politics beyond the representational institutions of elections and political parties. Thus, although the micro-movements have been fighting politically on several issues concerning the poor much before they joined the debate on globalisation, it is the challenge of globalisation that has brought many of them together on common political platforms at the provincial and national levels, making issues of participatory democracy a part of their ongoing struggles. It is in this emergent context of globalisation that this paper analyses the discourse and politics of micro-movements, and their role in reinventing participatory democracy as a form of social action and political practice, creating new spaces and infusing deeper meaning to democracy in the globalising world.

I Movements and Globalisation

The micro-movements in India represent a varied and complex phenomenon. They are variously referred to as 'grass roots movements', social movements, non-party political formations, social-action groups and movement-groups. In this paper I shall use these terms interchangeably but the reference is specifically to a particular genre of social movements which became visible and acquired political salience in the mid 1970s and have since been active on a variety of issues which, in their own perception, are – directly or indirectly – related to what they see as their long-term goal of democratising development and transforming society [Kothari 1984; Sethi 1984; Sheth 1984]. These movement organisations differentiate themselves self-consciously and sharply from the welfare, philanthropic and such other non-political NGOs. Although there is no systematic survey, compilations made from different sources by researchers and guesstimates provided by observers in the field suggest a figure in the range of 20-30,000 such movement groups in the country [Kapoor 2000].

In order to understand the terms in which the movement groups conceive and articulate the idea of participatory democracy, it is important to know the context in which they emerged and the challenges they confronted in the initial phase of their formation. A large number of them existed as fragments of the earlier political and social movements, which had their origins in the freedom movement, but were subdued and dispersed soon after independence when the liberal, modernist English-educated ruling elite began to dominate public discourse in India. These were the groups which had their lineage in the Gandhian, socialist, communist and social reform movements but, by and large, had stuck out as groups of party-independent social and political activists [Sheth and Sethi 1991]. They worked in small, stagnant spaces available to them at the periphery of the electoral party politics. But within three decades of independence, new social and political spaces opened up for them as well as for several new groups of social activists. This became possible, ironically, with the decline of institutional politics, which began in the late 1960s, giving rise to several mass-based movements of protests [Kothari 1988b]. The issues of protests varied from price-rise to corruption. The protest movements, however, acquired a big momentum in mid-1970s, the largest and politically most high-intensity movement among them being the one led by Jayaprakash Narayan (popularly known as the JP movement). Seen in this context, what we recognise 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 1983; Kothari

1988]. Although the decline had begun in the late 1960s, it became visible when the Emergency was imposed (1975-1977) by Indira Gandhi [Kothari 1989; Sheth 1991].

An important, if unanticipated, consequence of the decline of institutional politics was the revitalisation of old social movements, with some of them aiming their politics directly against the Emergency regime. The anti-emergency movements gave rise, especially in the period between the mid-1970s and 1980s, to thousands of new micro-movements in the country. These movements were led by young men and women, quite a few of whom left their professional careers to join them. They took up issues and constituencies abandoned by political parties and trade unions, and those ill-served by the bureaucracy. The organisational form they evolved for themselves was not of a political party or a pressure group. It was that of a civil-associational group, leading political struggles on issues articulated to them by the people themselves. The key concept they worked with was democratising development through empowerment of the people [Sethi 1984].

Discourse of Globalisation

In the early 1990s, the grass roots movements confronted an entirely new set of terms justifying the hegemony of the newly established post cold war global order. Earlier, till the end of the cold war, a significant section of grass roots movements in India were active in protesting against the exclusionary, elite-oriented development model that was conceived and sought to be made uniformly and universally applicable the world over, by the post-second world war Bretton Woods institutions and their sponsor countries. These protests were, however, articulated largely in the context of the discourse developed by new social movements in the west where the nuclear and environmental threats produced by the cold war, were more poignantly felt. It was through this process that the idea and the campaign for 'alternative development' grew in the west. Although this idea had been propagated and practised in India for long by Gandhian activists, after independence it was marginalised within the development discourse dominated by India's modernist ruling elite.

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

The idea of alternative development found new votaries even in the consumerist core of western societies during the cold war, when the threat of nuclear holocaust loomed large and access to the world's fossil-oil resources was threatened by what was then described as the 'oil crisis'. Concerns were expressed on world policy forums about 'third world poverty'. Strange though it may seem today, deep anxieties were felt and expressed about the growing consumption habits of the middle classes in these countries. For, it was feared that combined with the hunger and poverty of their masses, they may lead to state policies resulting in rapid depletion of the world's natural resources. The conventional argument for development was now made with several caveats, sourced from the theory of alternative development. Thus, sustainability became a key word and consumerism a 'challenge' to cope with. Saving energy and finding alternative energy sources became an important consideration for policy makers of development.

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

This was the discourse of globalisation. Conceived and led by the victors of the cold war, it claimed to establish a new global order which would put an end to the old one that had kept the world 'divided' – economically, culturally and politically. In its place it not just promised, but communicated a virtual experience (as if that world was upon us!) of the world becoming one economy, (possibly) one culture and (eventually) one polity! Such a world could do, globally, without the messy institutions of representational democracy, even as such institutions were to be made mandatory internally for every individual country. It assured that this new global order would be managed by a set of global institutions (served by experts and freed from the

cumbersome procedures of representational accountability), which, being set up and controlled by the world's few 'self-responsible' and 'advanced' democracies, would guarantee peace and order to the whole world. Moreover, since the monopoly of violence (including its technology) will be withdrawn from a large number of individual and often 'irresponsible' nation states (whose natural location is in the south) and be placed collectively in the hands of a few nation states, which also are 'responsible' and 'civilised' democracies, (whose natural location is of course in the north) it not only will eliminate international wars, but alleviate poverty wherever it exists. These outlandish ideological claims of globalisation made and propagated globally by the world's most powerful (G-8) countries have been lapped up by large sections of the Indian middle class and the media, as if they represented a policy package offered by some really existing and democratically legitimate World Government.

Counter Discourse of Movements

The grass roots movements took quite some time to recover from the ideological onslaught of globalism and devise their own terms of discourse to counter it. This was mainly because by the end of the cold war and two decades after the emergency, the movement-groups were by and large fragmented into an almost isomorphic existence of each group fighting its own little battle independently. Quite a few had lost the élan of social transformation, having acquired a fairly stable and comfortable financial base. Much larger quantities of funds were now made available to them by the international donor agencies which had their own agenda for influencing the politics of discourse in peripheral countries. Most movement-groups had thus become routinised in their activities and functioned as NGO bureaucracies. In short, in the early 1990s, the mood among grass roots movements in India was marked by widespread pessimism among the observers and participants of the movements [Kothari 1993]. There were indeed some groups, largely of Gandhian, Left and social-democratic lineage, who stuck-out and kept fighting their battles for rights and socio-economic reconstruction at the grass roots, thus tenaciously retaining their character as movements. They however did not function at their earlier high levels of energy, and remained starved of funds.

All this changed, almost suddenly in the mid-1990s, when protests against globalisation led by the few movement-groups, which had kept the tradition of struggles alive during the period of drift, acquired momentum, as different sections of the poor in India began to acutely feel globalisation's adverse impact. It got a big fillip as many more groups responding to the pressures at the grass roots, returned from their NGO existence to the fold of movements. This produced a high degree of convergence among different types of groups and movements on a wide range of issues concerning globalisation. It revitalised the entire spectrum of grass roots movements in the country, giving rise to a new discourse and politics aimed at countering the forces of hegemonic globalisation. [Sheth 1999; Kothari Smitu 2001] What follows is an account of terms in which the movements view and resist globalisation.¹

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

Second, a section of social activists, and those who were relatively apolitical but active in alternative development movements earlier, have become acutely aware of the role that politics of discourse plays globally and nationally, in influencing policy choices of governments and inter-national organisations. Consequently, some of them now are participating actively in shaping the terms of discourse globally on such issues as biodiversity, global warming, construction of big dams, regulations concerning international trade and intellectual property rights and so on. In this process, they have become active in a variety of global 'conventions', forums and campaigns opposing the policies of the global power structure as well as in building more durable trans-national alliances with similar movements in other countries, both in the south and the north. In performing this 'global role' they often explicitly articulate their long-term objective in terms of building and sustaining institutional processes for global solidarity. Put differently, their aim is to create global politics of popular (civil society) movements with a view to building an alternative institutional structure of global governance, based on democratic principles of political equality, social justice, cultural diversity and non-violence, and ecological principles of sustainability and maintaining biodiversity [Sheth et al 2002]. Leading this discourse globally, a group of Indian activists interpret global solidarity in terms of the ancient Indian principle of 'vasudhaiva kutumbakam' (Earth as one family) and link it to Gandhi's vision of swaraj (self-governance) and swadeshi (politics of establishing peoples' own control over their environment – economic, social and cultural) [Pratap 2001]. It is in this context that the movements differentiate between the two types of politics they engage in: politics of establishing global solidarity and of opposing contemporary globalisation,

a distinction that has been conceptually aptly captured by Boaventura de-Souza Santos as the hegemonic vs counter hegemonic globalisation [Santos 1997].

Third, another type of movements, representing largely the Left and social democratic strands referred to earlier, see globalisation as intensifying further the already existing economic and social inequalities in the country [Sainath 2000]. Thus while the votaries of globalisation celebrate the growth of the middle class, the social activists see this phenomenon quite differently. In their view the programmes of economic reforms being implemented as a part of globalisation package, have consolidated and enriched the old middle class. The 'growth' of this class, in their view, largely represents the rise in the purchasing power of the small middle class that emerged during the colonial rule and expanded during the initial four decades after independence, covering largely the upper and middle strata of the traditional social structure. The structural adjustment programmes (SAP), implemented in the name of economic reforms – the recipe dispensed by the global financial institutions across the world – far from improving living standards of the poor, have pushed them further down the social and economic ladder, and below the poverty line [Arun Kumar 2000]. Indeed some fragments of the traditional lower social strata have entered the 'middle class', but this has been due to the long existing social policies of the state – like affirmative action. In fact, with the state shrinking in the process of globalisation, there has been a reversal of this process.

The few avenues of upward mobility that the policies of the Indian state had opened up for the disadvantageously located populations in the traditional social structure are now narrowing. The market is increasingly becoming the only avenue for upward mobility, and that too is monopolised by the upper strata of caste society, using their traditional status resources. Thus economic globalisation offers ever rising standards of living to those entering the market with some entitlements usually available to members of upper castes, given their resources: land, wealth, social privilege and education. For large segments of the population outside the charmed circle of the market, and disadvantageously located in the traditional structure, it means malnutrition, semi-starvation, disease and destitution. This relationship of the traditional social structure and globalisation is emphasised by the movements but is, strangely, ignored in the academic debates on globalisation.

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

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

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

Finally, the new ideology of globalisation has, in the view of the movements, made issues of poverty and social deprivation in the peripheral countries of the world ever more unintelligible in the global discourse. Even more, it has blunted the transformative edge of the new social movements, which were once (when they really were new) in the forefront of the alternative development movement in the west as well as globally. In effect, the agencies of hegemonic globalisation have been able to produce new terms of justification for the old development project, i e, of retaining the political and economic hegemony of the few rich and militarily powerful countries globally and of a small metropolitan elite within the country. The result is, today, unlike during the cold war, development is seen and measured in terms of the extent to which a country can 'integrate' (read subjugate) its economy to the world economic (capitalist) system.

Global Discourse of Protests

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

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

Even some 'international' human rights groups today seem to act as political pressure groups on behalf of the hegemonic global forces, seeking to prevent the peripheral countries from making certain policy choices in areas such as land-use, labour legislation, exports and so on. Although this is done in name of universalising human rights, selectivity of issues and the targeting of particular countries often betray their particularistic nationalist (western) bias. In this new hegemonic discourse the thinking on human rights has been dissociated from concerns like removing poverty, fulfilling basic human needs and social justice. Poverty is increasingly seen as the poor peoples' own failure in creating wealth, not as an issue of rights of the poor. It is no longer seen as a moral issue. In other words, the global discourse on human rights has ceased to be a discourse regarding social and political transformations; it has, instead, become a discourse about possible conditions that the powerful, 'developed' countries can impose over other countries, ostensibly for bringing about a global-legal regime of rights.

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

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

In the global feminist discourse, sensitivity about the social structural, economic and cultural complexities faced by women in poor countries in securing their rights has vastly receded; in its place the legalist and metropolitan concerns about women's rights in a consumerist society have acquired prominence. Thus, grass roots activists have come to believe that hegemonic globalisation is bent upon monopolising the global discourse of protests, with a view to legitimising the hegemonic global order and undermining the processes of social and political transformations.

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

In short, movements-activists in India view globalisation as a new, post-cold war ideology justifying the rule of a hegemonic structure of global power seeking to establish monopoly of a few powerful countries over resources of the whole world. As such, they find globalisation to be inimical to basic democratic and ecological values: liberty, equality, diversity and sustainability. To them, its impact on poorer countries has been to produce new and more dehumanised forms of exclusion and inequality – worse than those created by the cold war development model, or even by the colonial rule. They are particularly concerned about its adverse impact on democracy in India. For, when the poorer classes have found long-term stake in democracy and have begun to acquire their due share in governance, the power of the state (elected governments) itself is being denuded and undermined by the global power structure in collaboration with the country's metropolitan elites. In other words, they see globalisation as undermining and delegitimising institutions of democratic governance. They see it as a force which seeks to undo India's democratic revolution.

II New Politics of Movements

Based on such an assessment of globalisation's adverse impact both for development and democracy, grass roots movements conceive their politics in the direction of achieving two interrelated goals: (a) re-politicising development and (b) reinventing participatory democracy.

Re-Politicising Development

The main effort of the movements today is to keep the debate on development alive, but to recast it in terms which can effectively counter global and national structures of power. They are thus formulating old issues of development in new political terms, although their objective remains the same as before, namely, those at the bottom of the pile find their rightful place as producers in the economy and citizens in the polity. Accordingly, they now view development as a political struggle for peoples' participation in defining development goals and devising means to achieve them. Their view of development is thus a non-hegemonic, pluralistic process, in articulating which they use inductively arrived insights and criteria evolved through their own struggles. In this process they increasingly relate the globally debated issues such as feminism, ecology and human rights to the economic, social and cultural specificities of India in which these issues are embedded. Consequently, their politics is about making development a bottom-upward process, directly relevant to and an edifying experience for the poor and the oppressed. Thus, rather than altogether 'opting out' of development they now seek to change the power relations on which the conventional model of development is premised. In the process some new elements, essentially political in nature, have entered in the grass roots movements' thinking and practice of development.

First, the old post-colonial critique of development which invoked pre-modern nostalgia has ceased to appeal to a large section of these movements. Although that kind of critique still remains a hobby-horse of some esoteric activist groups and academic clubs, it finds little resonance in the changed aspirations of India's poor. Thus, at one level movement groups see the power elements of the old development model being encoded in the hegemonic structure of globalisation which they oppose. But at the level of national politics they see the idea of development as representing political and economic rights of the people who have been denied access to it because of their disadvantageous locations in the power structure. Hence they problematise development, seeking to create a politics for changing power relations in society. This change in perspective was effectively articulated by a well known social activist Aruna Roy when she left a development NGO in mid-1980s to found a movement-group. According to her the need of the time was to "redefine the paradigm of development – to see the whole process of development from a different perspective". And such a change in perspective would, she held, enable social activists to see development for what it really is, i e, a political process. In her words: "Development is politics and there can be no development without political will...In fact all acts of social and economic living are determined by the nature of politics" [Roy Aruna 1996a].

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

This awareness has led some movement-groups to form transnational alliances aimed at democratising the global power structure. For example, quite a few movement-groups in India have been actively associated with such counter hegemonic global initiatives as the Convention on Biodiversity, Agenda 21, World Commission on Dams, Alliance for Comprehensive Democracy and so on. These initiatives are not just confined to the transcendental global space. They are concretely embodied in their activities at the national and local levels in the form of disseminating awareness and activating organisations at the grass roots level to identify and oppose specific policies, programmes and legislations meant to expand hegemonic global power.²

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

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

Similarly, the ecology movements at the grass roots do not view ecology as merely a cost factor in development, as some development specialists do. Nor are they interested in specifying tolerable levels of ecological destruction necessary for achieving higher levels of economic development as do the policies of hegemonic globalisation. Instead, they view ecology as a basic principle of human existence, which, if reactivated, can yield higher level principles for reorganising the economy in a humane way and refocus development in terms of well being, in which, to use Gandhiji's well known phrase, "everyone shall have enough to satisfy one's need, but not greed".

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

Guided by this broad perspective, movements are often able to forge links with each other in fighting for issues at the grass roots. It is not accidental that ecology movements like the Chipko movement have large participation of women, and that in the Bodhgaya movement for the rights of the landless in Bihar, women play significant leadership roles. Women are in the forefront of the movements fighting for the rights of the population displaced by development projects especially in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. Similarly, human rights organisations often team up with women's organisations on issues of dowry, sati, rape, and equal wages. Similarly, activists in women's groups play an active role in mobilising and assisting the victims of the Bhopal chemical disaster. At no time in independent India, in the movements led by the parties and trade unions, was there ever such a high degree and such a sustained level of participation by women as one witnesses today in the non-party political movements at the grass roots.³

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

Thus, by redefining issues of development in political terms, the groups working separately on different issues such as gender, ecology, human rights or in the areas of health and education are now conceiving their activities in more generic terms – as a form of social and political action aimed at countering hegemonic power structures at all levels – locally, nationally and globally. An important consequence of this change in perspective was that the grass roots movements, which were in a state of fragmentation and low morale at the end of 1980s, began to regroup and come on common platforms, on the issue of globalisation. In the mid-1990s this led to launching of several new nation wide campaigns and to the formation of organisationally more durable coalitions and alliances. Among many such initiatives the most effective and widespread in recent years, has been the campaign for right to information – a series of local level struggles for securing correct wages for labourers working in public construction works for drought relief, culminating in a successful nation wide campaign for right to information. The older, ongoing movement of the 1980s the Narmada Bachao Andolan, got a new boost and gave birth to a broad-based alliance of a number of social movements and organisations active at different levels and in different parts of the country. This alliance, known as National Alliance for People's Movements (NAPM) has been launching, supporting and coordinating several campaigns on a more or less regular basis, protesting against programmes and projects of the government and the MNCs, representing the policies of hegemonic globalisation. There have been many more such initiatives, but more recent ones among them include: A Campaign for Peoples' Control over Natural Resources comprising of several organisations active in rural and tribal areas covering about 13 Indian states; the movement called There Is An Alternative, led by among others, two previous prime ministers of India; The Living Democracy Movement for linking local-democracy decision-making to maintaining biodiversity; the movement for nuclear disarmament called Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace and so on. Although some of the above movements will be described in some detail in the next section, the point of just mentioning these here is to show how the challenge of globalisation has politically revitalised the scene of social movements in India which by the end of 1980s was losing both, momentum and direction; more interestingly, how it became possible for these movements to sustain their politics at a higher level of intensity, in the process, recovering the hope of initiating a long-term politics of non-cooperation and withdrawal of legitimisation to the dominant power structures.

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

Participatory Democracy and Political Theory

In theoretical discussions and in the practice of representational politics participatory democracy has been treated, respectively, as a para-political idea and a peripheral political activity – a desirable but not an

essential characteristic of a modern democracy. It is in the politics of grass roots movements, where the scope of democracy is being actively searched and expanded through their everyday political struggles, that participatory democracy is conceived as not just desirable but a necessary organisational form and political practice. Under conditions of globalisation, where the national level institutions of representation are being subordinated to hegemonic global power with the structures of political and economic decision-making becoming more remote – even alienated – from people, the movements' continuing politics of participatory democracy has acquired a new relevance.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The point of this exercise, it seems, is to show that the beliefs and practices historically associated with the participatory democracy of a city-state have no relevance today for a democracy located in the nation state and even less for tomorrow when it is likely to encompass the whole globe as its territorial domain. Participatory democracy, the theory concedes, is indeed a noble idea and some of its elements ought to be functionally incorporated in representative democracy. But it is a regression to think of citizens directly controlling and participating in governmental decision-making and may even turn out to be a recipe for disaster in today's world. In the derivative theoretical discourse of Indian democracy, this fixing of participatory democracy to the dead and gone past of the west has delegitimised any historical-theoretical exploration premised on its existence in India's past. Hence the idea of democracy as symbolised in the concept of the

village republic is treated by Indian political theorists as an atavistic idea, not deserving any serious theoretical discussion.

The other argument – unlike the previous one which views democracy's history in structural-functional terms – is made in normative-analytical terms. It seems to be based on the fear of romantic appeal (utopian images) that the idea of participatory democracy evokes. In the view of those advancing this argument, propagating the ideal of participatory democracy often promotes simple, populist ideas about democracy. They further argue that the proponents of participatory democracy fail to recognise the fact that modern governments have to routinely depend in their decision-making on specialists and professional experts; the issues involved are so complex and technical in nature that they are beyond the grasp even of elected representatives, let alone ordinary citizens. Concepts like direct or participatory democracy only serve as a distraction to theorisation of democracy for the globalising world [Schmitter 1999]. A section of Indian elites who believe that meritocracy provides a better form of democracy and good governance, has always sought political support for their position in this argument. They vociferously argue that for preserving institutional norms of representative democracy it is necessary to strictly limit, procedurally and structurally, the powers of elected representatives through the legal-rational institutions of bureaucracy, and the judiciary. In their view giving legitimacy to the idea of participatory democracy would only further expose representative institutions to majoritarian and populist pressures, often making for bad and irrational decisions which usually are not in public interest. It was the dominance of this discourse in India during the initial decades of independence that allowed the consolidation of the hegemonic rule, albeit democratically consented, of a small social-political minority consisting of urban and English educated members of the upper castes. They occupied a large number of positions in different sectors and institutions of the state, especially in higher bureaucracy and judiciary, for over 40 years after independence. What had become an established, common sense view of governing India, however, began to be challenged by the end of 1970s when the movements of subaltern classes gained strength both in electoral politics and in civil society [Sheth 1995].

Movements' Politics of Participatory Democracy

The idea of participatory democracy was central to Gandhi's political thinking and practice, and had inspired many activists of the freedom movement. He articulated this idea through the concepts of *swaraj* (self-governance) and *swadeshi* (community's control over resources) and by invoking the imagery of the 'village republic' (*gram swaraj*) as representing India's democratic tradition.⁴ These formulations were however stoutly refuted and virtually banished from mainstream political discourse after independence, as representing Gandhi's impractical idealism. The idea of participatory democracy has, however, not only been kept alive but developed conceptually and in practice by a section of grass roots activists who liberally draw on Gandhi's economic and political thinking – although many of them may not want to wear the Gandhian badge [Bakshi 1998]. In a different political and ideological context M N Roy had critiqued representative form of democracy and pleaded for participative democracy. Based on his vision of participative democracy Roy had prepared a detailed proposal for Constitution of Free India [M N Roy 1981]. These proposals which did not receive any serious response in the then prevailing nationalist politics, have now been revived and reformulated by some activist groups in the changed context of globalisation. [Tarkunde 2003].

The first comprehensive and politically effective proposal on participatory democracy for independent India, however, came from Jayaprakash Narayan (JP). A popular socialist leader of independence movement JP joined the Gandhian movement about five years after independence. He raised the political profile of the movement high when in 1954 he made a public pronouncement of dedicating his whole life to the movement; in his words, to 'the Gandhian way'. The issue of deepening democracy was central to his agenda for the movement, without which, he believed, only the elite rule will perpetuate in the name of democracy.⁵ This concern found a lasting expression in of his treatise on non-party democracy in 1959 [Narayan 1959]. He critiqued the idea of representation by political parties and argued for a more participative and comprehensive form of democracy constituting a broad democratic base from where the power will flow upward to units using power allocated to them by the units below, on conditions of accountability and transparency. The amount and kind of power to be allocated to a higher unit will be as per the requirement of the unit. JP's thesis however made little impact then beyond the Gandhian circles. It in fact drew sharp criticism from the liberal democratic theorists as well as the party politicians who saw it as a naïve exercise of an idealist, unaware of its dangerous consequences for democracy itself [Kothari 1960]. The document was virtually 'withdrawn' from public discourse, but within two years JP came up with a politically more potent and a comprehensive statement on the issue of participatory democracy [Narayan 1961]. Here JP rebutted arguments of his critics and elaborated his basic thesis by theoretically and historically establishing the need for a comprehensive democracy, where both economic and political power is primarily held and exercised directly by the people from the base of the polity. It did not take very long for his vision of democracy to find a powerful political expression. He launched a massive movement in early 1970s with the aim of, in his own coinage, restoring peoples' power ('*lokshakti*') in democracy [Narayan 1975]. This idea of peoples' power fired the imagination of many young women and men, which besides upstaging the government in Delhi gave rise to a new genre of micro-movements,

celebrated and characterised by theorists as the 'non-party political process' [Kothari 1984]. This genre of movement groups that emerged from what became known as the 'JP movement' has since been working at the grass roots. They articulate participatory democracy in terms of empowerment of people through everyday struggles for their rights as well as through harnessing their collective efforts to developing local resources for collective well-being.

The most remarkable in this genre was the movement launched by Chhatra-Yuva Sangarsh Vahini in 1978, known as the Bodh Gaya movement. It has since served as a source of inspiration nationally for many movement groups. This movement succeeded in seizing about 10,000 acres of land from the religious establishment in Bodhgaya, a district in Bihar, through non-violent direct action. The land was legally redistributed among families of tillers who were attached to the land for generations. In the course of redistribution, legal entitlements to land were given equally to women and men. More important than its outcome in the form of land redistribution was the process of change through which the movement's larger objectives and values of political and social transformation were kept alive, communicated and partially institutionalised, affecting lives of about 3,000 participant households in the area. In fact the movement-group ensured that the dalits (ex-untouchables) for whose land-rights the movement was launched remained in the forefront and among them the women performed crucial leadership roles. The movement created a new hope among social-action groups all over the country about the efficacy of using non-violent militancy as a means for social and economic transformation.⁶

Another, and equally significant movement of the same genre in recent years, has been the one led by Tarun Bharat Sangh. It is known to the outside world through its Magsaysay award winning leader, Rajendra Singh. He joined and has revitalised the organisation through his work since 1985 in the villages of Rajasthan. He and members of his group started work with a deep conviction that the people have the knowledge and the capacity to develop and manage their affairs collectively for their own well-being (that is how he saw JP's message of 'power to the people'), provided they stopped looking to the government for help and become motivated to work on their own. In Singh's own words: "...our fight (is) against the state for communities to have a say in their development. Administrative system...tries to foist its own vision of development on communities, without bothering to find out what people need. In fact, it is a myth that development is for people, it is actually anti-people... Schooled in the ideals of Jayaprakash Narayan and Acharya Vinoba Bhave working for social change was an obvious choice (for us)" [Singh 2001].

Beginning their work in mid-1980s this group of social activists was able to establish, in the course of a decade and a half, a self-governing system of land and water management in about 700 villages in the perpetually drought affected and poverty-ridden villages of Rajasthan. This was achieved through reviving recessive knowledge and skills of the people themselves of building water harvesting structures known locally as Johads. In this process the villagers not only went ahead and built a network of check-dams and small reservoirs without government help but took decisions, bypassing the government, on land use in the area, built boundary walls around common lands and afforested a huge barren land-mass. This became possible due to social confidence the people could recover with the water becoming available to them by their own efforts. The old forms of economic interdependence and social cooperation were now recovered and imbued with new economic and democratic-political meanings. In Singh's eyes, this is a small, perhaps a short-lived achievement. He sees a long political battle ahead for achieving real democracy for the people. In his words: "Unfortunately, the state in India does not appreciate communities trying to help themselves. If people start participating in development and questioning the money that ostensibly is being spent on them, it makes difficult for those who run the system. For a bureaucracy schooled in the colonial tradition of ruling rather than working with people, grass roots democracy is an alien concept. So instead of development being a collaborative effort between people and the state, it is actually people versus the state" [Singh 2001].

But the government saw all this quite differently: an encroachment on its territory and usurpation of its functions. The administration slapped hundreds of legal cases on the movement-group and the villagers and threatened them with demolition of the dams as they were built without the government's permission and the guidance of experts ('civil engineers'). Here is where the grass roots group's politics of mass mobilisation and joining larger alliances helped; it became possible for the group along with the villagers, to withstand the pressure and ultimately get the government to endorse the mode of self-governance they had evolved through political struggles on the ground. Again, Rajendra Singh sees this as a temporary reprieve obtained by winning of a battle, not a war. In his words: "Unless the communities are empowered and encouraged to develop stakes in development, winning the war is going to be difficult" [Singh 2001].⁷

In the process of countering hegemonic globalisation, the movements have added another dimension to their politics. This is about making law an important site of social and political action/struggles. In the course of implementing the structural adjustment programmes and other globalisation-related policies, the state has been actively assisting the Indian and multinational corporations to acquire land and other resources of the villages at a nominal cost. This involves withdrawing constitutional guarantees given to tribals regarding alienation of their land and, in effect, extending such guarantees to MNCs as making land, water and forest-resources available to them cheaply, but at a great cost to the livelihood of the people and ecology of the area.

Enactment or implementation of such legislations and government orders are now challenged by the movement-groups not just in the courts of law, but in the larger arena of civil society. The proceedings of public interest litigations which earlier had remained by and large confined to the courtrooms as contentions between the state and the social-legal activists, have now become matters of direct concern and involvement for the people themselves, constituting everyday politics of the movement groups.

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

One among many such cases is the movement against bauxite mining in tribal areas of Vishakapatnam in Andhra Pradesh. In 1991 a walkathon, known as the 'manya prante chaitanya yatra', a consciousness raising walk of the area facing ecological destruction was organised by a couple of movement groups, SAMTA and SAKTI, active in the area. Over 50 other social action groups joined the march and prepared a report on ecological destruction they saw and experienced during the march. The report described how the region had come under severe threat to its ecology and to livelihood of people inhabiting it and how if the damage was not controlled could cause ecological disaster for the entire peninsula of south India. The report also spoke of the displacement of 50,000 tribals, the massive deforestation and the problem of flash floods and silting that resulted. (Report by P Sivaram Krishna of SAKTI, (Mimeo); also report in *Newstime*, March 13, 1991).

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

The participative methodology of preparing and disseminating reports which involved self-reporting by members of the affected communities as well as technical and financial inputs from well known NGOs, movement leaders and reputed activist-professionals, succeeded in drawing nationwide attention regarding the usurpation of tribal lands by corporations, ostensibly by legal means, which deprived the people of their livelihoods, identity and culture.⁸

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

In essence the court recognised the local people as legal stake-holders in the development of the area they live in. It made the people's participation in development necessary, and their claim to a share in the benefits of development legitimate. This land-mark judgment, known India as the SAMTA judgment, has since become a rallying point around which many struggles are now waged jointly by action groups in the country: first, to secure implementation of the court's mandatory rulings as well as its recommendatory provisions. Second, to test and expand legal and juridical meanings of the judgment for wider application; third, to use it politically for

creating a bulwark of resistance to prevent implementation of the government policy which, as a part of globalisation package and under pressure from multinationals, seeks to withdraw guarantees given by the Constitution to the people under its Fifth Schedule.

In the course of the six years since the Supreme Court's judgment in this, a number of marches, demonstrations and conventions have been held in different parts of the country, on a more or less regular basis by social movement groups. One remarkable example of how the SAMTA judgment energised the micro-movements, struggling for long but not making much headway in securing ecological rights of the local (tribal) communities is the case of the adivasi movement in the Rayagada district of Orissa. The movement aided and assisted by the National Committee for Protection of Natural Resources (NCPNR), itself a network of over 40 social action groups, succeeded in highlighting the plight of the Rayagada tribals and the injustice done to them by forcibly acquiring their lands for bauxite mining. The movement effectively used the SAMTA judgment in making the government officials aware of their obligation to implement the Supreme Court judgment in Orissa [Hiremath 2001].

Different from the above campaign for preventing the government from enacting certain kinds of legislations, there is a movement which seeks to compel the government to implement its own rules and regulations honestly and efficiently. Its politics centres around holding public hearings and peoples' courts with a view to creating political and social sanctions for the local government administration to compel it to observe and make public the rules and regulations by which it is governed in implementation of development programmes. It began as a struggle launched by a mass-based organisation in a village in Rajasthan founded by Aruna Roy who gave up her job in the Indian Administrative Services (IAS) "to work with the people". The organisation was named Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) addressed the problem most acutely felt by the people themselves, i.e., government officials cheating labourers working on government construction sites, by not paying them minimum wages fixed by the government.⁹ Besides being underpaid, the people in the area did not get enough work through the year, often because sanctioned development programmes often remained on paper, with the allocated money being pocketed by government officials and elected leaders. Since all this was done with the knowledge of the 'higher-ups' no amount of petitioning helped; only direct democratic action by the people was seen as a possible remedy. In December 1994-95 several public hearings, Jan Sunvai, were held by MKSS where the workers were encouraged to speak out their problems with the bureaucracy – especially narrating specific details of underpayment of wages and unimplemented development schemes – in presence of local journalists, and people of surrounding villages from different walks of life. It took several public hearings to persuade some among the accused parties – the contractors, engineers and local elected leaders – to accept the MKSS invitation asking them to avail of the opportunity of their self-defence by responding to peoples' charges of corruption. All this had little impact on the administration and for people outside the local area until a marathon 40-day sit-in, a dharna, was organised in the nearby town of Beawar in 1996, followed by another series of public hearings, demonstrations and processions. This compelled the Rajasthan government to amend the Panchayati Raj Act, entitling citizens to get certified copies of bills and vouchers of payments made and the muster-rolls showing names of labourers employed (for, payments were often made by forged bills and shown against fictitious names of people who never worked on the site). This grew into a state level campaign, demanding that the Rajasthan government pass a comprehensive legislation granting citizens and organisations the right to information. This culminated in organising a nation-wide campaign – National Campaign for People's Right to Information – which prepared a model legislation for right to information. By extensively canvassing a model bill, the campaign succeeded with about half a dozen states assemblies passing similar legislations. Eventually, the parliament too was forced to pass such a bill, though in a vastly diluted and truncated form. Expectedly, even after about eighth months of its passage, it has not been publicly notified for implementation! But that is a different story.

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

There are numerous other cases of the movement groups articulating different elements of participatory democracy in the course of their struggles for democratising development [Kothari, Smitu 2000b]. For lack of space, only a brief mention could be made of a few. For example there are city-based movement groups like the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in Ahmedabad, with a long and formidable record of work among self-employed women for their economic and political empowerment and social emancipation [Rose 1992]. There are two other recently founded organisations in Delhi: Manushi Forum for Citizen Rights and the Jan Parivahan Panchayat of Lokayan. These organisations have been running campaigns for protecting economic rights and expanding freedoms of self-employed urban poor – such as street hawkers and cycle-rickshaw pullers [Kishwar 2001b and c]. As part of the campaign film shows, photographic exhibitions, and marches are organised in the different localities of the city. The media campaigns, on the whole, demonstrate

how the implementation of economic reforms blatantly discriminate between the rich and the poor and, how the rules are often used to prevent people to exercise their right to make a living [Kiswar 2001a; Lokayan 2002]. Public hearings are held revealing the harassment of hawkers and rikshaw pullers by government officials, which focus not so much on implementation of rules as on collection of corruption money. Similar movement-groups fighting for the rights of the urban poor have been active in Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Calcutta and other cities, whose work is equally, if not more important, but cannot be described here for want of space. The short point is: a new civil society politics – different from conventional trade union politics – has emerged in the cities, focusing on the rights of the urban poor in making livelihood choices and use of urban spaces.

Similar new movements addressing issues of livelihood and use of common spaces have emerged in the rural and tribal areas. They aim at empowering the gram sabhas by making them self-governed and participative decision-making bodies managing affairs of their own villages [Kothari Smitu 2000a]. One such movement, for example, explicitly conceives of participatory democracy as an 'antidote to globalisation'. Its politics is about giving organisational shape to Gandhi's ideas of swaraj and swadeshi at the grass roots level. Led by an activist trained in the JP movement, Mohan Hirabai Hiralal, the movement has motivated people to establish their own governance, to begin with, of forests in the area. Today, the villagers themselves maintain the forest-ecology and make judicious use of forest produce (Deshpande Vivek, May 21, 2000). The self-governance movement is now being expanded to many more villages, covering other areas of collective life. The movement's credo is: we are the government in our village and there shall be our government in the region, the nation, and the world. Interestingly, this movement-group has also theoretically worked out a 'blue print' of organisational structures required for a participatory democracy from the village to the global level, specifying the long-term objectives and values by which they should be informed [Hiralal 2001].

Conclusion

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

Such politics of movements, however, often brings them into confrontation with the state, the bureaucracy, the law and order machinery, the local power structures and now increasingly with the multinationals penetrating the rural and tribal spaces in India. The micro-movements sometimes come in conflict also with political parties and established trade unions. The activists of movements, however, view such confrontations as an aspect of the larger, long-term struggle for political and social transformation, and not as means of competing with political parties in the arena of representative politics, for acquisition of the state power. They thus view their everyday struggles as a process of expanding political spaces trans-locally through raising people's consciousness and building their own organisations. In the process, in the areas they have been active, they contribute to creating a political culture of participative democracy.

The movement activists have developed their own critique of the prevalent macro-structures of political representation as well as a view of local politics. Their critique is not theoretically derived; it has emerged from the experience of day-to-day political struggles on the ground.¹⁰ In their view the representative institutions have imprisoned the process of democratisation in the society. The way out from such impasse is the spread of their kind of politics – the politics of micro-movements. Movements, they believe, by involving people deeply in politics will in the long run, change the terms of justification for the state for holding and using power. This probably explains their epistemic preference in articulating their politics in terms of 'reconstruction of state', rather than of 'acquisition of state power'.

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

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

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

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

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Notes

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1 The following account is based on my close and continuous association and interaction with activists of several movement groups throughout the country, since 1980. I also have extensively used the materials they regularly produce and disseminate in the form of booklets, pamphlets, leaflets and newsletters, which do not easily yield to the academic style of citations. As such, it incorporates parts of my earlier writings on grass roots movements, cited here. The activists and movements appearing in this paper by their names suggest my greater, often accidental, familiarity with their work, inasmuch as the absences suggest my ignorance – and the lack of space – but in no case any lack of their salience in the field.

2 For example, witness activities of a network of grass roots organisations founded by the leading activist of transnational ecological movements, Vandana Shiva; the network is known as *Jaiv Panchayats* – The Living Democracy Movement [Shiva 2000].

3 It is significant to note in this context that major popular movements in India today such as campaign for right to information, campaign for Saving the river Narmada (Narmada Bachao Andolan), movement for rights of self-employed women and of street-hawkers and rickshaw pullers in cities, campaign for maintaining biodiversity and against intellectual property rights are all led by women.

4 For concise and pointed exposition of these concepts see M K Gandhi (1968a, b, c, d, e) in Shriman Narayan (ed): *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*; Volume Four, Chapter 16 'Swadeshi', (pp 256-60), Volume Five, Chapter 15, 'Non-Cooperation' (pp 203-08), Chapter 16, 'Civil Disobedience', (pp 209-16), Chapter 39, 'Swadeshi', (pp 336-39) and Chapter 42, 'Village Communities' (pp 344-47), Navajivan Publishing House: Ahmedabad.

5 For a perceptive, cogent and authentic account of JP's life and work see, 'Introduction' to his selected writings edited by Bimal Prasad (1980).

6 For detailed history and political account of the movement see, Prabhat, (1999).

7 All quotes are from the leader of the movement, Rajendra Singh: "I was called a dacoit, terrorist and fraud", *Hindustan Times*, Edit Page, August 12, 2001; for a comprehensive account of the contribution made by this movement see, *Manushi*, 2001: No 123.

8 Surveys and studies carried through participatory-action research have, by now, become a common practice for the movement-groups. There are special groups of activist-academics, e g, Alternative Survey Group, regularly carrying out studies and publishing their findings. Such studies are devised, self-consciously, to counter the politics of positivist knowledge which privilege experts and exclude people from decision-making on matter of vital interest to them [Sheth 1999].

9 The MKSS nearly ideally fits the concept of 'micro-movement' explicated in this paper. The campaign it initiated for right to information has become a nationwide movement. It has built a large network of movement-groups, human rights organisations, media-leaders, intellectuals and professionals. Unfortunately, I cannot do justice to some innovative political concepts and practices developed by this and other such movement in the space available here. For a detailed account of the MKSS movement and the vision of its founder see the following: Bakshi (1998); Aruna Roy (1996a and b), Aruna Roy and Nikhil De (1999); Roy Bunker (1999); Dogra (2000).

10 In the course of last five years the issue of participatory democracy has received a more serious and focused attention of the leaders of micro-movements. Several pamphlets, booklets, newsletters and articles have been prepared and disseminated by them for wider discussion and, possibly, for future campaigns. The basic principles and concepts were, as we saw earlier, enunciated by Gandhi and Jayaprakash Narayan. Some activist-thinkers in recent years have incorporated these in their politics and have renewed the debate through their own writings. For example see, Roy, Aruna (1996); Hiralal (2001); articles in the special issue of *Samayik Varta: Lokantra Samiksha* (July-August 2000) especially by Patnayak, Yadav, Bhattacharya and Pratap; Pratap (2001); Kumar (2001); Tarkunde (2003). My presentation here of the movements' conceptualization of Participatory Democracy is largely based on the above mentioned materials.

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