

**A STUDY OF THE THEORETICAL ISSUES OF THE
NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT**

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "A STUDY OF THE THEORETICAL ISSUES OF THE NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT" submitted by SHALINI VATSA in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** is her own work and has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other University.

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PREFACE

This dissertation aims at understanding theoretical issues of the New Social Movements [NSMs] in the Indian context. This includes two parts — [1] the theoretical aspect of the NSMs and [2] an empirical analysis of NSMs in India. For this purpose predominant theoretical paradigms of the West and of the Indian context have been studied. The second aspect of the empirical study includes a specific study of Self-Employed Women's Association [SEWA], Chipko and the People's Union for Civil Liberties has been done. The reason for choosing both the Western and the Indian approaches is to be able to have a broader and a richer insight into the NSMs.

A specific study of the three movements viz. SEWA, Chipko and PUCL has been taken up to have an empirical application to the theories.

SEWA is an all women's movement founded on the basis of the Gandhian principles. Its social base comprises of the self-employed women, women workers of the informal and unorganized sector. Though, SEWA was a part of the Trade Labour Association, it broke off from it to become an autonomous movement.

Chapter two is a study of the SEWA movement. I analyse the movement itself, its activities, the issues around which mobilization takes place and the way SEWA operates vis-a-vis its adversaries. There is also an analysis of SEWA as a NSM on the basis of the theoretical paradigms examined above.

Chipko, the environment movement of Tehri-Garhwal, forms Chapter three of the dissertation. 'Chipko' the word in Hindi literally means hugging. The social actors of this movement hug the trees to stop felling. Chipko as a movement

epitomises the principle of autonomy. This principle of autonomy is over the natural resources available to the local people. Chipko is also a completely autonomous movement with reference to the area of conventional politics. The social basis of the movement is of the local people, though Chipko guarantees global support for itself. The leading philosophy of Chipko is also the Gandhian principles though, there are some others strands of ideology as well. The basic features of Chipko demarcate itself very easily as a NSM and this forms an analysis in the Third Chapter.

People's Union for Civil Liberties [PUCL] is a movement for the guarantee of civil liberties to individuals in India. It came up with the post-emergency period to protect the individual against the repression of the state. The attempt in Chapter Four is to study the activities of the PUCL as a NSM within the theoretical paradigms.

The purpose of dissertation is —

1. to analyse the 'newness' of the NSMs.
2. to have an overall understanding of the theoretical issues of the NSMs; causes for their emergence; the context in which they come up and the themes around which they operate.
3. to study the predominant theoretical paradigms with reference to the three specified social movements.

In the course of research work, one discovered that the literature on the history and the activities of SEWA and PUCL were scattered and scanty. An attempt to study these movements has been made on whatever literature was available.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Society today is marked by the presence of social movements which are transforming the society — its functions, classifications, stratifications and the public institutions. They are also transforming beliefs, faiths, values, behavioural patterns and the political processes. These social movements are being classified as New Social Movement [NSMs].

In this chapter, I analyze the important theoretical paradigms for the study of NSMs. There are two sections here — [i] the western approaches and [ii] the approaches relevant to the Indian context. There is a further section which is an analysis of the 'newness' of the NSMs on the basis of the theoretical approaches.

Though the western approaches have taken shape in a different contexts, their study becomes important for a fine understanding of the subject.

1. THE CLASSICAL OR THE STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALIST APPROACH

The classical theoretical paradigm¹ was the social psychological tradition of the Chicago School. This theory was dominant till the early 1970s. Here, the collective actions were understood in terms of a breakdown either in the organs of

1 Turner, Ralph H.(ed), Robert E. Park, **On Social Control and Collective Behaviour: Selected Papers**, Chicago University Press, 1967. Blumer, Herbert, "Collective Behaviour" in Alfred McClung Lee (ed), **New Outlines of the Principles of Sociology**, New York, Barnes & Noble 1951. "Collective Behaviour" in J.B. Gittler (ed), **Review of Sociology: Analysis of a Decade**, New York, Wiley, 1957. R.G. Turner and L.M. Killian, **Collective Behaviour**, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Princeton Hall, 1957. For a summary of collective behaviour theories see Gary T. Marx, and James L. Wood, Strands of Theory and Research in **Collective Behaviour**, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 1, 1975

social control or in the norms which facilitated social integration. The breakdown was caused by structural changes. The resulting strains, discontent, frustration, and aggression led the individual to participate in collective behaviour. All theorists of this paradigm stressed upon the psychological reactions to break down, crude modes of communication and volatile goals. They viewed crowd to be the basic unit of collective behaviour. The approach reflected an implicit bias towards regarding collective behaviour as a non rational or irrational response to change. This bias triggered a lot of criticism of the contemporary theorists.

After the massive movements in the U.S. and Europe in the sixties and the seventies there was need to have a new theoretical approach. Thus, in the United States came up the 'resource-mobilization' paradigm and in the Western Europe the 'identity-oriented' paradigm.

2.1 RESOURCE MOBILIZATION THEORY

The Resource Mobilization Theory came up as a response to the psychological categories of the Classical Theory, e.g., it rejected the emphasis on feelings and grievances. It also rejected the focus on 'breakdown' characteristic of the collective behaviour approach. Instead this thought stressed upon objective issues such as resources, organization, interests, opportunities and strategies to account for large scale mobilizations.

There are different orientations within this paradigm which range from the pure rational actor approach pioneered by Olson² to the organizational entrepreneurial approach by McCarthy/Zald³ and the political conflict of the Tillys⁴, Oberschall⁵, Gamson⁶ and Tarrow⁷. Despite their differences, the resource mobilization theorists share the following assumptions —

1. Social movements must be understood in terms of conflicts of interest.
2. There is no fundamental difference between institutional and non-institutional action.
3. Both entail conflicts of interest built into institutionalized power relations.
4. Collective action involves the rational pursuit of interests by groups.
5. Goals and grievances are permanent products of power relations and cannot account for the formation of movements.
6. The formation of movements depends instead on changes in resources, organization, and opportunities for collective action.
7. Success of the movement is proven by the recognition of the group as a political actor or if the material benefits increase.

2 Olson, Mancur, *The Logic of Collective Action*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1965.

3 McCarthy, John D. and Zald, Mayer N., "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory", *American Journal of Sociology*, 82, May 1977

4 Tilly, Charles, Louise Tilly and Richard Tilly, *The Rebellious Century: 1830 - 1930*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1975.

5 Oberschall, Anthony, *Social Conflict and Social Movements*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J. Prentice Hall, 1973.

6 Gamson, William, *The Strategy of Social Protest*, Homewood, Ill., Dorsey, 1975

7 Tarrow, Sidney, "Social Movements, Resource Mobilization and Reform During Cycles of Protest: A Bibliographical and Critical Essay, Working Paper No 1 of the Project on Social Protest and Policy Innovation at Cornell University, January 1982

8. Mobilization involves large scale special purpose, bureaucratic, formal organizations. Thus, organization and rationality are the two basic premises of the resource-mobilization approach.

2.2. CHARLES TILLY

Charles Tilly has made an important contribution to the Resource Mobilization Theory.⁸ He explains the formation of a NSMs as an impact of economic transformation, urbanization and state making. These large scale shifts in the big structures bring about a shift in the everyday life of the individuals. This structural change also brings about a shift in the locus and mode of power. This causes a shift of power and resources from local centres to the national level.

The collective action which leads from these shifts had been defined by Tilly as 'competitive' and/or 'reactive' and 'pro-active'. The former entails contention among existing communal groups at the local level over resources claimed by rivals. "Reactive" collective action involves communal groups threatened by efforts of state makers to gain control over the general population and its resources. He then, explains a "proactive" collective action which asserts a group's claim to power, privileges or resources that have not previously existed. He traces a long-term shift from the predominance of the first two, up until the mid-19th century to the predominance of the third ever since.

8 Tilly, Charles, *The Rebellious Century 1830-1930*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1975. "European Violence and Collective Action since 1700" revised version of a paper presented at the conference on Political Violence and Terrorism, Instituto Carlo Cattaneo, Bologna, June 1982 [as quoted in Cohen's "Strategy or Identity", *Social Research*, vol. 52, no.4, Winter 1985, pp 663-717] "From Mobilization to Revolution" Reading Man Addison Wesley, 1978, pp 143-51 "Models and Realities of Popular Collective Action", *Social Research*, vol. 52, no. 4, Winter 1985 "Fights and Festivals in 20th Century Ile de France". CSRO Working Paper No. 305, University of Michigan, December 1985 [as quoted in Cohen's "Strategy or Identity, *Social Research*, vol. 52, no. 4, Winter 1985].

At the level of organization Tilly says that there is a formation of formal association groups as contrasted with the old communal groups as a result of this shift.

The development of man , electoral politics, universal suffrage and multi-party system made the formation of associational groups legal. The rights to organize recruit, speak publicly, assemble, solicit, publicize and demonstrate became the basis for participation. These rights form key institutional components of modern civil society. Thus Tilly writes that civil society has become an indispensable terrain on which social actors assemble, organize and mobilize even if their targets are the economy and the state. The large scale mobilization was further facilitated by urbanization and mass media. Therefore, according to Tilly, the factor that causes the formation of NSMs is the structural change. He has discussed the newness of the NSMs at the level of organization, collective action, the politicization of the civil society and structural changes in everyday life.

3.1 IDENTITY ORIENTED PARADIGM

Contemporary collective actors attempt to construct new identities, to create democratic spaces for autonomous social action. They also reinterpret norms and reshape institutions. The attempt of the identity oriented theorists is to look into the processes by which collective actors create the identities and solidarities they defend. They assess the relations between opposing groups and the stakes of their conflicts. They also analyze the structural and cultural developments within the society.

The identity-oriented theorists argue that theories stressing the primacy of structural contradictions, economic classes, and crises in determining collective identity are inappropriate in examining the contemporary collective action. They also maintain that one cannot apply the national-actor models to those collective actors whose conflictual interaction is not limited just to political exchanges, negotiations or strategic calculations between adversaries.

Two important theorists in this area have been Pizzorno and Alan Touraine.

3.2 A. PIZZORNO

Pizzorno⁹ points out that cost-benefit calculations of the resource-mobilization theory cannot explain the logic of collective action of “new groups” seeking identity, autonomy and recognition. He writes that the process of identity formation, makes the NSMs devoid of the logic of exchange and negotiation over benefits. The NSMs are primarily involved in the creation of solidarity and identity. According to Pizzorno, “the real end is non-negotiable, since it consists in the formation of the very subject which has successively to become the actor of the exchange and the bearer of gains and losses”.¹⁰

Thus, we see that Pizzorno considers the formation of the identity of the actor as the end of the NSMs.

9 Pizzorno, A., “Political Exchange and Collective Identity in Industrial Conflict” in C. Crouch and A. Pizzorno (eds), *The Resurgence of Class Conflict in Western Europe Since 1968*. London, Macmillan, 1978, 2, pp. 277-278.

10 Pizzorno, “Political Exchange”, p. 293.

If the end of the NSMs is the formation of identity, autonomy and solidarity, it involves direct participation on the part of the actors and exclusion of representation. This is so because the action of NSMs is expressive and seeks direct participation.

3.3 ALAN TOURAINE

Another theorist who has provided a framework for an identity-oriented paradigm is Alan Touraine.¹¹ According to him, the study of social movements is not about describing social “reality” but is a study of a specific process which aims at constructing social reality. He begins with a hermeneutic understanding of the contemporary movements, but moves on to analyze their new dimensions which have emerged in a new historical context. These dimensions are [i] reflexivity regarding the creation of identity and norms, [ii] emphasis on the democratization of the society of the movements [iii] self-limitation of the movements, and [iv] focus on cultural issues. He also theoretically analyses the structural and cultural dimensions of contemporary society and relates the emergence of social movements to these aspects. He studies the contemporary action as a conflictual process through which identity formation of collective actors takes place.

The work of Alan Touraine reflected that he expands upon the pure identity-oriented paradigm. He focuses on the social dimension of civil society. He rejects a pure identity-oriented analysis of social movements, arguing that it tends either to reproduce the ideological self-understanding of actors or to slip into social-

11 Touraine, Alan, **The Voice and the Eye**. New York, Cambridge University Press, 1981, “An Introduction to the Study of Social Movements”, **Social Research**, vol. 52, no 4, Winter 1985 “Triumph or Downfall of Civil Society?” in **Humanities in Review**. New York, Cambridge University Press, 1982.

psychological account of interaction at the expense of a truly sociological analysis of struggle.

NSMs CAPACITY FOR SELF-PRODUCTION OF SOCIETY

Alain Touraine describes the contemporary collective action as NSMs due to its capacity for 'self-production of society'. By this Touraine means the use of action as a capacity of human societies to develop and alter their own orientations. Self-production of society refers to a society's capacity to transform or destroy itself with reference to normativity and objectivity. The area of action of an old movement was limited. This was so because earlier the capacity of a society to produce itself was also limited. The old movements while referring to their stakes and enemies would use a metasocial principle which meant the divine rule, natural law or historical evolution. The capacity of self-production of a society has become boundless now. This is so because the area of the public space extends practically to all experiences of life — from illness to health, from birth to death, from fecundation to child birth. The extension of public space has happened due to the emergence of a new historical context — the post-industrial society.

POST-INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

Touraine explains the post-industrial society as one marked by research and development, information processing, mass media and biomedical science and technique. These components of a post-industrial society produce technical and symbolic goods which transform the notions of everyday life. These transformations cause social conflict and social movements come up in defense of the self and its

creativity. It is through this process that new identities and solidarities get formed which are defended by social movements. It thus leads to an easy self-definition of the actors and goals.

NSMs AS SOCIAL CONFLICT

Touraine categorizes the social conflicts into eight sections. He writes that

- i. social conflict can be a competitive pursuit of collective interests.
- ii. There can be conflict for the reconstruction of a social, cultural or political identity. Here the opponent is defined more as a foreigner or invader than as an upper class, a power elite, or the management. A conflict can also occur if values are threatened by invasion or obstruction.
- iii. A conflict can happen if a political force aims at changing the rules and conventions. Here the identification and self-definition of the actor and stakes is easier because the alteration of rules and convention can cause great mobilization.
- iv. There can be a conflict for the defense of a status or privileges and for the protection of norms and interests which can no longer be efficiently protected or defended by usual institutional channels.
- v. There can be a conflict for the social control of the main cultural patterns. Touraine specifies three patterns — a model of knowledge, a type of investment and ethical principles. All these patterns are important because any of them could lead to the self-production of society.
- vi. Creation of a new order is another basis for conflict. This stands as opposed to the self-production of society. The extreme form of such an action is revolution.

Touraine also explains two types of historical conflicts.

- i) The national conflict where only a nation or a state can maintain the continuity of its identity even in times of historical change, for example, industrialization.
- ii) Neo-communitarianism, Touraine writes, is a negative equivalent of national conflict. Here, the effort is to reject a historical transformation which comes from outside. This can destroy traditional values and existing forms of social organization.

TYPES OF CONFLICTS

In Touraine's categorization, there are two types of conflicts — offensive and defensive. A movement takes an offensive shape when the actors compete over interests as autonomous units, for example, a conflict of an autonomous unit of actors with a political force altering the norms and rules. The defensive type tends to identify an actor with social and cultural values and excludes the opponent as an external enemy or as a traitor, for example, the defense of a status or privilege.

We see that Touraine's analysis of the contemporary movements takes into account the cultural orientations such as the wish and attempt of the actors for a self-production of society. It also reflects on the incapability of the political institutions with reference to the defense of the stakes of the actors.

Touraine writes that a social movement is defined by a clear interrelation between conflicting actors and the stake of their conflict. According to him, there are three components which express the central conflict — definition of the identity [i] of the actor, the definition of the opponent [o], and the stakes, that is, the cultural totality [t] which defines the field of conflict. As contrasted with the old 'class' movements, the central conflict of the contemporary social movements deal

less with labour and economic problems. This is so because the domination which is challenged controls not only “means of production” but also the production of symbolic goods, that is, of information and images of culture itself. Thus, we see that the explanation here is that the NSMS deal with cultural and ethical problems.

4.1 A CRITICAL COMPARISON OF THE RESOURCE-MOBILIZATION AND IDENTITY-ORIENTED PARADIGM

Jean L. Cohen¹² compares the two dominant paradigms of [i] resource-mobilization and [ii] identity-oriented paradigm for the purpose of understanding NSMs. These paradigms are complementary to each other as both include the issues that are left out in one or the other. But the two paradigms are not necessarily incompatible because both of them depend on the key feature of modern civil society to pinpoint the specific elements of contemporary social movements. Cohen writes that since all the NSMs have raised the theme of self-defense of ‘society’ against the state and the market economy and since all of them in one way or another, struggle for ‘post bourgeoisie, post-patriarchal’ and democratic civil society, it would be useful to make a theoretical assessment which would use these aforesaid issues.

4.2 COHEN’S CRITICISM OF TILLY’S PARADIGM

Cohen’s criticism of Tilly’s resource mobilization paradigm is that although Tilly shows that modern collective action presupposes the development of autonomous social and political spaces within the civil society, he takes up only the strategic conditions for the economic transformation, state making of the nineteenth

12 Cohen, Jean L., “Strategy or Identity: New Theoretical Paradigms and Contemporary Social Movements”, *Social Research*, vol. 52, no. 4, Winter 1985, pp. 663-717

century repertoire. He does not focus upon the impact of the universal principles emanating from the 'big structures' of the economy, urbanization and industrialization.

As we see, Tilly's emphasis is only on the mobilization of organized groups and not on the creation of new meanings, new solidarities and new identities.

He studies the social conflict in and over civil society and the form of the political public sphere. These social conflicts are viewed from only one perspective, i.e., as defensive or offensive reaction to change.

Tilly's contention is that group is the main actor in collective conflicts and that it pursues collective interests. He defines groups in terms of two elements: [a] categories of people who share some characteristics, and [b] the networks that link people to each other. Cohen has criticized this definition at three levels —

- i. at the level of collective identity — why would a shared characteristic become relevant for the mutual recognition of group members;
- ii. At the level of consciousness — the connection between the relations of production and the articulation of interests over the long or short run is not automatic;
- iii. At the level of solidarity — what counts as collective advantages and new collective interests are recognized, interpreted and able to command loyalties and commitment.

Cohen's argument is that these issues can be treated as 'givens' but actually are 'achievements' of a group. He says, that these three factors could have been taken as 'givens' in the nineteenth century when the major movements of the time were socialism and nationalism. In these movements, the actors defined themselves with

reference to the nation and the economy. Then the conflict was also about control over the state and the economy. But Cohen writes that in terms of the contemporary movements, the actors do not define themselves with reference to class or nation.

4.3 SHIFT FROM RATIONAL ACTION TO RATIONAL INTERACTION

“In Models and Realities of Popular Collective Action”,¹³ Tilly addresses the aforesaid problems and also makes an attempt to solve the free-rider problem. The resource-mobilization theory makes rationality a basic premise for the mobilization of collective action. But, in the case of a free-rider, it would be more rational to ride free and let the others make the sacrifices. He grants that there is yet no explanation for why an individual joins a collective action or what is the relationship between the individual and group interests. He accepts that the issues of the creation of solidarity and commonality of interest have not been sufficiently explained in the resource-mobilization approach. The solution that Tilly offers is the replacement of models of rational action with models of rational interaction. The study of interaction between individuals could help explain as to how consciousness, solidarities and identities get formed.

Tilly’s claim is that an understanding of rational interaction would need specifications of the actors, their interests, the decision rules adopted by each actor and the values of the elements of the decision rules. He writes that these elements would in their turn, typically concern the probable costs of the various sequences of action that are available to each actor. It would also include probable benefits of each of these sequences and the capacity of each actor to sustain the costs of sequence.

13 Tilly, op. cit., **Social Research**, 663-717

This is a framework for a single actor. To convert it into a model of rational interaction for many actors, Tilly makes the expected benefits and costs for each actor [alongwith some other variables listed above] depend on the action of other actors. Alongwith this, he institutes communication among the actors. Cohen accepts the revision brought about by Tilly in the resource-mobilization approach, but is doubtful about some issues. He states, "... the character of interpersonal ties that constitute and shape social life and that involve so little strategic interaction"¹⁴ could not be adequately addressed even in this revised framework. An explanation of how some collective interests emerge in the mobilization process is not equivalent to an account of the formation of collective identities, ideologies, or solidarities. We are still not offered an analysis of the rewards of collective action from a non-strategic point of view".

Despite the above criticisms, the resource-mobilization approach could still be applied to the contemporary movements. It can help in the correlation of changes in organizational forms, targets and tactics of collective action with changes in the focus and technology of power and resources. It explains the alterations in the relation between state, economy, and society, and transformations in the experiences and structures of everyday life.

4.4 A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF TOURAINE'S APPROACH

Cohen further discusses Touraine's identity oriented paradigm. Although Touraine offers an explanation of the new features of contemporary movements, he

14 Cohen, Jean L., *Class and Civil Society: The Limits of Marxian Critical Theory* [Amherst University of Massachusetts Press, 1982], pp.214-228

does not develop a theory of the type of action presupposed by the thesis of increased reflexivity of the individuals.

Cohen also argues that though Touraine places the action of NSMs in the realm of civil society, he nowhere develops a theory of civil society or a concrete analysis of its institutional make-up.

Cohen writes that Touraine develops a circular argument. This is so because Touraine writes that the contemporary collective action is defined as new because it involves struggle around the areas opened up by the post-industrial society. Then, again, he goes on to write that the post-industrial society is a new societal type because it triggers new forms of collective action.

Cohen also criticizes “the dogmatic aspect of Touraine’s methodology and his hierarchization of forms of social struggle to correspond to the theory of societal types”.¹⁵

As a solution to the problems caused by the lacking in the resource-mobilization and the identity-oriented paradigm, Cohen suggests Habermas’¹⁶ theory of self-reflection for communicative action.

4.5 COHEN’S SOLUTION

Habermas ascribed two interrelated roles to social movements. First, movements as dynamic elements in social learning processes and identity formation.

15 Cohen, *op.cit.*, **Social Research**, p. 701

16 Habermas, Jürgen. **The Theory of Communicative Action**, vol. 1, Beacon Press, Boston, 1984

Through the cultural traditions and new forms of socialization, social movements change the latent rational structures into social practice so that they can find new institutional embodiments. Second, movements take up the cause of democratization and have the potential to revive the public spaces and expand in a wide range of institutions.

In more recent of his works, Habermas¹⁷, makes movements appear solely as defensive reactions against penetration by the state and the market into social life. The central idea here is that modernization involves the separation of the state and the market economy from the society.

NSMS AS SUBMERGED IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Alberto Melucci¹⁸ is a theorist who discussed NSMs as submerged in everyday life and serving as a symbolic challenge to the existing power structure.

The above theory also assign the emergence of NSMs to the transformations in everyday life. The difference here from the previous theories is that he does not take up the analysis of the structural shifts of the cultural factors which cause shifts. Instead, Melucci explains how the NSMs, despite being submerged in everyday life, expose the invisible centres of power.

17 Habermas, Jurgen, "New Social Movements", *Telos*, no 49, Fall 1981, pp 33-37

18 Melucci, Alberto, "New Social Movements" in John Keane and Paul Mien (ed), **Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society**, London, Hutchinson, 1989. Melucci, Alberto, "Ten Hypotheses for the Analysis of New Movement in D. Pinto (ed), **Contemporary Italian Sociology**, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981. Melucci, Alberto, "The New Social Movements: A Theoretical Approach", **Social Science Information**, 19 (2), 1989. Melucci, Alberto, "An End to Social Movements", **Social Science Information**, 23 (4/5), 1984

5.1 NSMS AS COMPARED TO THE OLD MOVEMENTS

Melucci contrasts the NSMs with the old movements. The old movements were mostly for citizenship. They were for the extension of political rights. They were involved with the task of including previously excluded social groups.

Earlier there were actions which were social and political at the same time. But it is not so now. Not because the extension of democratization is complete in the social sphere or because the struggle for citizenship is over, but because the social and political areas have diverged.

The old movements, observes Melucci as have most of the theorists, were homogenizing factors. The NSMs contain a plurality of elements. The NSMs are involved with an alternate definition of sense, meaning and identity. They stand in contrast with the determination of life by impersonal and technocratic power. These NSMs come in conflict with dominant codes and formal regulators of knowledge. The NSMs are submerged in everyday life. They generally remain invisible but make themselves visible when a public policy confronts them. A political stand point usually confines itself to the visible face of mobilization ignoring the fact that what nourishes it is the alternate framework of sense. This alternate framework of sense is found in the day to day life. The challenge of the NSMs upset the dominant set of codes rather than getting in conflict with the political institutions.

5.2 THE POST-INDUSTRIAL/COMPLEX SYSTEM

Melucci's contention is that movements have transformed from being 'characters' to 'signs'. He puts them in the historical context of a post-industrial

democracy or a complex system. Complex systems have a great fragmentation of power at the level of groups and at the level of political decision-making structures. Thus, the central problem of complex system is the maintenance of equilibrium.

5.3 THE DILEMMAS OF THE POST-INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY

The post-industrial democracy as explained by Melucci suffers from three dilemmas —

- i. THE DILEMMA OF SURPLUS VARIABILITY — In a post-industrial society, it is important to have, on the one hand, the account of changeable interests, many sections of social actors and the variability of their aggregated demands and, on the other hand, a set of normative and prescriptive rules to help in equilibrium.
- ii. THE DILEMMA OF UNDECIDABILITY OF ULTIMATE ENDS — With the fragmentation of the structures of political decision-making, there is a losing of sight of the ultimate social-political ends. On the other hand, there is also a fragmentation of power at the level of groups. These groups are not under the control of the state and remain invisible. These groups involve themselves with the decision of ultimate goals.
- iii. THE DILEMMA OF DEPENDENT PARTICIPATION — There is an extension of citizenship and participation and this increases the role of the bureaucracy and planning. This planning spawns a technocratic decision-making centre, which inevitably curtails participation and effective rights.

With a high level of the availability of variables, and the extensive roles of bureaucracy and planning, power becomes invisible. It gets crystallized in the political and social institutions and processes and in the undifferentiated consumption of the great market media.

5.4 NSMS AS AN ATTACK ON THE INVISIBLE POWER

As Melucci writes, the NSMs have been transformed into 'signs' from being 'characters'. As they have become signs, they can affect at the level of new information and technocratic power creations. As signs, they not only challenge the dominant codes of behaviour and the invisible, but excessively dominating power relationship. Melucci writes that it is important to make the invisible power visible because negotiations can be made only with visible power.

5.5 NSMS AS FORMS OF SYMBOLIC CHALLENGE

Melucci states three main forms of symbolic challenge. These attempts render power visible and consequently challenge it.

- i) Prophecy where the actors announce the alternate framework of sense. This alternate framework is based on a personal experience and declares that the operational logic of power apparatuses is not the only possible rationality.
- ii) Symbolic challenge also takes place with the statement of paradox. Here, power is made visible through exaggeration or the reversal of dominant codes or by pushing the code to the limit. This reveals the self-contradictory nature of the rationality of the power codes and conversely proves that what is labelled as 'irrational' by the dominant apparatuses is perhaps dramatically true.

- iii) Representation makes another form of symbolic challenge. As the nature of the movement is symbolic they represent the contradictions of power through expressive language, theatre, video and images of various kinds.

The above mentioned processes render power visible and make negotiations possible. Melucci makes a detailed comparison of the NSMs with the old social movements to bring forth the former's feature of 'newness'. As we saw earlier, he assigns the emergence of NSMs to the features of a complex society or a post-industrial society. He writes that the old movements were untouched by the social conflict [age, sex differences, health, relation to nature, human survival]. The NSMs are shifting from political or economic to cultural grounds. This is so because the post-industrial society does not have an economic basis but the informational symbolic system dominates it. This affects the identity, the time and space of everyday life, the motivation and cultural patterns of individual action. In this setup, the social movement's focus shifts from the external to the internal nature. The old social movements formed only a formal organization but the NSMs include not only the formal but also the informal relationships of individuals and groups which share a conflictual and a collective cultural identity.

The NSMs are not only different from the traditional political organizations but are also autonomous from it. Melucci writes that NSMs are networks of small groups submerged in everyday life. These emerge only around issues.

The new organizational form of NSMs is not just an instrument for the goals as was the case with the old labour movements. Melucci's contention is that the form

of the NSMs is a goal in itself and a symbolic challenge to the dominant cultural patterns.

Though the NSMs appear to be disorganized, inefficient, indifferent to the political power, no great leaders, Melucci finds these very factors symbolizing a qualitative change.

The NSMs modernize institutions bring about cultural innovations but also on “who decides on codes, who establishes rules of normality, what is the space for difference, how can one be recognized not for being included but for being accepted as different, not for increasing the amount of exchanges but for affirming another kind of exchange?”

5.6 SYMBOLIC CHALLENGE TO



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It seems from the above analysis that NSMs operate only at the level of cultural innovations, but this is not true. They also come in conflict with social and political systems when they choose for public mobilizations. So, this is one area where Melucci's symbolic challenge can be measured.

As opposed to the old movements NSMs in their symbolic form can affect the national context and the international relations. When the old movements questioned the bases of economic and political power they found a solution in the control of the economy and the state. But the NSMs make the apparatuses to produce justifications, it pushes them to reveal their logic and the weakness of their 'reasons'. This makes power visible and creates a political relationship between the collective actors and the dominant patterns. Now negotiations and exchanges through confrontations or

mediation become possible. Earlier there was only an authoritative transmission of power.

The space for political relationship creates an intermediary public space 'beyond the traditional distinction between state and civil society'. "An intermediate public space, whose function is not to institutionalize the movements nor to transform them into parties, but to make society hear their messages and translate these messages into political decision-making, while the movements maintain their autonomy".

6.1 NSMs AS A PROCESS OF POLITICIZATION

Melucci's discussion on the NSMs reflects that there is a political content in them. Offe¹⁹ analyzes the 'newness' of the NSMs on the basis of politics. The study of NSMs till now reflect the control of the public policies over the citizens and the efforts of the citizens to negotiate the political elites and the processes which maintain the institutional policy. As with the other issues, there is an attempt to redefine 'politics' as well. The non-political spheres debase political authority. This happens when a non-political sphere, for example, family gets independent of the political institutions, but still functions according to some political design. This amounts to politicization outside the traditional political arena and delegitimises political authority. Clause Offe writes that as the politics of the NSMs operates outside the traditional political arena they seek to politicize the institutions of the civil society. This effort would reconstitute a civil society which would be free from the

¹⁹ Offe, Claus, "New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics" in **Social Research**, vol. 52, no. 4, Winter 1995, pp. 817-868.

bureaucratic restrains, regulation, control and intervention. Just like Melucci, Offe also suggests an intermediate sphere between private concerns and institutional politics. The practices of this sphere would politicize the civil society.

Claus Offe writes that the old movements were concerned with the issue of economic growth, distribution and security, these concerns were a result of the modern welfare state. The NSMs appear to politicize issues which cannot be easily coded “in binary terms”, for example, the intermediary space between the private and the public. Offe writes that this kind of a binary codification is a product of the liberal theory and the welfare state.

6.2 ISSUES OF NSMS

The other aspects that Offe takes up for distinguishing the old from the NSMs are their issues, identity, mode of action, social basis. Offe writes, the issues of the NSMs are body, health, sexual identity, environment; the cultural, ethnic, national and linguistic heritage and identity; the physical conditions of life and the existence of humankind in general. The ‘newness’ is not in the fact that these issues are new but in the fact that the emphasis is on values like autonomy and identity which was not so earlier.

6.3 THE MODE OF ACTION

Offe discusses the mode of action of the NSMs to compare them with the old. He describes two aspects — internal mode of action and the external mode of action. In their internal mode of action, the NSMs in organization do not rely on the principle of differentiation in the horizontal [insider vs outsider] or in the vertical dimension

[leaders vs rank and file members]. In the external mode of action, they use demonstrations as a strategy and other similar actions which make use of the physical presence of people.

Just as Pizzorno²⁰ said that the NSMs have non-negotiable demands, Offe also suggests says that NSMs are incapable of negotiating because they do not have anything to offer in return.

6.4 IDENTITY

With reference to the identity of the actors of the NSMs. Offe writes that these actors do not depend on the political [party, ideology] or socio-economic codes [class or rural/urban] for their identity. Their identity is dependent on the categories of the issues [gender, ecology, locality etc.]. The identity in the old movements were predominantly formed by the political and socio-economic codes.

6.5 SOCIAL BASE

The social base of the NSMs, writes Offe is of three segments of the social structure, namely, [1] the new middle class [human service, profession and/or the public sector; [2] elements of the old middle class, [3] a category of the population consisting of people outside the labour market or in a peripheral position to it [unorganized workers, housewives, retired persons, etc.].

The common features of the aforesaid categories is that [1] their conditions are shaped by direct and authoritative regulation, [2] they have a flexible time

20 Pizzorno, *op.cit.*

schedule. So, we see that there is an alliance between the peripheral or the decommodified groups.

Though the same themes — issues, mode of action, identity and the social base have been discussed the idea for taking it up here has been the fact that this particular analysis is closer to the Indian context.

6.6 FEATURES OF NSMS

An analysis of the above theories bring forth some common features which either form a basis or a characteristic of the NSMs. These features are:

- i) The NSMs are a response to structural changes.
- ii) There is a formation of identity in the process of collective action.
- iii) The consciousness of a common identity develops a sense of solidarity.
- iv) The struggle of the NSMs is for autonomy.
- v) The NSMs gain ideology from the experience of everyday life.
- vi) The NSMs question the political values but do not seek the state power.
- vii) The NSMs encourage direct participation.
- viii) The NSMs bring about a process of democratization.
- ix) The NSMs resist modernization as in the penetration of state and society.
- x) The action of NSMs takes place in the realm of civil society.

With these conclusions, we move on to analyze the theoretical discourse available on the NSMs in the Indian context.

7.1 THE INDIAN CONTEXT

The context of India is at variance from the western context in which the above paradigms have been stated. This is so not only because Indian society has some unique features just as any other society, but also because India is placed specifically as a developing or a post-colonial society in the global context. The western paradigms would broadly apply here but there is a need to study the theoretical discourses which can be specifically applied to India.

Most of the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America were colonies and are now referred to as 'post-colonial' or 'developing' societies. After independence, the post-colonial societies adopted the western model of development and democracy. Two basic values — human development and participatory democracy which are at the core of the new thinking — were not there at the core of the western imitative models of development and democracy. They were also not a part of the mainstream economic development. The conceptualization of the NSMs here has taken place on these lines.

7.2 NSMs AT THE PERIPHERY

Samir Amin²¹ conceptualizes NSMs at the periphery of the system. He explains this with the help of the explanation of the actual existing capitalism as a

21 Amin, Samir, "Social Movements at the Periphery" in Poona Wignaraja (ed), **New Social Movements in the South - Empowering the People**. Vistaar Publications, New Delhi, 1986, p. 78.

world system which he defines as a globalized system that reproduces and deepens polarization world-wide. The nature of the issues that emerges from this polarization is twofold: [1] compradorisation of the Third World, [2] emergence of the popular national power in the Third World. The second theme that he takes up is the manner in which the 'old' national liberation movements respond to the challenge of unequal capitalist development, its historical limits and its contemporary crisis. The third theme that he takes up is the nature of recent developments in the system and their prospects. Do these developments call into question the issues in conflicts? Do NSMs respond to these developments?²² He further writes that the nature of the issues raised by NSMs are on two premises — [1] the unequal development of capitalism, [2] the need for delinking. Unequal development harbours tendencies of polarizing into centres and peripheries. In the periphery it has objectively required envisaging a 'different development' from the centre that results from the periphery's integration into the world capitalist system.

Amin writes that the centres 'structure' themselves and the peripheries 'adjust' themselves²³ with reference to the existing capitalist system. He further explains recompradorisation in this context of the existing capitalist system. The various social classes belong to the logic of the various national formations. The bulk of the 'reserve army' for capital is located geographically in the peripheries of the system. It is the 'reserve army' which is revolting against the expansion of

22 Ibid

23 Ibid., p. 80

capitalism. They question the inequality, refuse to submit to its consequences and on this ground embark on a battle, i.e., as a result, objectively anti-capitalist.²⁴

The second impact of polarization according to Amin would be popular national reconstruction. He writes that most of the revolution of our times are anti-capitalist instead of being socialist [with socialism unfailingly being the aim of the actors]. His argument for this is because they occurred in the backward regions and thus got a complicated nature. The attempt of 'progress' in the capitalist Third World based on radicalization of the national liberation was also not socialist as they still kept the capitalist path of development. The small scale products is entrusted to the capitalist enterprise towards which the government is generally hostile but finally accepts it. The bourgeoisie class in spite of the blow has remained organized and turns any opportunity that comes its way. Conversely, the popular classes were organized just for the popular national revolution, the government works at reducing its autonomy. This class which was not prepared to argue and protest for itself gets marginalized easily.

Amin's another argument is that the unequal development immanent in capitalist expansion has placed on the agenda another type of revolution, i.e., of the people of the periphery. This revolution is anti-capitalist because it is against the capital expansion but is not socialist. These have a complex nature — the expression

24 Ibid.

of their specific and new contradictions which had escaped the imagination of Marx “gives post-capitalist regimes their real content, which is that of a popular national construction in which three tendencies of socialism, capitalism and statism combine and conflict.”²⁵

7.3 NINE THESES ON NSMS

Andre Gunder Frank and Marta Fuentes²⁶ give their nine theses on the NSMs. These are not only exactly placed in the Indian context but it can be applied here because of its features. The following are their theses —

- i) the NSMs are old but have some new features;
- ii) the NSMs differ but share moral motivation and social power;
- iii) the NSMs are cyclic;
- iv) the social base of the NSMs does not have a homogeneous class composition;
- v) the NSMs do not seek state power. They seek autonomy from it;
- vi) NSMs have a new vision and are transformative;
- vii) The NSMs seek to redefine ‘links’;
- viii) There are coalitions and conflicts among the NSMs;
- ix) The NSMs do not benefit from outside advice.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 84.

26 Frank, Andre Gunder and Fuentes Marta, “Nine Theses on Social Movements”, **Economic and Political Weekly**, August 29, 1985, pp 1503-1510

7.4 EARLY INDIAN DISCOURSES

The early Indian discourses came from D. Dhanagare²⁷, T.K. Oommen²⁸, Ghanshyam Shah²⁹ and many others. But these theories could not provide for a comprehensive theoretical framework.

M.S.A. Rao³⁰ was an important work in the area of NSMs. Rao differentiated a social movement from an individual action on the basis of three factors [1] collective mobilization, [2] change orientation, [3] ideology. Rao takes three theories into consideration to study NSMs. There are the relative deprivation theory, the strain theory, and the revitalization theory. The conclusion of Rao is that a NSM is a collective mobilization for change.

M.S. Gore³¹ writes that social movement is a 'process' and a social process in itself is a transaction and an interaction in which individuals take part with reference to their role in the social system. He studies the functions of NSMs in the social system. For him, the 'function' of a social movement is with regard to the 'value system' or the 'pattern of behaviour'.

27 Dhanagare, D. and J. John, "Cyclical Movements Towards the Eternal - Nine Theses on Social Movements: A Critique", **Economic and Political Weekly**, 33(21), May 21, 1988

28 Oommen, T.K., "Theoretical Framework and Empirical Research: Their Interactions in the Analysis of Two Social Movements", **Sociological Bulletin**, vol. 36, no. 2, September, 1987

29 Ghanshyam Shah, **Social Movements in India: A Review of the Literature**, Sage, New Delhi, 1990

30 Rao, M.S.A., "Conceptual Problems in the Study of Social Movements" in self ed **Social Movements in India**, 1985, pp. 1-5.

31 Gore, M.S., "Social Movements and the Paradigm of Functional Analysis With Reference to the Non-Brahman Movement in Maharashtra", **Economic and Political Weekly**, August 29, 1987, pp.1503-1510.

7.5 NSMs IN THE CONTEXT OF AGRARIAN CONFLICT

A.R. Desai³² formulates two hypotheses for the development of NSMs in the present context of insufficient realization of the socio-political implications of the development strategy and technology. These are [1] that agricultural production has rested on the outmoded social structures, [2] the new technology and agricultural development has about in such a way that it has regarded the social imperatives to be secondary.

7.6 NSMs AS ANTI-DEVELOPMENTAL

Gail Omvedt's³³ conceptualization is another approach which is quite close to Samir Amin's conceptualization of the 'post-capitalist regimes'. She says that the capital accumulation on the basis of wage labour and surplus value is only a part of the entire process of accumulation. There are 'products' produced or created under non-capitalist conditions which become "commodities" and are incorporated into the cycle of capital accumulation, thus allowing extraction of surpluses from non-capitalist [even non-human] resources.³⁴ She enumerates on a few of them.

1. The commodity labour power, produced largely by domestic labour under non-wage conditions or non-capitalist relations, allow for accumulation and exploitation.
2. Natural resources accumulated at low or no cost by capitalists.

32 Desai, A.R., **Agrarian Struggles in India After Independence**, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1986.

33 Omvedt Gail, **Reinventing Revolutions**, M.E. Sharpe Inc. Armonk, New York, 1993

34 Omvedt Gail, "Peasants, Dalits and Women: Democracy and India's New Social Movements", **Journal of Contemporary Asia**, vol. 24, no.1, 1994, p. 42

3. The products of peasant labour when in the early phase of capitalism often as unfree, bonded, slave or serf labour and in the contemporary world primarily as “independent” petty commodity producers.

The NSMs are engaged in defining exploitation in the new process of capital accumulation. The workers' movements are there — not for higher wages, but for relief from debt and demands for higher prices for farm products. The agrarian reform is still on the agenda but not to recapture land from the landlords, but to save it from governments projects for dam construction. The environmental movements are giving a call for resources and planning to be made local thus giving a call for 'alternate development' or 'anti-development'. After independence, India took to the path of socialist development. After four decades, there is an explosion of NSMs demanding an alternate path of development.

7.7 EMERGENCE OF NSMs TO COPE WITH THE COLLAPSE OF THE WELFARE STATE

Rajani-Kothari³⁵ explains this through the collapse of the welfare state and of those components of development that were directed to the amelioration and welfare of the underprivileged. The concept of welfare state was to temper the harshness of modern capitalism and technology through the rise of welfare state even though it was the defense of the capitalist forces against radical and revolutionary forces. The collapse of the welfare state saw the rise of the masses. This Kothari attributes to three factors —

35 Kothari, Rajani, “Masses, Classes and the State” in Wignaraja (ed), **New Social Movements in South-Empowering The People**, Vistaar Publications, New Delhi, p. 66

1. The continuing drudgery of so-called work that must go on for the system demands it.
2. The capacity of the ruling classes to break the labour and the working class.
3. The condition of the masses beyond drudgery and exploitation is affected pervasively conditioned by media on the one hand and the deep schism and scare caused by the fundamentalist drive forces on the other.

Rajni Kothari also writes that ‘development’ has led striking dualism of the social-order and ‘democracy’ become the playground for growing corruption, criminalization, repression and intimidation for large masses of the people who survive outside the political process and disparate economy fear from entering the economic process as well.

7.8 THE FEATURES OF THE NSMS IN INDIA

Distinct features of the NSMs in India emerge from the analysis of the theories taken above. These theories had been specified because during the course of reference-work one was struck by the commonalties that were embedded in them with reference to each other and with reference to the western paradigm. These commonalties — sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit — form the distinctiveness of the NSMs.

A very obvious feature is that of the NSMs being in confrontation with the idea of traditional Marxism. The contribution of traditional Marxism was the theory of surplus value and the theory of class in understanding domination and exploitation. But as we see all the NSMs are involved in ‘redefining’ exploitation.

The definition of exploitation brings us to the issue and conflicts regarding the anti-caste movements. To define the anti-caste movement in terms of the exploited dalits would be limiting the movement. The movement today includes the dalits and the shudras. However, the burning issue quite lately, however, has been with reference to the OBC's on the issue of reservation. The exploitation against caste is based on violence, atrocities, a low self image. These factors base themselves on the contradictions among the people rather than the extraction of surplus alone. Here we see that the struggle is against the dominant codes as referred to by Melucci. The exploitation is submerged in everyday life. Similarly, within the factory violence is not a definitive factor but outside in the process of accumulation — plunder, loot and violence exercised through the state is crucial to the extraction of the surplus. This conflict manifests itself in movements against the government projects of the construction of dams. The 'violence' of the state sees the revolution of the people in the periphery, as Amin explains.

Traditional Marxism, rejects private property but condones the state's ownership of property. The NSMs reject the state's role in development or even the ownership of resources. The sole right of an expert over the planning of the resources is also being questioned.

The case of the class in the Marxist analysis has to be challenged and revised to develop a theory of historical materialism that incorporates ideological and ethnic/community features into an analysis of surplus accumulation, contradiction and exploitation.³⁶

36 Omvedt, Gail. *op cit.*, p. 39

Moreover, the NSMs draw in widely disparate and sometimes conflicting actors. At the base there — those are most affected by shift and changes occurring in the environment; the women who have to work extra hours; the tribals who suffer as a result of losing access to forest produce; the fisherfolk who suffers from excessive trawling. But since these conflicts take place in far away places, for a hearing space, they require allies. This mediation comes from voluntary or political organizations which work with the affected people or in their areas. Another set of actors active in such struggles are those related to the media — journalists, film-makers etc.— who are involved in reporting about and communicating the protesters messages to world outside given the nature of the issues, there is a strong need to involve middle-class professionals — scientists and researchers, doctors, engineers, technologists and lawyers both to examine laws governing the issues and to argue cases in the courts. Civil and human rights groups may come in as clashes become inevitable and severe. Many of these struggles have attracted sympathetic policy-makers and bureaucrats. Thus we see that there is a chain of actors — the ones with a functional role and also the ones removed from the actual struggle. In fact, NBA takes the help of the international actors since the project is co-financed by the World Bank. But this international participation could raise questions of political ethics.

There can be another line of argument as well where the environmental movements not only comprise the tribals but Brahmans and Rajputs as well in the Chipko movement; the kunbi-maratha peasants in the Bali-Raja anti-drought movement in the Shangli Dist. in Maharashtra; in the Narmada Bachao Andolan we find the kurmi peasant of Madhya Pradesh as well as the tribals. Among the peasant

movements, the Shetkari sangathan defines “peasant” as anyone whose livelihood depends on agriculture — be it a peasant, labour, artisan or petty shopkeeper; the Ryot Sangh of Karnataka calls its movement a “village movement” and not a “peasant movement”. For this Gail Omvedt argues that if a class character to be given to these movements, it has not to be with reference to their membership or leadership but with reference to their goals and the effects of their agitation on the overall system of exploitation.³⁷ The question of exploitation and oppression goes beyond economy in the case of women. In 1958, Fredrich Engels said that “. . . full freedom in marriage can become generally operative only when the abolition of capitalist production, and of the property relations created by it has removed all these secondary economic conditions . . .”³⁸ He absolutely attributes exploitation of women to the economy. In 1970 a manifesto for New York Radical Feminist wrote that “the political oppression of women has its own class dynamic and that dynamic must be understood in terms of previously called “non-political”— namely, the politics of ego.³⁹ This manifesto is a completely different explanation than what had been putforth by Engels. Even in India and elsewhere, the issue of wife-beating and alcoholism can be put under this. Here my attempt is not to say that no economic exploitation exists, but the attempt is to see beyond ‘economic’ exploitation. Patriarchy is an area where the invisible power operates to exploit. Thus, we see that the debates with reference to the ‘class-politics’ define ‘class’ in terms of private property and exclude any relationship of

37 Ibid

38 Joshi, P C , **Man and Development**, vol IX (1), March 1987, p 298

39 “Politics of the Ego: A Manifesto for New York Radical Feminists” in Firestone, Shulamith (ed), Notes from the Second Year Women’s Liberation, **Writings of the Radical Feminists**, New York, 1970, p. 124.

exploitation and surplus extraction between toilers, for example, landowning small peasants and those controlling other conditions of production, the market or the state itself. The state is seen as a system backing up exploitation but not as a direct exploiter or as the state powerholders as exploiters. The exploitation of non-wage labourers with petty commodity producers, sellers of minor forest produce, or subsistence producers is missed. The extractions of nature's product is also missed and thus the issues related to the destruction of nature.

7.9 THE CONTEXT FOR THE EMERGENCE OF NSMS

The NSMs take up these aforesaid issues around women, dalits, low castes, peasants, farmers and tribals and since 1980s NSMs have become the predominant feature of the Indian politics. After independence, Nehru set the country on a socialist path of development. The last two decades have seen a decline of the Congress hegemony, the collapse of the 'Nehru model', the sudden placing of the economic issues at the centre of politics in the form of the government's "new economic policy", and the rise of the B.J.P. and other communal forces. As against this, the 1989 National Front Government representing the democratic-left forces fell, the alliance cracked. Then there was the debacle in the split of Congress [1] following the Hawala Scam. The present year will be earmarked in the files of Central Bureau of Investigation for the number and magnitude of the anti-corruption cases against the bureaucrats and the top level politicians.

The NSMs came up in 1972-5. 1972 saw the birth of the Dalit Panthers, of new farmer's organization in Tamil Nadu and Punjab of AASU, of JMM, SEWA; it was also the year of the rise of the Chipko movement. With reference to this Radha

Kumar writes that there was the Moist insurgency in the late 1960s. The early 1970s saw its repression and disintegration. This gave a belief that a revolutionary transformation of society can take place only if different oppressed groups, such as tribals, subordinate castes and women, first represent and organize themselves and then coalesced to fight their common enemy.⁴⁰

Gail Omvedt argues that “clearly it had something to do with the defeat of the Naxalite revolts following upon the 1967-68 crisis in Indian development and return to power of Indira Gandhi. There is no hegemonic democracy and liberty ideology which genuinely comprehends the issues of the movements and the concerns of socialism for equality and development”.⁴¹

The above statement speaks a great deal on the politics of representation of the parties and the role of the state for equality and development. The Indian state, like any other post-colonial state had the task of nation-building at its behest. The Indian National Congress had a highly hegemonic place owing to its role in the national liberatory struggle. But the attack of the NSMs has been on the state.

7.10 THE FEATURES AND ROLE OF NSMS

In recent years, the demand for ‘democracy’ has been intense replacing the demand for ‘socialism’. This is a new phenomenon since demand for ‘democracy’ was restricted to the certain segments of the bourgeoisie. Samir Amin explains the term ‘democracy’ which is the means of national protection and self-assertion of the

40 Kumar, Radha, “The Women’s Movement”, *Seminar*, No. 355, March 1989, p. 21

41 Omvedt, Gail, op cit . 1994, p. 41.

periphery, i.e., the instrument of delinking, in the sense of the subordination of external relations to the logic of an internal development.⁴²

The paradigms of development and democracy as of now can be characterized as [1] highly centralized decision-making power; [2] industrialization model; [3] an exploitative process; and [4] transfer of resources from rural to urban centres. Democracy and development does not see participation of the people as subjects in matters which affect their lives. Democracy and development have been a part of the social-political structures for more than 2,000 years. Some other values then were a holistic view of life, sharing and caring for the community beyond self-interest, harmony with nature and a rational use of resources, democracy in labour relations, exchange labour, common ownership of land and other productive assets. The knowledge system that evolved then would propell the system with its own rationality. In the NSMs one finds a reflection of this rhythm. This is so because inspite of the western model of development, post-colonial states are full of visions of a good society. They have a different intellectual framework which emanates from their own value and knowledge system. In many cases, which can be due to westernization, colonization and bureaucratization have diluted this holistic view of life.

An attempt of the post-colonial state was to realize democracy through the politics of representation of the political parties. But, the political parties have failed in the representation of interests. Rajani Kothari writes that the trade centres of representation, i.e., the political parties and trade unions have gone corrupt and

42 Amin, Samir, *op.cit.*, 1986, p. 89

ineffectual, respectively.⁴³ It is in this vacuum that the NSMs are emerging as a countervailing power. A point that should be made clear here is that these NSMs have no claims to make for the state power. In spite of their political attacks on state policy, they are not 'antipolitical' rather the attempt is to redefine political action. The attempt of the NSMs is to capture a different concept of the social power.⁴⁴ This conception is important because organizations built around traditional, dominant conception of power where power equals state are doomed to lose the faith of the people.

In the process of redefining political action, one finds eruption of the NSMs outside the confines of the traditional political organizations and institutions. For example, as Radha Kumar writes that the dowry issue and wife-beating invaded the realm of the family. Here the public-private dichotomy was broken by groups of women demonstrating outside the offices and houses demanding the intervention of the state.⁴⁵

The ecology perspective also overlaps between personal and political as the issue can no longer be left to experts or the government. The understanding of the persuasiveness of male power led feminists to reject the older equation of politics and the public sphere in order to actively question the assumptions underlying the very categories of public and private.⁴⁶

43 Kothari, Rajani, op. cit., 1986, p. 66.

44 Amir, Samin, op. cit., p. 89.

45 Kumar, Radha, op. cit., 1989, p. 21.

46 Kauffman, L.C., "The Anti-Politics of Identity", *Socialist Review*, vol 20, no 1, Jan-Mar 1990, p.78.

Barbara Epstein in her article “Rethinking New Social Movements” quotes Marcus Garvey — “Prejudice of the white race against the black race is not so much because of color as of condition; because as a race, to them, we have accomplished nothing; we have built no nation, no government; because we are dependent for our economic and political existence”⁴⁷ She, then, quotes Stokley Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton — “our basic need is to reclaim our history and our identity from what must be called cultural terrorism, from the depredation of self-justifying white quilt. We shall have to struggle for the right to create our own terms through which we define ourselves and our relationship to the society, and to have these terms recognized”.⁴⁸ Garvey’s nationalism was firmly inscribed within the public sphere tradition shared by the social movements of the early 20th. Carmichael and Hamilton, by contrast, the key site of political activity had shifted to collective identity fashioned through discourses, as part of what Carmichael called the struggle for psychological equality. The struggle for psychological equality is what the dalits are struggling for after suffering from exploitation in terms of a low-self image, social discrimination and violence.

47 Garvey, Marcus, “The Philosophy and Opinions” in Amy Jacques Garvey (ed.), **The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey**, vol. 1, the Majority Press, Dover, MA, 1986, p. 18.

48 Kauffman, L. A., *op. cit.*, 1990, p. 80.

K. Balagopal⁴⁹ in a reply to a suggestion by Sumanta Banerjee where Banerjee suggests physical ruthless suppression of the Hindutva forces writes that the fanatical chauvinism of Hindutava has to be rejected as a value system if it has to be fully defeated.

All the above references refer to a solution which lies outside the realm of traditional political organizations and institutions. The NSMs in their efforts have democratized the issues of everyday life which were traditionally unattainable and unthinkable for the masses — they see development as a political process rather than a technological process.

Thus, we see that NSMs are involved in “redefining exploitation” and are ‘political’ though different from the traditional political parties. They also put forth a moral vision’. They are engaged in understanding exploitation and not explained by classical traditional class analysis. These movements are coming up because these forms of exploitation have intensified in modern capitalism. The NSMs brings out the incapacity of the macro-organization of the poor and the weaker and exploited sections to act ineffectively against trends like poverty, inequality, landlessness etc. against a growing centralization of power, repressive measures of the state to crush

49 Banerjee, Sumanta, “Sangh Parivar and Democratic Rights”, **Economic and Political Weekly**, August 21, 1993, p. 66.

any local movements. The state, political parties and their mass fronts are being devalued as there are eruptions outside the confines of the traditional politics.

CHAPTER II

SELF EMPLOYED WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION [SEWA]

Self-Employed Women's Association [SEWA] is a movement of the self-employed women, women employed in the informal sector and the women employees of the unorganized sector. It is an all women's movement which through the experiences of the member-women in everyday life has evolved an ideology. This ideology, primarily aims at empowerment of the self-employed women.

This chapter gives a historical account of the movement, analyses its dynamics, the issues, the mode of action and the problems that it faces. As Gore defines a NSM as one which has a vision for a good life, for a transformation. SEWA has been striving towards this aim since its inception.

1. A HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF SEWA

Ahmedabad, the birth place of SEWA, is the textile mill city. Since the beginning of this century, industrialized jobs have drawn people to Ahmedabad not only from the villages of Gujarat, but also from Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. While some of them found jobs in mills, many people in need of employment adapted their skills to other niches of life in the city. The kinds of occupations that have evolved around the mills portray a graphic picture of the way self-employed women have earned economic niches out of whatever kinds of opportunities exist.

Since the mid-thirties there has been a serious decline in the number of women workers in the textile mills due to technological modernization which has displaced low skilled women's labour. Although men were also engaged in low skilled jobs, they were reabsorbed into the industry and trained in the use of more technical equipment but women were generally excluded from this upgrading. While in 1925 women accounted for 20 per cent of the textile workers in the mills, in 1975, SEWA found that there were only 2.5 per cent women workers in the same industry.¹

Following the early technological displacement of women workers, there was an overall decline in the textile industry in the sixties. Because of the outdated processes and machinery of India's oldest mills and strength of the textile unions, some mill-owners began to give out work to home-based or shed-based power-looms where protective legislation could not be enforced. Families who have migrated and have no land to return to have adapted to whatever means of livelihood they could get for their survival. Many women in retrenched families have turned to waste paper picking, rolling incense-sticks or *bidis* or *papads* to supplement the family income. For a majority of the families, these are the sources of income. Though originally the prosperous mills had attracted people from the villages to Ahmedabad, the inward migration has not declined with the decline of the mills. On the contrary, successive droughts, increasing landlessness, and displacement of traditional skills in the villages have contributed to a growth in immigration of people in search of jobs.

In background of these problems Ela Bhatt became increasingly aware of the complexities and contradictions of modern India finding niches for its traditional and

1 Jhabvala, Renana, "Closing Doors - A Study on the Decline in Women Workers in the Textile Mills of Ahmedabad", SETU, New Delhi, Tej Press, 1985.

industrial aspects. Bhatt had been deeply affected by Gandhi's non-violent movement in the independence struggle which she experienced in Surat, Gujarat, through her grandparents' participation. During college she worked on the 1951 census and saw face-to-face the degraded conditions in which innumerable families were living. In 1955, after attending law school, she began to look for a Gandhian job and a way to work on some of the problems of poverty and injustice. After a meeting with Ansuyabehn Sarabhai, the President of the Textile Labour Association [TLA] who had founded the union alongwith Mahatma Gandhi in 1917, Bhatt decided to use her legal skills to represent the labour problems of the TLA workers.²

1.2 THE BIRTH OF SEWA

Bhatt's initial three years at the TLA [1955-58] were spent preparing proposals which were aimed at representing the TLA in labour court. These proposals later got translated into labour laws. After her marriage to Ramesh Bhatt — a committed activist and professor of economics — and the birth of her two children, she returned to work in 1961 with the Ministry of Labour of Gujarat. By 1968, when the TLA offered her the position to head the women's wing, she took it up because she knew that she wanted to work specifically on the labour problems of women. At this time, the women's wing was engaged in imparting training in stitching, typing, embroidery and other conventional skills to the wives and daughters of mill-workers. Bhatt was convinced that poor working women in the city needed access to a worker's union, a more comprehensive training and social services.

2 Ela Bhatt in an Interview with Kalima Rose in 1988 in her book: **Where Women are Leaders: The SEWA Movement in India**, Vistaar Publications, New Delhi, 1992, p.40

The first chance for such organizing came in 1971 when a group of migrant women headloaders and cart-pullers who were living on the footpath without shelter approached the TLA for assistance in housing. As Bhatt questioned them about their housing needs, other issues began to surface. They earned only 10 to 15 paise per trip, never amounting to more than Rs.3 per day. The traders lost track of how many loads they carried; they were paid the same amount whether they carried the bales to the next road or to the market two hours' walk away; they often had to sit all day and get only one or two trips; most of the money would go into the pockets of contractors who owned the carts. The organizers of the women's wing called a meeting of all these women and after discussing their problems, they decided to form themselves into a group and tried to work together to improve their situation. After the meeting ended, Ela went back to the TLA and wrote a newspaper article outlining the problems of the cloth market headloaders. The merchants quickly countered the charges in their own article. The women's wing reprinted the merchant's claim of fair treatment on cards, and distributed them to the newly formed group of headloaders to use as leverage. They were going to try to hold the merchants to their claims.

In the meantime, Chanda Papu — a women from the Vaghari community came to meet Ela Bhatt. Vaghari is a community in which women exchange clothes for stainless steel vessels and plastic basins taken on a credit from a local shop-keeper. They pay 10% interest per month on the retail priced vessels which form the basis of their trade. With the help of their husbands and sons and brothers, the Vaghari women mend the clothing the women have traded to make them into a new

looking garment. These repaired garments are then sold to low income customers. In 1971, Chanda related to Ela Bhatt the difficulties of the garment trade fraught with debts and police harassment, juggled between feeding the family, pregnancies, and the problems of family life in the slums. British laws are still found in Indian books which relegate small traders to the ranks of illegal 'encroachers', even though it is the most widespread, traditional way of trading. Assisted by these laws, the policemen threatened them with arrests, confiscation of their goods and terrifying them into paying small 'fines'. Because of the widespread belief that they are thieves, Vaghari are arrested, beaten, sentenced, and fined summarily, without evidence to implicate their guilt.

There was a meeting of the Vaghari women suggesting they also get the benefits the TLA was helping the textile workers get. Thus, on 3 December, 1971, the Self-employed Women's Association was born. Ela Bhatt was made General Secretary and Arvind Buch, TLA's President, was made the President of SEWA.³

1.3 THE INITIAL ACHIEVEMENTS OF SEWA

The same definitions of labour unions that SEWA set out to change posed the first obstacle. Indian labour laws only recognized unions where specific employer-employee relationships existed. SEWA upheld that unions did not necessarily have to be formed against an employer. There could be unions just for the workers. After four months of negotiations with the government, the authorities finally agreed to

³ Rose Kalima in her book writes - - This account of Vaghari trades and work problems compiled from 1988-89 interviews with many Vaghari women in Ahmedabad who helped built SEWA in its first decade

SEWA's broader interpretation and registered it as a legitimate trade union in April 1972.

Running its initial surveys and struggles, SEWA found that 97% of the members were slum-dwellers, 93% were illiterates, and on an average each woman had four living children. The bottom-line for every woman they met was that she did not have enough money. Vendors, who generally had a higher income than most of self-employed women, attributed their financial problems to their daily losses to the police or municipality and the high interest they paid on working capital. Among the women who were stitching garments, pulling carts and making wood and metal utility items, the most common problem was that they did not own their own tools of trade or production and had to hire them at an exorbitant rate. It was also observed that 70% of the surveyed women had to carry their children along with them to the work site. Children of market-vendors were exposed to filthy conditions and danger of traffic on the roads where their mothers sold goods. Children of cart-pullers were exposed to extreme heat and vehicular pollution, as they were slung in cradles below the carts, or rode on top of loads if they were slightly older.

For these and countless other issues, the self-employed women did not have either the leverage or the awareness to ask for a better deal from anyone.

SEWA retaliated by developing generalized strategies to overcome these conditions. They articulated their goals in a small pamphlet they published, "Profiles of Self-Employed Women". These goals were: [i] to be healthy in order to avoid loss of work days, [ii] to be literate enough to avoid being trapped into the corrupt practices, [iii] to improve their skills by better training in the modern sense in order to

increase their bargaining power, [iv] to learn to save in order to build their own capital or to make use of credit facilities for productive purposes.⁴

The initial struggle of the SEWA secured self-employed women access to institutional sources of credit at fair interest rates. They gradually got a great number of women workers rallying around them. On the health front SEWA concentrated on changing the conditions which contributed to women's health. SEWA helped organize the agricultural workers — pre-dominantly women — into a union called the Agricultural Labour Association [ALA] for the implementation and the raise of the minimum wages. They organized the Chindi workers, the displaced artisans and got associated with National Dairy Development Board to include women into their training programmes.

1.4 SEWA AND TLA

When the women's union was gaining ground, tensions had been mounting between SEWA and TLA, which had much of their executive leadership in common. Most SEWA organizers trace the emergence of the tensions to Ela Bhatt's reception of Magsaysay Award in 1977. They believed that TLA leaders wanted credit for the work of SEWA, since they represented the older, parent organization. TLA blamed Bhatt for travelling abroad more and more often, they charged her with neglecting her duties in the women's wing sewing classes. Also, SEWA's work in developing the self-employed was sometimes perceived as clashing with the interests of the TLA; advancing credit and building alternative economic structures were not considered union work. Some of the people whom SEWA had to confront directly because of

4 Bhatt, Ela, *Poriles of Self-Employed Women*, Ahmedabad. SEWA, 1976, p. 19.

their exploitation of the self-employed were allied to the TLA. The growing personal and political strength of all the women in the organization was disconcerting to the TLA leadership in a society where women are taught to refer to men. The underlying tension surfaced into a real crisis between the two organizations over an incident in the city on which the two took very different stands.

In 1981, tension and violence in the city stemmed from a conflict of reservation of seats in the medical college for Harijans. Higher castes and medical students and their supporters launched an agitation to do away with the reservations. Both indiscriminate and targeted violence between the two groups became widespread. TLA and SEWA had both members of the communities which would benefit from this. TLA, with its close association and affiliation with the National Labour Organization had members from the middle class and white collar workers. The TLA leadership, thus, decided to maintain a policy of silence. But Ela Bhatt citing Gandhi's commitment to remove untouchability wondered how they could remain silent. Thus at a public meeting in the presence of TLA leadership and the government officials she spoke in favour of the reservations.

Bhatt was held in contempt by the TLA for extreme indiscipline. Organizationally the TLA was built on a hierarchical structure. Decisions were made from top down and were highly politicized. SEWA, on the other hand, made joint decisions democratically and strictly avoided any alliance with a political party. For SEWA social work was about empowering women rather than a welfare programme. Women moreover are often viewed as objects of reform rather than active participants

in change on development. SEWA wanted to extend the concept of empowerment even to the Harijans.⁵

A month and a half later, in May 1981, Bhatt returned from a Board meeting of the Women's World Banking — where she headed the Board of Directors — to find her telephone disconnected and a letter from TLA leadership advising SEWA to vacate TLA premises. Within a month the TLA leaders resigned from the executive positions they held in SEWA, the TLA deposits to the tune of Rs.300,000 were withdrawn from SEWA bank, Ela Bhatt was expelled as an honorary member of the TLA and the TLA resolved to sever off all links with SEWA.⁶

This is SEWA's side of the story. The reasons given by the TLA were these

- a) it was simply a matter of indiscipline on Bhatt's part that she had undertaken too many foreign trips without permission, and violated the silence policy on the reservation issue; and
- b) SEWA was not ordered to leave, but gladly accepted their advice in a usual weaning process after their initial teething problems were over.⁷

The final blow of disaffiliation which came in August that year casts doubts on the validity of the TLA's assertions. However, it occurred at the General Council

5 Kishwar, Madhu, "Gandhi on Women", **The Economic and Political Weekly**, 5 Oct, 1985, p. 1695.

6 Sebstad, Jennifer. "Struggle and Development Among Self-Employed Women". **USAID Report**, p. 166.

7 **Economic Times**, 8th June 1981.

meeting of the National Labour Organization [NLA], a Gujarat based federation of 36 unions. All 36 unions had as their President one of the TLA office bearers, except for SEWA — After Buch and his successor, Mooharlal Shukla, had resigned. At the meeting, without any discussion or debate, the meeting passed a resolution to disaffiliate SEWA from TLA. Then, Mr Buch said, “I built a wall of poor women around TLA to protect us from Indiraji’s attacks, but now that the Emergency is over, we no longer need them”.⁸ In the early seventies, when Indira Gandhi split the Congress party, TLA was associated with the old party which was ousted from power. In the sweeping socialist reforms which followed, groups like TLA had to shore themselves up against policies which threatened to undercut their old political control.

What Madhu Kishwar observed in 1988 as a trend in rural women’s movements was SEWA’s experience almost a decade earlier — “In most cases, the leadership begins to make a special appeal to women to join when the movement is facing a crisis like government and police repression or a backlash from oppressive forces. At such times, the leaders call on women more easily because the community is compelled to suspend the normal rules of behaviour in order to cope with the emergency and the men become more willing to encourage women’s participation”.⁹

8 Rose, Kalima, op.cit.

9 Kishwar, Madhu, ‘Nature of Women’s Mobilization in Rural India’, *The Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXIII, Nos. 52 and 53, 24-31 December, 1988.

2.1 THE UNION ACTIVITIES OF SEWA

Women have been deeply engrained to believe that they are weak and that they themselves have to overcome their weakness before they can bring any change. The major focus of any SEWA meeting is to build unity.

The problems in building unity arise not only out of competition in getting benefits from the contractors, traders, landlords but also at work places; in private spaces, at the municipal taps, housing spaces, at the slums, through historical communal and caste divisiveness, community and social structures which limit women's mobility and action, and also from the negative legal and policy climates.

Union organizing is a continual process of distilling issues and building issues around them; raising the consciousness of workers, society and government; pressing for policy change; and enforcing the policy for women to get their due rights.

Interaction out of her family and immediate community helps her allay her fears and to build her weak self-image, as well as to change the divisive patterns of behaviour which characterize the crowded communities where she lives.

SEWA works at three levels — first, at the grassroots level, against the direct exploiters like the bidi contractors or extorting policemen; at the second level, against an ineffective labour enforcement bureaucracy and legal system; and at the third level, against unfavourable or absent national and international policies and laws.

The structure of the union which this process works through is based on trade groups. The 33 trade groups represent diverse communities of women who choose

group leaders from among themselves. The group leaders for each trade meet every month as the Trade Committee, to discuss the ongoing problems and strategies of action. They are the main catalysts for action in each trade group. They, in turn, choose leaders to send to the Trade Council, which includes all the trade groups of SEWA. For every 100 members in a trade, one representative is sent to the annual Trade Council meeting to learn about the work of other trades. From this 300-members Council, the Executive Committee of the Union is elected.

The Executive Committee of 25 trade teachers and 4 staff organizers meets once a month to make the major political decisions of the organizations — whether a trade group will strike, what resolution they will put before the government or the public, etc. Their resolutions cover both work issues [demands for a commission on self-employed women, and minimum wage notification] and social issues [alcohol prohibition and sale]. The Executive Committee assigns work to the paid organizers of the union, who carry out their mandates. The Executive Committee members are the inspired leaders of SEWA— unanimously dedicated, articulate, and empowered women. The majority of the Executive members are in their 40s and 50s, due to their experience and the fact that once relieved of the burden of children rearing, they have more time to devote to the unpaid work of the union.

2.2 THE SEWA BANK

Anandibehn Budhabhai, savings mobilizer and a former vendor when questioned on the building of the bank said that “How do we illiterate women do things? With our hands. By walking, by carrying loads on our heads, by talking to

each other. This kind of work makes us strong. This is how we built this bank. By walking all over this city. Talking and talking to our sisters, carrying small amounts of cash from so many women until we had one big amount. We have built a strong bank from this work, and this bank has made us stronger too”.¹⁰

The bank of SEWA is a unique organ of the movement and has been a serious bank for self-employed women through a pooling of their own money, setting their own terms for sanctioning loans, putting themselves on the Board of Directors, hiring their field-workers from amongst themselves and using the service of the greater SEWA body to support women’s other needs.

A Board of Directors comprises ten long standing trade leaders from different self-employed occupations, four organizers with professional training, and one cooperative manager. They take decisions and sanction loans. Trade leaders have an insight into both the financial and psychological workings of the self-employed while the professionals have the skills and literacy to link the trade leaders insight with banking economics and the formal guidelines and cooperative regulations of the RBI from which the bank receives its authority.

According to Ela Bhatt women are to be encouraged to build assets for two reasons, first, women’s income is used mostly for food, clothing, and shelter, the more cash income that goes into her hands the faster the family’s quality of life goes up, and second, there is an increasing number of women headed households and in times of crises assets are the only things which help them.

10 Rose, Kalima, op. cit., p. 172.

2.3 WOMEN'S COOPERATIVES

SEWA's cooperatives span diverse trades and services. Besides building the highly successful cooperative bank - which inspired SEWA to pursue organizing more cooperatives - women have formed artisan cooperatives, vendors cooperative, dairy cooperatives, land cooperatives, and labour and service cooperatives.

Urban members belong to only one occupational cooperative: [a] artisan cooperatives include Chindi stitchers, weavers and cloth block printers; [b] service cooperatives include child care or health care services provided by the self-employed women for the member community; [c] vendor cooperatives include kerosene vending, fish vending, vegetable supply service to government hospitals, schools, and jails; and [d] labour cooperatives provide industrial cleaning services to large institutions on a contract basis, and collect recyclable waste materials from government institutions.

In rural areas, women are engaged in diverse seasonal occupations and often they are members of more than one cooperative. Simultaneous membership in land-based, artisan, and/or dairy cooperatives can provide the necessary resources to keep women employed throughout the year.

Although there are now almost forty SEWA cooperatives, these cooperatives had to pass through a long process where they overcame caste barriers, cheating and competition within the cooperatives, men's resistance to putting assets into women's hands, old feuds within the community, space constraints for production and equipment, and the problems working class women face when trying to develop the

necessary links with businessmen. In the larger scheme, cooperatives have to overcome women's low skill levels; low literacy levels; government policies which allocate the resources they need to large industry; and cumbersome bureaucratic hurdles which prevent cooperative registration or credit being allocated to women.

Samubehn talks about their dairy cooperative, now ten years old, run and membered by all women. When asked about the history of their cooperatives, she asks in response "what have we not fought to keep this cooperative going? Illiteracy, men dominating our accounts, extortion, droughts, the tactics of mill traders to lure members out, government refusal to registering women's cooperatives. But even during the last three years with no rain, we made one and a half to two lakh rupees every year."¹¹

The above statement reflects the gut, determination and conviction that SEWA has managed to instill among the women, women showed solidarity first as women and co-workers regardless of caste lines and thereby overcame a major obstacle of collectivity. Yet when poor women acquire assets, it questions the old rules.

2.3 SEWA'S COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICE

SEWA runs a community Health Service and the basic goals of this programme are to increase women's knowledge and control of their bodies, and to organize more women around health issues. Whenever the union has been weak or on new ground, they have found health organizing to be one of the most effective,

¹¹ Ibid., p. 206.

non-threatening entry **points** for bringing new women into SEWA. Where the union was already strong, SEWA **found** that health care was the most **urgent** need after economic issues that the women **wanted** to **organize** around.

The SEWA health service looks after the understanding of family planning in a perspective favourable for women. It looks after the occupational health issues and negotiates with the employees. As SEWA lobbies to reduce occupational hazards faced by members, the bottom line is always women's basic work conditions. If there is no regulation of working hour or minimum wage remuneration, a woman hardly has a chance of improving her precarious health balance. SEWA's largest challenges in the field of women's health lie in collaborative work between the union and the **health team** in pressing for work legislation to cover self-employed women.

2.4 ANALYSIS OF SEWA AS A MOVEMENT

Is SEWA a new social movement? Gail Omvedt in her book **Reinventing Revolutions**¹² characterizes new social movements as —

1. They are new social movements because they have a broad overall organization, structure, and ideology aiming at social change.
2. They are 'new' because they through their own ideologies define their exploitation and oppression, in 'new' terms related to traditional Marxism. Yet having clear differences from it, they define their exploitation and oppression, the system that generates these **and** the method to end it - in 'new' terms. They cannot be seen just a 'popular movements' under the

¹² Omvedt, Gail, **Reinventing Revolution**

vanguardship of the working class, their parties and their ideology. They reject this relationship and question the ideology on the basis of their experience.

3. These are movements of groups which are ignored as 'exploited' by the traditional Marxists [women, dalits, shudras] or who are exploited in ways related to the new processes of contemporary capitalism. These had been left out of the conceptualization due to a preoccupation with "private property" and wage labour.
4. A full analysis of this position requires a modified Marxism, i.e., a historical materialist analysis of the new capitalist process.

SEWA does have an organization, structure and ideology for social change. With regard to being a 'new' social movement having its own ideology through which it defines exploitation and oppression on the basis of its own experience is completely applicable to SEWA. They rejected a working-class understanding which took only men in its ambit in their own socio-economic context. A woman's working-class status, her socio-economic context, her personal and emotional needs are very different. A Working class women is not only a worker, she is also the person around whom the family life revolves. She has to look after the day-to-day expenditure even though there is no asset in her name, she has to look after the children's health, education [if in a position to get the facility] - and this also is to be done in the fetters of patriarchy. Traditional Marxism explained exploitation only in the terms of the working class. It did not have any place for patriarchy - a system which spells excessive oppression for women. A working-class woman in her relationship with

the tradesman or the employer functions with her limitations as a worker and a woman. SEWA has made continuous efforts to make the power structure of the society understand this. But first it had to make efforts to make the women get conscious towards their double-exploited life.

Chaya Datar summarizes the following characteristics of female labour —

1. The cheapness of female labour constituted the following elements — low money cost of wages, low cost of reproduction of female labour [i.e., the woman does her subsistence work herself, the man keeps a wife to do it]; their role as “supplementary” income earners based on the concept of the family wage and the “breadwinner”; their belonging to the reserve army of labour power.
2. The submission at work [among other things due to their role as reserve army]
3. Reproduction of subordination at the work place [for example, use of sexual pressure by male supervisors].
4. Interplay of capital and patriarchy [i.e., wage work seem to be an escape from strict patriarchal control at home].
5. Sexualization of skills [i.e., work categorized as unskilled is often in fact based on very intricate skills acquired in house work].

6. Different forms of struggle [for example, when finding it difficult to unionize, women may find other ways of struggle or finding other unorthodox ways to boycott the production process.¹³

These are some of the issues which were experienced by the women workers now associated with SEWA. But once they realized this, there was no going back. Not only do they participate as a worker they also inspire other women to be a part of the Union by their 'better existence' which has happened with the help of union. Tarabehn is one such lady who through her association with the bank explains and coaxes other women to be a part of the Bank's Savings Service to help themselves. Thus, we see that the ideology formation of the movement, even though it deals with the working class-section of the society is formed from the dialectic experience of gender and class.

2.5 AN ALL WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

SEWA's experience with its parent body TLA was that the TLA being a labour union could not affiliate itself with the problems of the labouring women. The leadership could not be sensitive to the women's existence and issues. SEWA decided against male membership as they with experience felt that they would simply take over and SEWA's purpose would be lost. Talking about the first meeting of SEWA after the split from TLA, Ela Bhatt said, "There was such a sense of liberation that there was no man heading the meeting and telling us what to do or think. There was no one we had to be careful not to hurt if we did not pay him enough respect. It

13 Datar, Chaya, 'Redefining Exploitation (I.S.R. E), Bombay, 1982 republished in Gabriele Dietrich's *Reflections on the Women's Movement in India — Religion, Ecology and Development*, p.64.

was our first meeting without a *topee* [literally “hat”, but meaning, male leader]. We passed a resolution that day that men would not be allowed as members or as office bearers of our union. Although insulted at the way we had been thrown out, really, we felt most powerfully, an incredible sense of freedom. It felt like a daughter’s righteous struggle. We had left the nest”.¹⁴ SEWA’s all female membership provides its members and women everywhere strong female role models and embues their pursuit of self-reliance.

There can be a criticism of exclusive membership and whether it is conducive for social change. Improvement in the conditions of the women has a cascading effect in the improvement of the conditions of the entire family, and hence the society. Since poverty takes hardest toll on women, it would be better if the relief is managed by them. As many occupations are family occupations, setting up networks and support for women contributes to the work of the entire family. Putting the family land in the women’s names protects the entire family from vulnerability, migration, separation and starvation. Or when the union demands identity cards for bidi workers, their entire family gains access to the medical clinic. If a vendor member’s husband has been harassed by the police, for example, SEWA will take up his case also. The balance which has been shifted through an all-women’s membership, however, is which family member gets access to benefits. The fact that the resources are channeled through the women’s hands is the radical difference. In SEWA’s nature as an all-women’s organization is reflected a strong relationship between the self-emancipation of a woman and social emancipation. Their

14 Rose, Kalima, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

autonomous existence came about not as an assertion of autonomy but as an understanding of their relationship with the 'others'. SEWA did not desire to create a separate destiny for women but rebel led against the impossibility of being a woman despite a willful and a habitual renderance of support to the other. SEWA's all women member organization has a vision of the alternative.

2.6 THE INFORMAL SECTOR

The labour force in the unorganized sector is characterized by a high incidence of casual labour mostly doing intermittent jobs at extremely low wages or working at extremely uneconomical low wages. There is neither job security nor is there any social security. These workers work in extremely health hazardous conditions. The organized sector finds it advantageous to decentralize production units of larger registered units and make use of this vulnerable sector. There are several such examples of the unorganized sector neither competing with nor giving rise to the organized industry, but subsidizing the organized industry through super exploitation of women workers. This is facilitated by the existing patriarchal attitudes, land practices which make women vulnerable in the family, in society and in the labour market.

The other self-employed women-employed women, such as vendors, domestic workers, rag pickers, prostitutes, etc. provide many services to society without any direct relationship to an employer. Therefore, they do not derive benefits from an employer or from the state. Thus being completely unrecognized and unprotected they are the worst of women workers.

Sewa as a forum gives self-employed women the place to demystify the formal world and its procedures at their own pace and at the terms of their own understanding.

The informal sector refers to home-based workers. This sector has its own specific socio-economic, legal and occupational health issues. These issues are also specific to each group. This sector had to be acknowledged due to the vast proportions of workers present here and, especially in the third world where an increasing amount of the world's production takes place. Workers who are in the informal sector are the basis of viability for many formal sector industries. The home-based piece rate informal workers absorb all the risks and fluctuations of the market when any technological upgradation is introduced which displaces these workers, unemployment levels then further depress wage rates. As Samir Amin has conceptualized the 'adjustment' of the periphery to the centre similarly these trade group lines get adjusted involuntarily according to the existing capitalist system.¹⁵

Shramshakti Report of the National Commission on self-employed women and women in the informal sector reported that 94% of the women workers fall within the category of unorganized and self-employed and that women workers are under reported by 30-40 per cent of their actual numbers. This is because they do not fit in any one occupational category. They are defined as marginal workers and rendered statistically invisible as far as their economic contribution is concerned.¹⁶

15 Amin Samir,

16 **Shramshakti Report** of the National Commission on Self-Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector, Government of India, 1988, pp 27-30.

The activities where women outnumber men are the traditional activities which are either unpaid or low-paid. Of the modern skilled jobs like transport work, train manufacturing, electrical wiring, plumbing and carpentry; women account for less than one per cent of the workers.¹⁷

Defining new social movements Alberto Melucci writes that they are involved with an alternate definition of sense, meanings and definition of identity which contrast with the increasing determination of individual and collective life by the impersonal technocratic power. They reflect conflict regarding codes of formal regulators of knowledge; and the languages which organize our learning processes and our social relations. They assume the form of networks submerged in everyday life.¹⁸

SEWA, on the basis of everyday experience of its members announces that existing framework of nationality of the state and the society is not the only one and they have very tangentially put forth alternate frameworks. They have proven that what the dominant apparatuses like patriarchy explain as 'irrational' for example, the owning of assets by women, the social mobility of women, the entry of women into organized unions, are not only excessively 'rational' but also put up a struggle against the politics of violence and silence deeply enmeshed in their 'irrationality'.

These efforts of SEWA in the informal sector have not only rendered them visible but also the power that exists submerged and contained and perpetuated by everyday life. This power could be in the form of our ever favourite patriarchy, state

17 Ibid., pp.15-57

18 Melucci, Alberto, op. cit., p. 247.

apparatus, bureaucracy, the political institutions, technology, the world-capitalist order.

2.7 SEWA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE POLITY AND POLITICS

SEWA and TLA both had roots in the Gandhian philosophy, but one remained static whereas the other developed an independent status, its own style of functioning and politics. SEWA's growth, popularity and dynamism was slowly influencing the patriarchal and hierarchical relationship between the two. Though working as one organization with a common ideology, TLA male leadership could not take the 'growing up' of SEWA. Involvement of SEWA with the issue of Harijan reservation, its attempts to curb communal violence, its attempts to identify with and form an international identity of self-employed women - not with an aim of consuming power for itself but with an aim of empowering the women - was not appreciated by the TLA leadership. Mr Arvind Buch who had served as the first President of SEWA at the time of the disaffiliation of SEWA from TLA said, "I built a wall of poor women around TLA to protect us from Indiraji's attack, but now that the emergency is over, we no longer need them". In the early seventies when Indira Gandhi split the Congress party the TLA was associated with the old party which was ousted from power. In the sweeping socialist reforms which followed, groups like the TLA had to shore themselves up against policies which threatened to undercut their old political control. TLA acted with regard to its relationship with the state power. SEWA in contrast has never been in the area of political power for its own sake. There have been times when SEWA has put up recommendations which have got accepted and

there have been times when SEWA has had to face still opposition for even very basic needs from the formal system.

SEWA's initial credit plan was benefitted by Indira Gandhi's central government's plan to eradicate poverty. The government put pressure on nationalized banks to grant one per cent loan of their portfolios to families falling below poverty line. With reference to TLA at the time of fixing up of minimum wages the labour ministry intervened with the landlords on the behalf of SEWA. Rajiv Gandhi as the Prime Minister appointed Ela Bhatt as a member of Parliament in the Rajya Sabha and head of a Commission on Self-employed Women. Though there was a lot of fanfare about the commission the central government took little action on the 'shramshakti' report.¹⁹ There are innumerable instances when SEWA has had to face problems in the form of resistance from formal organizations.

SEWA has also had a lot of problems with police services of the state in their attempts of not only acknowledging their need to sit on the pavements and sell their goods, but the police has gone far ahead in beating them, confiscating their goods [which meant starvation for a whole family], extorting 'fines' and openly taking bribes from them. The police accustomed to hierarchy like the bureaucracy has proved to be a hard nut to crack.

Rajni Kothari writes that it was the excessive centralism which did away with the local levels of political power. This led to a direct dependence of local problems and issues on the central leadership. This happened at the time of Mrs Gandhi's Prime Ministerial tenure. The growing expectations of the populace pointed to a need

19 Rose, Kalima, *op.cit.*, p. 106.

for a structural change in the system but instead produced a politics of postures, a purposely diffused populist rhetoric aimed at the poor and the dispossessed.²⁰ This led to a political style that was seeking to establish a direct link with the masses and evoked symbols of solidarity and blind trust in charismatic leaders and, in turn, undermined the importance of intermediate institutions and mediating structures. The idea of institutions being sensitive to the social reality eroded and this permitted voluntary action outside the state apparatus.

Andre Gunder Frank and Marta Fuentes, write in the fifth thesis of their analysis that new social movements do not seek state power, they seek autonomy from it, “state power is a *sine qua non* of a social movement and state power would negate the very essence and purpose of most social movements. They aim at grassroots participatory democratic and bottom up self-determination for the things that have been denied by the state. The state has also failed to protect the livelihood and the identity of the people. As we see with SEWA, it is the frustration and disappointment of the women with the state institutions, political institutions and the socio-economic power structures which has resulted in their search for alternate politics.

The Indian state as a participatory democracy has failed to keep up to the aspirations of the people. Robert Dahl says that for a democratic-polity to be participatory in its highest order it should nurture the enactment of the principle of

20 Kothari, Rajni, *State Against Democracy: In Search of Humane Governance*, Ajanta Publications, 1988, p. 22.

autonomy.²¹ — having a priority over any other objective.²² SEWA signifies this struggle for autonomy which the state on its own has failed to offer.

2.8 SEWA AND MODERNIZATION

In modern age ‘modernization’ very simplistically refers to industrialization of a socio-economic system. Ela Bhatt in an interview says that “we talk about industrialization a lot not because we are pro-industrial or anti-industrial. The question is what does industrialization do to the employment of millions of workers? We are worried that its cutting employment. How can it be called “development” if it is disemploying, semi-employing, or making part-time, or taking away the assets of so many millions of people?²³ There is a certain medicine used on crops that kills the plants which women make rope from, displacing an entire occupation. As Rajani Kothari has written about the effect of technology that in a technocratic society there is only 30% of the population which can be a participant and the rest 70% is easily marginalized and dispensed with.

An international report writes that modernization, technology and development help men with their areas of work — ploughing, irrigation and harvesting, but leaves women to continue their back-breaking work of weeding,

21 *Principle of Autonomy refers to individual being free and equal in the determination of the conditions of their own lives, i.e., they should enjoy equal rights in the specification of the framework which generates and limits the opportunities available to them.*

22 Dahl, 1985, p. 65.

23 Rose, Kalima, op. cit., p. 232.

thinning, transplanting by hand or with primitive knives and hoes.²⁴ Mechanization leads to retrenchment of women as compared to men. In modern industrial society jobs have been created on the assumption that workers have no domestic responsibilities.

Another study observes that the failure to recognize rural women's work in the developmental planning means that practical policy interventions are not only detrimental to women themselves, but also to the rest of the community. It further states that the generally negative consequences of 'external influences' [colonialism, incorporation into the world capitalist system, world religions] on the lines of third world women, represents an intrusion of outside influences and ideologies into rural communities should be taken care of by the planners.²⁵

SEWA with reference to the above issues has been conscious. Their ideology and policy formulation does not come from any paradigm of knowledge but is based on personal experience. They have not only helped the women in their union but have also gone global with their influence. Ela Bhatt is the chairperson of women's world bank and SEWA members are frequent visitors to other countries.

3.1 SEWA AS A NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENT

SEWA as a societal project which by going 'beyond capitalism', attempts to resolve the contradictions that capitalism in reality cannot transcend like the issues of

24 **Women A World Report, A New Internationalist Report**, Metheun, London, 1985, p. 16.

25 Whyte, Robert Orr and Whyte, Pauline, *Rural and Asian Women Status and Environment Notes and Discussion Papers No.9*, Institute of South East Asian Studies, Singapore.

women garment stitchers and paper pickers. Paper pickers, in fact, do a great service to ecology and yet lead a very condemned life. SEWA also deals with the sense of self-respect.

SEWA's attempt is not about 'conquering the state power', but that of a different conception of the social power to be conquered. This conception is important because organizations built around traditional, dominant conception of power where power equals state are doomed to lose the faith of the people and thus their legitimacy. They reject party politics and stress on the many sided social content of the power that has to be developed. SEWA stresses on anti-authoritarianism in state and leadership, party and ideology. They react against the whole burdensome heritage of the historical formation of "women".

SEWA as a response to the structural changes is a NSM. This is so because it is the structuring of the market economy which affects the lives of the women.

The identity of the women has seen an emergence due to SEWA. The women see themselves collectively sharing a consciousness which emerges out of the mobilization process. Women see their problems as specific to their own existence.

The development of identity sees a growth of solidarity amongst the women. They feel close to each other, empathise with each others problems and develop a sense of togetherness.

SEWA as a movement seeks autonomy with reference to the lives of its members. Here autonomy is related to the women's access to resources and benefits.

SEWA sees a direct participation of its members in the decision-making process and in the implementation of it. This direct participation brings about a sense of belongingness.

After the above analysis of SEWA, one can say that it proves to be a model of NSMs. With the kind of effectivity it has carried its work it has been able to kindle not just hope but many lives.

CHAPTER III

THE CHIPKO MOVEMENT

A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Chipko as an environment movement came up in the 1972-73. It is a struggle of the people for access to resources. It is a movement for autonomy at the structural and cultural level, the participation comes from the local people. Though Chipko has managed a world-wide support.

This chapter studies the movement, its ideology and its struggle. All these themes would be analyzed in terms of Chipko bring a NSM.

The roots of Chipko movement go back to several decades. History has several protest movements in this area.¹ Earlier forest movements in the Garhwal-Himalayas were against the colonial destruction of forests. The introduction of zamindari system transferred the common village resource into the private hands of landlords. The large-scale felling of trees for non-local commercial needs for British resulted in the massive destruction of natural forests.² There are several instances of popular revolt in pre-independent India. The monuments erected in memory of Birsa Munda, leader of revolt in Ranchi [Bihar] and other martyrs on the banks of the Yamuna in Tilari [U.P.] etc. are proofs of such revolts.³ The protection of village

1 Guha, Ramachandra, "Scientific Forestry and Social Change in Uttarakhand", **Economic and Political Weekly**, vol.20, November 1985, pp.1939-52. Ranajit Guha (ed), **Subaltern Studies**, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1982-85.

2 Shiva, Vandana, "Ecological Movements in India", **Alternatives**, vol. XI, No.2, 1986, p. 225-73

3 Bahuguna, S.L., **Chipko: A Novel Movement for Establishment of Cordial Relationship Between Man and Nature**, Tehri-Garhwal, Chipko Information Centre, 1980, p. 1

forests and the opposition against any sort of destruction is about a century old in Tehri-Garhwal.⁴ There is also a link between earlier forest movements in Uttarakhand to the swarajya movement in 1920-21. In Uttarakhand, the century began with a mass revolt against colonial forestry and later became a part of the swarajya movement.⁵ The forest movements in Uttarakhand were intensified as years passed, despite the violent opposition from the state. One instance is that, in 1930, a group of people who agitated against the restrictions of their forestry rights were indiscriminately fired at by the armed forces, killing many.⁶ This agitation at Tilarī of Rawai region initiated a long chain of protest movements in Uttarakhand. Thus we see that ever since the commercial exploitation of forests was intensified and the people's forestry rights were curtailed, they rose in revolt to assert their traditional rights and protect forests.

THE RISE OF CHIPKO

There is a difference of opinion on the actual date of beginning of the Chipko movement. Bahuguna, a prominent leader of Chipko says that it was started on 30 May 1969 during the 'zilaadan' of Uttarakashi in the wake of Acharya Vinoba Bhave's Gram Swaraj movement.⁷ One of the important events which followed, paved the way for actual starting of the movement. It was in 1972, when the villagers protested against a sports goods company from Allahabad which came for felling the ash trees auctioned to them by the Uttar Pradesh government. Villagers were

4 Dogra, Bharat, **Forests and People**, New Delhi, 1983, Published by the Author, p. 62

5 Bahuguna, S.L., op.cit., 1980, p. 3

6 Dogra, Bharat, op.cit., p. 44.

7 Bahuguna, S.L., op.cit., 1980, p. 3.

previously denied even small scale consumption of these trees. Led by Alam Singh, the headman of village, all villagers of Mandal resolved to hug the trees even if axes split open their bodies. The labourers and agents of the company were forced to turn away from the village without felling a single tree.⁸

This remarkable event was led by Dashauli Gram Swarajya Sangh [DGSS]. It is a labour cooperative formed in Gopeshwar town of Chamoli in 1964.⁹ It was aimed at creating employment opportunities by letting up forest based small scale industries. They were the main beneficiaries of ash trees which were denied to them by the administration. C.P. Bhatt, a sarvodaya worker who later became one of the prominent leaders of chipko movement, gave leadership to their early resistance.¹⁰ After this, there were several incidents of resistance to felling trees in different parts of Uttarakhand. All groups of people actively participated in the movement.

Collective efforts of the people from different villages in Uttarakhand, especially women resulted in a virtual halt to tree felling in most of the area. Forest officials, contractors and armed men were at a loss compared to the women's non-violent resistance coloured with emotions. This was largely felt in incidents like those in Reni. Reni forest, near Indo-Tibet border is part of the badly denuded catchment area of the Alakananda and its tributaries. About three thousand trees were auctioned there by the forest department. On 3 March 1974, when all menfolk went to Chamoli town for receiving their overdue compensation, labourers marched

8 Weber, Thomas, *Hugging the Trees: The Story of the Chipko Movement*, Delhi, Viking, 1988

9 See for details, Weber, Thomas, op.cit

10 Bahuguna, S.L., Op.cit., 1980, p. 4.

towards the forest. Women under the leadership of Gaura Devi resisted the felling. That night the women of Reni guarded all possible routes leading to the forest to resist any intrusion. This was the first occasion on which women participated in a major way.¹¹ Soon after the incident, the state government appointed a committee to enquire into the validity of the demands of the Chipko movement. This committee recommended a moratorium on the communal exploitation of Reni and several other forests of Alakananda catchment for a decade. Similar incidents of collective resistance occurred in Rampur, Nainital, Henwalghata, Bhgudev valley, Dungri-paitoli etc.

Although the objectives and strategies of the Chipko movement are common in almost all areas, there are narrow differences in selected areas. Sarvodaya ideology is an inspiration in most of the villages. In some areas the movement is identified with Bahuguna and in some other areas with Bhatt. Studies on the Chipko movement often mention differences between Bahuguna and Bhatt regarding the approaches and strategies of the movement. Bahuguna like some American historians Lynn White and Thodor Roszakk stressed the role of religious belief in man's attitude towards nature and proposed a return to pre-industrial mode of living. Guha says that Bhatt stressed on the need of 'alternate technology'. Another study views Bahuguna as a 'purist Gandhian conservationist' who saw preservation of forest in an ecological context as an end in itself and Bhatt as one who stressed integration of people's needs

11 Tripathi and Mishra, **Chipko Movement : Uttarakhand Women's Bid to Save Forest Wealth**, New Delhi, Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1978.

with the sustainability of the forests.¹² The differences in the approaches and strategies of Bahuguna and Bhatt are enumerated in several other studies.¹³

Apart from the approaches of Bahuguna and Bhatt, the perspective of Uttarakhand Sangharsh Vahini [USV], a local organization is also dominant in the movement at least in some areas. USV, gaining support from Marxian ideology, stresses the idea of ecology oriented socialism. They are sharply opposed to the state and not reluctant to use violent means.¹⁴ Thus, we see the presence of two mutually opposing ideologies here viz., Gandhian, non-violent and leftist, violent. Dashauli Gram Swarajya Sangh [DGSS] workers also do not totally endorse Bahuguna's approach. Against Bahuguna's call for total moratorium on the felling of trees, they wanted the continuation of existing industries and letting up of new industries in the area. Therefore, they cooperated with the forest officials in some areas in a reciprocal manner. They allowed the forest officials to cut trees from 'not-so-sensitive' areas and in return the forest officials provided them resin, timber and other forest products for the small scale industries. Then we see that Bahuguna's opposition to the use of forests for any kind of consumption, including local consumption, has isolated him from several other groups and activists in the area.

Although the sarvodaya ideology greatly inspired the movement, there are instances of violence in some places. For example, in October 1977 in Nainital the agitation of Chipko activists against the auction of trees led to violent clashes with the

12 Sharma, Kumud and Velayudhan, Meera, **Women in Struggle : Two Case Studies of Peasants and Workers, Working Papers**, New Delhi, Centre for Women's Development Studies.

13 Bandhopadhyay, J., Shiva, Vandana, "Chipko", **Seminar**, no. 330, February 1987, pp 38-39

14 Dogra, op. cit., pp. 59-60; R. Guha, op. cit., 1989, p. 184.

police. Some set on fire the Nainital Club building located nearby causing heavy damage. This incident gave a bad name to Chipko movement. But leaders of the movement in Nainital denied their involvement in the incident.¹⁵

Another point to be mentioned regarding the movement is its strong religious content. There are several folk songs and slogans which are rooted in the religious and cultural heritage. They propagated the Chipko ideas through 'Bhagwadkatha', story of Lord Krishna, depicting the relationship of man with the inner self, society and nature. The close association between social protest in the region and popular religions has been stressed by scholars. Guha and Gadgil, for example, have mentioned that the ideology of the social protest in this region was heavily overlaid with religious symbolism. In the imagery of famous Hindu epic, 'Ramayana', the British government was portrayed as a demonic government [Rakshas Raj] and the King emperor equated with the very personification of evil, the demon King 'Ravan'.¹⁶ There is also a blending of Indian cultural idea with the global ecological ideas. Swami Chaitanandji of Rishikesh undertook a month-long tour to bless the people in their struggle. He related the spiritual message of Indian culture with the scientific ideas of western ecology which have emerged after the Stockholm Conference.¹⁷

Though motivated by the scriptures and religious rituals and symbols, the Chipko activists were not at all 'fundamentalists'. That is evident in the fact that

15 Dogra, op cit , p 60

16 Gadgil and Guha,

17 Bandhopadhyay, J & Shiva Vandana, op.cit., 1987, p. 35.

even the religion or faith would not affect the determination of women if any manifestation of faith was seen to be destructive to the forests. One example of this is their fight against the felling of trees at the time of pilgrim season in Badrinath. Women of Pulna village took away the implements of labourers and they resisted the felling of trees.¹⁸

Now let us look at the general demands of Chipko and the extent to which it succeeded in achieving them. The following are the main demands and perspectives of Chipko movement as stated by S.L. Bahuguna —

1. its stress on 'permanent economy' rather than a destructive economy;
2. The felling of green trees for commercial purposes should be stopped at least for ten to fifteen years until green coverage of at least sixty per cent of area is restored as proffered in the National Forest Policy of 1952;
3. More plantation of trees with capability of holding soil and water conservation should be taken up at war footing to enable the villagers to be self-reliant for basic needs.¹⁹

Demands of Chipko²⁰ have centred around two different aspects in early and later stages. In the early stages, the view is that the forests should be used more to generate local employment and income through forest based industries. Bahuguna, then felt the presence of some local vested interests in the deforestation. He, therefore, took the 'controversial step' of going back on some of his early statements.

18 Guha, R., op.cit., 1989, p.163.

19 Bahuguna, S.L., op.cit. 1980.

20 As mentioned earlier, the demands and strategies are not fully similar in every place and all time because of the ideological differences of Bahuguna, Bhatt, U.S.V, D.G.S.S., etc.

After that his basic concern was to demand a total ban on commercial exploitation of forests and a total change in the forest policy.

The Chipko movement has succeeded in resisting the felling of trees for ten years in 1300 sq. km. of the upper catchment area of river Alakananda. As a result of the struggle, felling of green trees has been suspended in many parts. The biggest achievement, according to Bahuguna, is the enlightenment of the laymen regarding the protection of trees and the nature conservation.²¹

THE COLONIAL APPROACH TO ECOLOGY

A characteristic of the Indian civilization has been its sensitivity to the natural ecosystems. It is said that the codes of visiting the important pilgrim centres, like Badrinath in the sensitive Himalayan ecosystem, included a maximum stay of one night so that the temple area would not put excess pressure on the local natural resource base. In the pre-colonial indigenous economic processes, the levels of utilization of natural resources were generally not significant enough to result in drastic environmental problems. They were useful social norms for environmentally safe resource utilization and people protested against destructive resource use even against the kings. A major change in the utilization of natural resources of India came with the British who linked the resources of this country with the direct and large-scale non-local demands of western Europe. Natural resource utilization by the East India Company, and later by the colonial rulers, replaced the indigenous organizations for the utilization of natural resources like water, forest, minerals, etc.

21 Bahuguna, S.L., "People's Response to Ecological Crises in the Hill Areas" in Bandopadhyaya and others (ed.), **India's Environment: Crises and Responses**, Dehra Dun, Netaji, 1985, Chipko Message, Chipko Information Centre, Silyava, 1984.

that were mainly managed as commons. The colonial intervention in the natural resource management in India led to conflicts over vital renewable natural resources like water or forest and induced new forms of poverty and deprivation. Changes in resource entitlements came in conflict with the local people's age-old rights and practices related to natural resource utilization.²²

The building of the railway network is a major landmark in the history of Indian forestry. In 1864, a Forests Department was set up hastily with the help of German experts as a result of tremendous destruction of accessible forests which aimed at supplying durable timbers. Himalayan pines proved to be the best and for a period of 14 years [1850-1864] the forests of Bhagirathi valley were leased to the British by the then rulers of Tehri.²³

All commercially insignificant weeds were eliminated permanently. These broad-leaved species provided fodder, fuel, food and fertility to the soil. Their place was taken by pine and this change in species had a disastrous effect on ecology which was the permanent economy of local people. With the disappearance of these forests, water resources started drying up, soil erosion was accelerated. The prevalence of 'chis' led to soil acidity. Tapping resin was another form of exploiting forests commercially. During 1920 the number of resin channels tapped were 21,35,000 while in 1921, it was 2,60,000. This increase led to exporting turpentine to the UK and the Far East.²⁴ Consequently, during World War II, felling and sawings were

22 Bandopadhyaya, J. and Vandana Shiva, Political Economy of Ecology Movements, **Economic and Political Weekly**, June 11, 1988, p. 1223.

23 Dobhal, Harsh, "Chipko: Social Background of an Environment Movement", **Mainstream**, January 18, 1992, p. 15.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 16

pushed into the remotest areas which had so far not witnessed even the shadow of the modern form of development. Alongwith this was the colonial policy of reservation of forests and the denial of villagers' rights of access which led to the creation of resistance movements in all parts of the country. The Indigo movement in eastern India, Deccan movement for land rights or forest movement in all forest areas of the country, the western ghats, the central Indian hills or the Himalaya, were the obvious expressions of protest generated by these newly created conflicts. The Forest Act of 1927 intensified these conflicts and the following years witnessed widespread forest satyagrahas as opposition to the new forest laws intensified.²⁵

THE POST-COLONIAL PERIOD OF DEVELOPMENT

The conflicts resulted by the colonial modes of natural resource exploitation could not, however, grow with a local identity. With the advancement of anti-colonial People's movement at the national level, these local protests merged with the national struggle for independence. With the collapse of the colonial rule internationally, and the appearance of sovereign independent countries in the Third World, together with India, resolution of these conflicts at the local level became a possibility. While the political independence vested the control over natural resources with the Indian state, the colonial institutional framework for natural resource management did not change in essence. Where colonialism ended, the slogan of economic development stepped in. The Indian state had no alternate method of development other than the one left behind by the British to respond to the aspirations of the people. The same institutions and concepts, nurtured and

25 Bandyopadhyaya, J. and Vandana Shiva, "Chipko", *Seminar*, no 330, February, 1987, pp.38-39.

developed by the colonial rulers were put to objectives which were exactly opposite to those of the colonial period. Concepts and categories about economic development and natural resource utilization that had emerged in the specific context of capitalist growth and industrialization at the centres of colonial power were raised to the level of universal assumptions and applicability.

The ideology of the dominant pattern of development derives its driving force from a linear theory of progress, from the vision of Enlightenment which was universalized all over the world, especially in the post-war development decades. This ideology of development equated development with economic growth, economic growth with market economy, modernity with consumerism and non-market economy with backwardness. The ideology became a homogeneous monolithic order which appropriated all the diverse traditions.

Vandana Shiva writes that the development projects were based on the notion of the 'national interest', and every local interest felt morally compelled to make sacrifices for what seemed the larger interest.²⁶ The function of a post-colonial state should be such that it becomes the means of national protection and self-assertion of local identities by delinking itself from the subordination of external relations to the logic of internal development. But the path of development which was taken up there was a mix-up of human progress with development and a further mix-up of development with modernization which is treated as synonymous to meeting the standards of a developed industrialized society. Rajani Kothari writes that the grounding of politics in the market makes 'profitability and market efficiency' the

26 Shiva, Vandana, "North-South Conflicts", *Frontier*, January 25, 1992, p. 11

sole criterion for organizing society which is immoral as it implies ecocide, ethnocide as a result of its homogenizing thrust.²⁷ He further explains that people have been reduced to being victims by processes of homogenization and victimization based on the effort to create a homogeneous world. Here, the citizens become objects of three projects — development, secularism and security. The three projects are interrelated as the development project based on narrow principles of economism is centralizing, homogenizing and secularizing.

We have seen that in the Enlightenment project the agent of progress for man is the increasingly effective application of reason to control the institutional, cultural and physical environment. This process merges with the nationalization of the state and statization of reason where the latter is characteristic of the theories of the reason for the state to be. Just as the modern natural scientists set aside the actual human being as the subject of the live experience of the world, so, ever more evidently, has been done by the modern state in the path of development.

In the core of the 'modern' thinking is that the present is more important. Discounting future in the course of economic activity will show up only in long term as has been seen in the case of exhaustion of natural resources.

Thus, we see that the framework that has influenced the development process in the past half century, assumed that there were 'developed' countries and 'developing' countries and that if the experience of the former, alongwith some capital and technology, was transferred to the latter the gap would be narrowed. The

27 Kothari, Rajani, *State Against Democracy: In Search of Humane Governance*, Ajanta Publications, 1988, p. 2.

objectives and processes were viewed in economic terms and great reliance was placed on economic factors and centralized decision-making to achieve results. This framework assumed that rapid economic growth could take place if there was central planning and control of the economy [by the state or private sector] as a 'top-down' process, with emphasis on industrialization, modernization and urbanization. Capital, the factor in short supply in the so-called developing countries, was seen as the main input into the process. Internal capital accumulation, it was assumed, would be assisted by free and massive inflows of foreign capital and technology. The cumulative benefits of growth in the modern sector were expected eventually to 'trickle down' automatically or at best to be handed down through administration.

Thus, the model of development in India under the post-colonial period was —

1. highly centralized decision-making power;
2. industrialization model;
3. transfer of resources from rural to urban centres.

As the scale of economic development activities escalated from one five-year plan to another, the disruption of the ecological processes that maintain the productivity of the natural resource base started becoming more and more apparent. The classical model of economic development in the case of the newly independent nations resulted in the growth of urban-industrial enclaves where commodity production was concentrated, as well as of quick exhaustion of the internal colonies

whose resources supported the enhanced demands of these enclaves.²⁸ Increasingly it is becoming clear that these classical concepts and priorities are being used as an alibi to direct ‘development’ at the national level, while the calculated minority elite is the main beneficiary of these ‘development’ processes.

The Chipko movement came up as the people’s response to the threat to their survival and a demand for the ecological conservation of the vital life support systems. The resource demand of development has led to the narrowing down of the natural resource base for the survival of the economically poor and powerless either by direct transfer of resources away from basic needs or by destruction of the essential ecological process that ensure renewability of the life supporting natural resources.

The most important and universal feature of Chipko is that it redefines the concept of development and economic values of technological efficiency, of scientific rationality — it has created a new economics.

Samir Amin’s contention is that capitalist expansion was and continues to be globalized, that is, it involves local development open to the world system. He says that the nature of the ‘actually existing capitalism’ which is defined as a globalized system is one which reproduces and deepens polarization worldwide.²⁹

Chipko is critical of the international lending institutions, whose finance fuels the process of the monetary growth oriented economic development at the cost of

28 Bandyopadhyaya, J. and Vandana, Shiva, op.cit., p. 1224.

29 Amin, Samir, “Social Movements At the Periphery” in Poona Wignaraja, **New Social Movements in the South Empowering the People**, Vistaar Publications, New Delhi, 1986, pp.96-100.

ecology and survival. Thus, it is also not surprising that the international lending institutions and the elite of the recipient countries look down on the ecology movement as obstructionists and anti-progress, since they are committed to obstruct ecological destruction and halt the process that results in progress for a few and regress for the many.

Giorgio Ruffolo writes that after World War II, and well into the 1960s and 1970s, debates about growth in industrial countries and development elsewhere have virtually been done away without taking into account land and its services, labour, or capital, or both together were seen as the determining factors of production those whose availability [in terms of quantity and quality] constrains economic possibilities and performances. In a sense, the idea of [natural] scarcity was lost-displaced by the [often only implicit] belief that man-made economic activity could overcome any physical limit. The environmental crises of the recent years, increasingly severe and far reaching, represent a powerful reminder of the crucial role of land as a productive factor - and a precious and endangered asset. Land has to be seen as a natural and environmental resource which is used in economic activity. The Chipko movement is a campaign for forest resources at the scientific, technical, economic and especially the ecological levels. It is not a narrow conflict over the local or non-local destruction of forest resources. At one stage, the demand was for a bigger share for the local people in the immediate commercial benefits of ecologically destructive forest resource exploitation. It has now evolved a demand for ecological rehabilitation. Since the chipko movement is based upon the perception of forests in their ecological context, it exposes the social and ecological

costs of short term growth oriented forest management. This is clearly seen in its slogan which claims that the main products of the forests are not timber or resin, but soil, water and oxygen.

The Chipko movement has been successful in forcing a fifteen-year ban on commercial green felling in the hills of Uttar Pradesh, in stopping clear felling in the Western ghats and the Vindhyas, and in generating pressure for a national forest policy which is more sensitive to the people's needs and to the ecological development of the country.³⁰ Unfortunately, it has often been naively presented by vested interests as a reflection of a conflict between 'development' and 'ecological' concern, implying that 'development' relates to the material and objective basis of life while 'ecology' is concerned with non-material and subjective factors, such as scenic beauty.

J. Bandyopadhyaya and Vandana Shiva write that in the final analysis, the dichotomy between 'development' and how scientific knowledge is generated and used to achieve it is very clear in the two slogans on the utility of the Himalayan forests, one emanating from the ecological concepts of Garhwali women, the other from the sectoral concepts of those associated with the trade in forest products.³¹

The slogan of soil, water and pure air has become the scientific and philosophical message of the movement and has laid the foundations of an alternative forestry science, oriented to the public interest and ecological in nature.

30 Bandyopadhyaya, J., and Vandana Shiva, *op cit.*, 1987, p 33.

31 Ibid.

CHIPKO AND ISSUES IN POLITICS

In India today, all questions lead to politics, nothing can be solved except through the instrumentality of politics. At the same time politics has lost its orientation. There is a widespread loss of confidence in the political process and its utter inability to solve the basic problems of the country and its people has become glaringly evident.

The crisis is not merely political. Caught between a decaying tradition and the dislocating onslaughts of modernity, Indian society is in unprecedented grip of violence, confusion and turmoil. Chipko brings to the forefront all relevant interactions between man, nature and patterns of resource use mediated by larger social, economic and political forces. There is a demand for decentralization and democratization. It exposed the state and the powerful. State supported private interests ranged against local communities and their subsistence needs. Not political ideals but the practical compulsions of land and water management demand democratization at the grassroots in the just sharing of the benefits with the poor and the privileged.

The Chipko movement operates outside the traditional party system and reflects people's disappointment and frustration with the political process, political parties and the state institutions. Though it gets inspiration from the Gandhian philosophy of satyagraha, its association with the Congress Party is nowhere to be found any where in the literature available on the movement.

Chipko as a movement questions the constitutional arrangements adopted by the Indian republic. Its demands for equity and social justice in the form of access to natural resources reflects the needs and aspirations of the people. Equity and social justice can be sustained between individuals if the individual's entitlement to these rights is respected and treated equally before the law. Thus the modern Indian state should protect and nurture individual's rights, a state of affairs in which no one is entitled to improve their own vision of a "good life". It challenges the inherent rationale of our industrial civilization and its political institutions. By its sheer existence, it questions the political procedures and institutions like that of bureaucracy and political parties which were to serve the purpose of mediating between the social actors and the desirability of outcomes.

Chipko makes possible, value based politics where it appeals to the moral capabilities of virtue, reason and self interest of the state to fulfill its obligations vis-à-vis the citizens.

Rather than solving the problem of empirical will of the people in diverse traditions, the attempt of the Indian state has been to homogenize the population in the name of development, secularization and national interest. The welfare state did not aim at generating citizens capable of the autonomous consideration of common goods but it favoured on creating dependable workers. Amartya Sen writes that economic growth is valuable because it helps to eradicate deprivation and to improve the capabilities and the quality of life of ordinary people. Elimination of illiteracy, ill health and other deprivation for their own sake is the task that the state faces. But development has led to deprivation because it has been a mistake to see development

as expansion of “human resources” — “Human” as if people were just the means of production and not its end.³² The principle of autonomy implies that individuals should be free and equal in the determination of the conditions of their own lives, that is, they should enjoy equal rights and accordingly equal obligations in the specification of the framework which generates and limits the opportunities available to them, so long as they do not deploy this framework to negate the rights of others.³³ Chipko has firmly emphasized the issue of autonomy of the people in taking decisions about things related to their lives. Chipko has been a revolution of the periphery against the capitalist expansion as it exists today. This periphery has been created as a result of the unequal development which harbours tendencies of polarizing into centres and peripheries. Samir Amin writes that the central state is strong whereas the peripheral state is weak making adjustments to the centre. He calls movements like the Chipko anti-systemic forces which question the contradictions and contrast of the central-peripheral polarization. Then they question the inequality and refuse to submit to its consequences.³⁴ Rajni Kothari writes that the rise of grassroots movements happened due to the following reasons —

1. Participatory democracy being the essence of the Indian state remained a prerogative for some, a right for all but the women were kept out of it.
2. There was an increase in the intensity and volume of populist rhetoric which was fashioned to depoliticize the people making the population

32 Sen, Amartya, **PUCL Monthly Bulletin**, April, 1995, p. 12.

33 Held, David, **Models of Democracy**, Polity Press and Basil Blackwell, Great Britain, 1987, p. 271.

34 Amin, Samir, op.cit.,

marginalized from organized politics and become dependent on one or few dominant individuals and their authorized agents.

3. The more the withdrawal of power from the people and from organizations representing them, the more isolated and marginalized and oppressed the people get and the more they become dependent on the centre of the power.³⁵

, Chipko as a movement came up in the contemporary times in 1973, a time when there was a complete personalization of politics and politicization of bureaucracy. There was description of an existing institutional polity in the hands of Mrs Gandhi but the destruction cannot be an end in itself. Lenin, Gandhi and Mao did exactly the same but they gave a new institutional model. Chipko with its inspiration from Gandhians along with the instrument of satyagraha has thrown up a new model for development and politics. It has opened up spaces outside the party and the government though not outside the state but through a new form of organization and struggle which is meant to rejuvenate the state and to make it an instrument of liberation from exploitative structures.

CHIPKO AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Reacting on civil society demands an analysis of the concept of politics itself which involves the relationship between individuals and the community, a view of society as organized or not and the delineation of the private and the public. Chipko has brought together individuals of the community which in its own capacity

35 Kothari, Rajani, *op.cit.*,

questions the capacity of social and political agents, agencies and individuals to maintain and transform their environment.

Writing about the Green Peace movement, Paul Warner writes that it is fashioning a new type of politics. It relied on familiar strategies of lobbying and pressuring governments but they also invest themselves in social, economic and cultural dimensions of global life that lie outside the realm of governmental affairs and he calls it world civil politics.³⁶

Chipko is about politicizing the issue of natural resources and about the forces that shape and influence its exercise. This politics is expressed in all the activities of cooperation, negotiation and struggle over the use and distribution of resources.

Chipko is involved in the relationship lying between the individual and the state, institutions and structures which are implicated in the activities of production and reproduction in the life of societies. Chipko has conditioned varied aspects of the lives of the individuals involved be it social, economic, political, ideological or philosophical. It is at the core of development of problems in society and the collective modes of their resolution. If politics is conceived in this way then the specification of the conditions necessary for the enactment of the principle of autonomy amounts to the specification of the conditions necessary for the participation of citizens in decisions about issues of which are important to them. This would make political life a central part of all people's lives.

36 Wapner, Paul, "Environmental Activism and Global Civil Society", *Dissent*, Summer 1994, p. 387.

CHIPKO AS A NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENT

The nature of a movement is primarily determined by the ideology adopted by the social actors. Ramachandra Guha while discussing the ideological trends in Indian environmentalism says that though there is a widespread agreement within the movement as regards the failure of the present development model, there is no consensus on likely alternatives. Here he sees the emergence of three distinct ideological perspectives.³⁷ The first, he called crusading Gandhian. According to him, this relies heavily on a religious idiom in its rejection of the modern way of life. It upholds the pre-capitalist and pre-colonial village community as the examples of ecological and social harmony. The methods of action are squarely in the Gandhian tradition — fast, padyatra, satyagraha. The second strand, he calls appropriate technology, less strident in its opposition to industrial society, it strives for a working synthesis of agriculture, industry, big and small units, eastern and western technological traditions. The third and the most eclectic strand embraces a variety of groups who have arrived at environmentalism only after a protracted engagement with conventional political philosophies notably, Marxism. Here systemic economic change is viewed as logically prior to ecological stability, and political action towards that end becomes an overriding priority. He further suggests that the environmental opposition must simultaneously operate on three fronts. In the sphere of the economy, it must strengthen the work of appropriate technologists in preventing before the public a set of resource conserving and socially liberating technical alternatives. In the realm of ideas, it must draw upon the arguments

37 Guha, Ramachandra, "Ideological Trends in Indian Environmentalism", **Economic and Political Weekly**, Dec. 3, 1988.

of the Gandhians and in its political struggle, it can invoke the experience of left groups in forging bonds of solidarity among those most seriously affected by environmental degradation.³⁸

Talking specifically with reference to Chipko there are others who say that in spite of the fact that Gandhian satyagraha was used to oppose the economic system that created material poverty and under development, it has often been understood and described as a spiritual phenomena without any materialist base. Gandhi focused his attention on the more fundamental and severe material contradictions since he understood the problem of the invisible and the marginalized majority.³⁹

There are two distinct streams of thought and action within the chipko movement. One is ascribed to Sunderlal Bahuguna who believes that material benefits arise from lowering the ecological costs entailed by resource destruction and increasing the productivity of natural and man made systems. For Bhatt, material benefits are not directly seen in the conservation of essential ecological processes. The instruments of production do not include nature and its ecological processes, and productivity is defined in the classical concept of industrial management, through the technological productivity of labour alone. In this respect, Bhatt's model is easily subscribed by the dominant development paradigm with minor environmental adjustments.⁴⁰

38 *ibid.*, p.2581.

39 Bandyopadhyaya, J. & Shiva, Vandana, **Chipko**, p. 34.

40 *ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

Chipko as a movement has made visible the invisible externalities of development based on particular economic ideology and revealed its inherent injustice and non-sustainability. Visible power disappears from modern society, it ceases to be a character but operates through a set of signs which are frequently concerted, interwoven and crystallized with procedures and institutions. Malucci writes that the fundamental role of collective action is to render the goals of social lives explicit by creating spaces in which power becomes visible. For it is only with visible power that there can be a confrontation and negotiation leading to political democracy.⁴¹

Gail Omvedt writes that new social movements reconceptualize capital accumulation and the capitalist system. The capitalist accumulation on the basis of wages, labour and surplus value is only a part of the entire process of accumulation. There are products produced or created under non-capitalist conditions which become 'commonalties' that are incorporated into the cycle of capital accumulation, then allowing extraction of surpluses from non-capitalist [even non-human resources]. Chipko is an uprising against the accumulation of natural resources at low or no cost by the state and the state backed capitalists.⁴²

Chipko as a new social movement not only expresses dissent but also expresses some basis for developmental and democratic alternative.

41 Melucci, Alberto, "The New Social Movements: A Theoretical Approach", **Social Science Information**, 19(2), 1989, p. 250.

42 Omvedt, Gail, "Peasants, Dalits and Women: Democracy and India's New Social Movements", **Journal of Contemporary Asia**, vol. 24, no. 1, p. 42

Andre Gunder Frank and Marta Fuentus in the fifth thesis of their work on new social movements write that they do not seek state power, they seek autonomy from it. "State power is a *sine quo non* of a social movement and state power would negate the very essence and purpose of most social movements."⁴³ Chipko also aims at grassroots participatory democracy and bottom up self-determination for the things that have been denied by the state.

As Alan Touraine writes that new social movements do not deal with a part of 'reality' but are an element of a specific mode of constructing social reality.⁴⁴

Chipko as an example of new social movement symbolizes the normal situation of today's movement which is a network of small groups submerged in everyday life which require a personal involvement in experiencing and practicing cultural innovation. They do not ask, they often by their own existence make visible — the amount of violence, silence and irrationality which is always hidden in dominant codes.

43 Frank, Andre Gunder and Fuentes, Marta, "Nine Theses on Social Movements", **Economic and Political Weekly**, August 29, 1987, p. 1507.

44 Touraine, Alan, "An Introduction to the Study of Social Movements", **Social Research**, vol. 52, no.4, Winter 1985

CHAPTER IV

PEOPLE'S UNION FOR CIVIL LIBERTIES [PUCL]

Of late issues of civil liberties and human rights have become contentious while the state considers them to be subversive of its legitimacy. The civil liberties organizations and activists often regard their actions as being affirmative of the presence of a democratic state and characterize their activities as an effort to maintain and extend democratic rights.

The civil rights movement in its present shape owes its origin to the political crisis of the National Emergency. D.L. Sheth writes that “crisis is the manifestation of a deeper malaise which engulfs the whole system”¹ A crisis is much more than the many problems which continuously arise in any political system and get enumerated at a point of time. In a state of crisis specific problems are not amenable to solutions, for these cannot be isolated from each other for the purpose of taking action.

Today, India faces a number of chronic crises — social, cultural, economic, political — and these have grave implications for the poor whose very survival is threatened and thus they must engage in even more violent struggles to assert their democratic rights. These struggles were assisted by the civil liberties organizations.

1 Sheth, D.L., “Social Basis of the Political Crisis”, *Seminar*, 269, 19 , p.28.

This chapter on PUCL analyses the nature of the movement, its area of work, the nature of the work and an analysis of PUCL as a NSM.

1.1 A SHORT EARLY HISTORY²

The first human rights group in the country, the civil liberties union was formed by Jawaharlal Nehru and some of his colleagues in the early 1930s with the very specific objective of providing legal aid to nationalists accused of sedition against the colonial authorities. However, this effort was short lived. The first Civil Liberties Protest after independence was organized by Communist Party. This was against the Preventive Detention Laws and the detentions without trials for long periods.

In the early 1950s Civil Liberties Conference was created with the support of various political elements because by then Preventive detention had become the vogue. Many popular agitations were also on the increase. N.C. Chatterjee and Vaze were the leaders. This gradually lost its momentum.³ It was not until the late 1960s that the real emergence of human rights groups took place. This was triggered off when both the privileged social classes and the government systematically cracked down on the groups fighting for the rights of traditionally oppressed people — landless labourers, marginal and small peasants, the unorganized working class. They

2 The references for history of Civil Liberties Movement are from Anjan Ghosh, "Civil Liberties, Uncivil State", **Seminar**, No. 355, March 1989, pp. 34-37.

Kothari, Smitu, "The Human Rights Movement in India", **Social Action**, Vol. 40, Jan-Mar 1990, pp.1-15.

"People's Union for Civil Liberties", **Monthly Bulletins** [PUCL MB].

3 Mohan, Surendra, "PUCL : A Historical Perspective", **PUCL MB**, July 1990, p. 6.

also repressed their mobilizers and supporters among the articulate and conscientious sections of the political middle classes. Several organizations were formed during this period. Notable amongst them were, the Association for the Protection of Democratic Rights [APDR] in West Bengal, the Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties' Committee [APCLC] and the Association for Democratic Rights [AFDR] in Punjab.⁴

The suppression of the naxalites in 1968-69 brought up Civil Liberties groups. The rigging of general elections in 1972, repression of railway workers' strikes in 1973 and particularly in 1974 created the need for a strong and effective civil liberties group.

Jai Prakash Narain [J.P.] set up the Citizens for Democracy in 1973. The process that led to this dated back to August 1972 when J.P. along with V.M. Tarkunde, S.N. Joshi, M.R. Marani and others who were in or were close to the Gandhian movement began to meet to discuss their concerns over the centralization of power by Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi. They formed groups in Delhi, Madras, Bombay and Calcutta and finally formed a national group called Citizens for Democracy [CFD] at a meeting in Delhi in 1974.⁵

Emergency saw all the opposition leaders in jail, censorship in press, holding of public meeting made impossible. The almost 19 months of National Emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi between 1975 and 1977 represent a watershed in the post-colonial history of democratic India. The politics of the Emergency era stands out as

4 Kothari, Smitu, *ibid.*, p. 2.

5 Rubin, Barnett R., "The Civil Liberties Movement in India", *Asian Survey*, Vol XXVIII, No. 3, March 1987, p.374. The author's source for the history of PUCL is an interview with V.M. Tharkunde.

particularly amoral. Emergency was not a sudden happening, there were events leading to it, for example, the increasing weaknesses in the professional efficiency of the state apparatus and many of the democratic institutions viz., the bureaucracy, political parties, judiciary and the media, their social bias and political partisanship; increase in the general level of social and political violence and regional tensions; the rising nexus between crime and politics; a certain level of populist middle class radicalism and the working class militancy along with its obsessive economism; increasing proliferation of the state; and the recurrent resort to the coercive instruments of state power to contain social and political violence leading to considerable brutalization of the post-colonial state machinery.⁶

2.1 EMERGENCY

To understand the context of the civil liberties movement, it is important to understand the nature and impact of the National Emergency as it denotes the complete contradiction of the constitutional democracy indicating a socio-political crisis.

Ashwini K. Ray in his work⁷ marks out the incipient trends accentuated in the Emergency. There was a sharp break with the middle class consensus of the earlier phase — which was anyhow under strain in the populist politics of the immediately preceding years. There was an almost totally fragmented political spectrum, including the Congress party, which was the only one with its organizational structure to spread

6 Ray, Aswini K., "Civil Rights Movement and Social Struggle in India", **Economic and Political Weekly**, Vol. XXI, No.28, July 12, 1986, p. 1302.

7 *ibid.*

nationality. Consequently, its predominantly middle class electoral politics had tended to polarize around individual personalities to the immediate advantage of Indira Gandhi, and her family. The Emergency heralded a surge of personal power of the state machinery by Indira Gandhi and her younger son, Sanjay Gandhi, who suddenly emerged as the most powerful 'extra-constitutional authority operating the Indian state-apparatus. This inspired an emergence of authoritarian personalities at the various tiers of the federal structure. It also led to a political assertion of revivalist identities and, consequently, further intensification of the social and regional tensions in India's diverse plurality, as so sharply manifested in recent times in Kashmir, Assam, Punjab and now in Gujarat, and, in different ways, in Andhra, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Thus, demands for regional autonomy, against the structural compulsions of a centralized developmental process, has assumed a new political significance in this context.

Another trend which was accentuated then was that the orchestrated political dent on the autonomy of democratic institutions by the populist demand of 'commitment' of the bureaucracy, judiciary, media and the intellectuals exposed and further weakened their professional efficiency and consequently, their credibility and legitimacy as instruments of conflict-resolution in a period of increasing social tensions, as so sharply manifested in the Delhi riots and subsequently in Gujarat.

The absence of such countervailing political institutions or instruments as provided by the weak democratic institutions of the Emergency increased the general level of administrative corruption and social oppression.

The above factors shaped the intellectual and political milieu that led to the origin of civil and democratic rights movement in its present shape.

2.2. THE MOVEMENT DURING THE EMERGENCY AND AFTER

It was only after Jayaprakash Narayan launched a major agitation against the growing authoritarianism of Mrs Gandhi that a large number of prominent liberals and humanists came together with radicals in 1975 to form the first national human rights organization, the People's Union for Civil Liberties and Democratic Rights [PUCLDR] with Jayaprakash Narayan as the Founder, V.M. Tarkunde as the President and Krishna Kant as the General Secretary. Within a few months a series of political developments helped consolidate the scattered concerns for the rights of the poor and oppressed on the one hand and for the issues agitating middle class dissidents on the other. The announcement of the Emergency on June 26, 1975 proved to be a supremely catalytic event. With the imprisonment and ostracism of intellectuals and political activists, the national consciousness was stirred and new meaning infused in the understanding of democracy and at this stage the PUCLDR had a simple aim which was to oppose the open repression of civil liberties under the Emergency.

During the Janata government [March 1977 to July 1979], the PUCLDR was relatively inactive. Although, it had not encouraged anyone to join the movement, the members of the opposition parties who had suffered under the Emergency had naturally been motivated to do so. When their parties were in power, some of them abandoned the PUCLDR activity.⁸ This loss of membership, as well as the death of

8 Rubin, Barnett R., *op.cit.*, p. 374.

J.P. Narayan and the loss of its original focus with the lifting of the Emergency and release of the detainees, left the PUCLDR without a well organized membership and effective leadership, or a clear program. However, before it became dormant, PUCLDR had initiated action in Punjab and Andhra Pradesh where Marxist Leninist groups were being suppressed without much regard to civil liberties. V.M. Tarkunde as the President of PUCLDR appointed eminent persons to take up such cases. Arun Shourie, K.G. Kannabiran and Balwant Reddy did a lot of work in Andhra Pradesh. The Delhi group remained active in the period of dormance.⁹ The return to powers of Indira Gandhi and the subsequent enactment of potentially repressive laws such as the National Security Ordinance [subsequently the National Security Act (NSA), reinstating preventive detention] led Justice Tarkunde and others to revitalize the PUCLDR by transforming it into a mass membership organization. To this end, they organized an all-India Civil Liberties Conference in New Delhi on November 22-23, 1980. The conference attracted more than 400 founding members of the organization.

¹⁰ This National Convention took place in Delhi which led to the split of the PUCLDR into two organizations — a Delhi-based People's Union for Democratic Rights [PUDR] and a national People's Union for Civil Liberties [PUCL]. PUCL now adopted a new constitution and elected Tarkunde as the President, Arun Shourie, editor of the 'Indian Express' and Rajni Kothari, a political scientist, were elected general secretaries. In 1984, Tarkunde retired from Presidency and Kothari

9 Mohan, Surendra, op.cit.

10 Rubin, Barnett R., op.cit.

succeeded him. In June 1986, Kothari resigned due to reasons of health and Rajinder Sachar, a retired Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court, became President.¹¹

The constitution provided for membership by everyone who paid a subscription and “believes that civil liberties must be maintained in India, now and in the future, irrespective of any economic and political changes that may take place in the country” [Article 3(a)]. The constitution furthermore made it clear that the PUCL, unlike members of the Constituent Assembly and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, saw the promotion of civil liberties as complementary to the struggle for socio-economic rights. It pledged to work against discrimination, against “social evils which encroach on civil liberties, such as untouchability, casteism and communalism” and “to defend in particular the civil liberties of the weaker sections of society and of women and children”¹² In these phrases, PUCL claims that socio-economic rights in some cases be necessary pre-requisites for full enjoyment of civil liberties, and that civil liberties could be particularly valuable to those deprived of socio-economic rights.

3.1 ISSUES TAKEN UP BY PUCL AND THE ACTIVITIES

On the review of literature one notices that PUCL has successfully raised three kinds of issues —

1. direct or indirect violations by the State [police lawlessness, including torture and murders of opponents through fake “encounters”, repressive legislation, political manipulation and terror by Mafia groups, etc.]

11 Rubin, Barnett R., *op.cit*

12 Ibid

2. denial in practice of legally stipulated rights as well as the inability of government institutions to perform their functions; and
3. structural constraints which restrict the realization of rights, e.g., violence in the family, landlords' private armies, the continuing colonization of tribals, etc.

The activities taken up have been —

1. fact finding missions and investigations;
2. public interest litigation;
3. citizen awareness programmes [including the publication of prospective statements on specific issues];
4. campaigns; and
5. the production of supportive literature for independent action group and mass movements in providing relief and rehabilitation and carrying out lobbying on behalf of the oppressed and the victimized. This comes through to be seen apparently in the collaboration following the carnage of the Sikhs in November 1984, the Bhopal disaster a month later or in situations of communal conflict, e.g., in Ahmedabad in 1987, Bhagalpur in 1989 or the Ayodhya issue in 1992.

4. THE CONCERNED AREAS OF PUCL

4.1 LAND DISPUTES

As a civil liberties organization, the PUCL does not advocate land or tenancy reform or work for the implementation of reforms that have already been legislated. They, however, intervene in such situations but with a clear reflection of an

understanding that the promotion or defense of civil liberties can happen only in relation to socio-economic rights. The PUCL reports of such incidents come predominantly from Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. While there are variations, the situation reported by a PUCL fact-finding team in the North Arcot and Dharampuri districts of Tamil Nadu is typical.¹³ The team found that “the background of all such incidents is the non-implementation of laws relating to land reforms, bonded labour, minimum wages, equal remuneration, and caste discrimination”. The description of the case also illustrates the mobilizing effect of unenforced laws, as well as the relations among landlords, police, politicians, tenants and labourers, and activists. The reports on these two districts cited deaths of activists in faked encounters; torture, custody deaths; violence by police against ‘untouchables’; arrest of activists on false criminal charges and lengthy detention without trial of activists arrested in such cases and use of the anti-sedition law to arrest activists for holding meetings or putting up posters. Other reports describe like conditions in other areas.

4.2 LABOUR DISPUTES AND CONDITIONS

This category includes only labour disputes outside of agriculture-violation of labour laws and trade union disputes that lead to police intervention. The cases reported in the PUCL’s Monthly Bulletin not only indicate that the laws prohibiting bonded labour, child labour, or unsafe working conditions or laws enforcing a minimum wage but also that those suffering from their violation have been too weak to organize protests that might lead to open conflict and intervention by the police. In

13 PUCL MB, December 1982, p.5. and March 1983, pp. 5-10.

these cases PUCL acts more as a legal aid or even as public interest group than as a civil liberties organization.

The report by a PUCL fact-finding team on an instance of police firing on workers on January 3, 1982 at a fertilizer factory in Unnao district, Uttar Pradesh illustrates all of these problems. There had been outstanding grievances between the trade union and the management since 1979. The state government's labour ministry referred the dispute to a Labour Court in September 1980. By December 1981, there were still no resolutions. On December 14, the workers began a peaceful sit-in which the government declared unlawful on December 29. On January 3, the local police and the provincial Armed Constabulary was called in and the PAC fired on workers inside with all lights switched off, burnt all the papers in the Union office, pulled some workers out of their homes and either shot them or threw them alive into the burning police vans which had been burnt by the workers. In all, at least nine people were killed by the police, but none of their bodies were turned over to the families.¹⁴ The report says that the situation resulted from the paralysis of all the institutions supposed to deal with such problems, in particular the state government. The second factor noted is that trade union fragmentation may also have played a role. All India Trade Union Congress [AITUC], with which the local union was affiliated, played a passive role on account of rivalry created by the workmen between CPI and CPM.¹⁵

14 PUCL MB, June 1982, p.19.

15 PUCL MB, June 1982, p. 20.

This reflects a failure of representation and conflict management which allowed the escalation into violence, leading to intervention and excessive force by the corrupt and demoralized police forces.

4.3 POLICE LAWLESSNESS

Many cases involve police lawlessness in some sense. There are two major cases which come through — ‘excesses’ are instances where the police reportedly violate the rights of citizens [usually prisoners] in the course of law enforcement. These are cases of torture or death of persons in custody, often on petty criminal charges where no political question or influential person or group is involved. The other type of case is one where the police sell their services to private citizens, including criminals, or use the force available to them to protect their private interests.

A number of cases reported by the PUCL reproduced this pattern. In Agra, a PUCL fact-finding team investigated police attacks on members of the Chhatra Yuva Sangharsha Vahini [the Student Youth Struggle Force, a Gandhian organization founded by J.P. Narayan]. The vahini had been helping a group of poor people — “Harijans, Dhobis, Jatavs, Muslims and other weaker sections of society” — to resist the efforts of one Lajjaya Ram, a local racketeer with good political connections, to evict them from land on which they had been resettled by the state government after some floods four years before. The vahini also had rescued a girl from a brothel near the police station and had forced a gambling den and an illegal distillery to close, depriving some local officials of substantial income. There were rumours that two of the vahini men, Ashok and Anal, were to be killed by police in an “encounter” and

the two went into hiding. Only women remained in the vahini office on July 27, 1982, when police broke in they arrested the women and severely tortured and humiliated one named Madhu, whose medical examination showed bladder injuries and five burns attributed to lighted cigarette butts.

4.4. SUPPRESSION OF FREE EXPRESSION

Many cases classified in other categories involve the suppression of the free expression, such as the jailing of rural activists on sedition charges in response to radical speeches at public meetings. The cases in the Monthly Bulletin deal with the Press Bills in Bihar, Tamil Nadu, and Orissa; the banning of books; censorship of articles written by employees of the public sector; a conspiracy case against a writer; police monitoring of telephone calls and mail; attacks on journalists; harassment of writers with foreign exchange regulations; and an attack by police on a peaceful demonstration organized by the PUCL itself in Madurai, Tamil Nadu.

4.5 URBAN HOUSING

The problems of urban housing, of course, is not in itself a civil liberties issue, nor has it frequently led to protest movements drawing in the police but on a number of occasions the PUCL and even other civil liberties organization have taken up the rights of the slum and pavement dwellers of Delhi and Bombay. PUCL's arguments have focused on the right of the slum and pavement dwellers to due notice of eviction and on the legal duty of those who evict them to provide alternative shelters.¹⁶

16 PUCL MB, January 1984; PUCL MB, February 1984.

4.6 TREATMENT OF WOMEN

The status of women receives immense attention in the Monthly Bulletin. There are articles on women and civil rights; women, law and the state; the right to free movement; rape; class and the state; from 'bondage to brothels'; the chipko movement and women; dowry atrocities and the state; Muslim women and the uniform civil code; Muslim women and civil rights; and women and health.

4.7 COMMUNALISM

Many cases taken up by PUCL have communal elements — in land disputes or urban housing problems the victims of the police atrocities are frequently members of scheduled or lower backward castes. A number of cases where the police allied themselves with politicians and criminals for personal gain involved conflicts between the criminals and identifiable communities, as in the Baroda riots of October 1982. The Meerut riots of September-October 1982, however, constituted "pure" communalism which developed out of a conflict over the location of places of worship in a crowded commercial section of town. The PAC were called in and proceeded to attack Muslims where the PAC jawans dragged Muslims out of their houses and shot them.

4.8 REGIONAL CONFLICTS

In some parts of India, mainly in the North East and Punjab, ethnic subnationalism has given rise to the imposition of laws of exception and the use of the army. There have been articles frequently published in the PUCL Monthly Bulletin. Furthermore, during the anti-Sikh programmes in Delhi following the

assassination of Indira Gandhi, the PUCL and other groups helped organize what had started as spontaneous movement to aid the victims and document responsibility.¹⁷ This led to joint PUCL-PUDR publication of another pamphlet, “who are the guilty ?” documenting the complicity of Congress [I] politicians who led and organized the mobs. When the police made arrests, politicians intervened to have the accused freed. The civil liberties organizations called for a judicial inquiry, prosecution of the guilty and compensation to the victims.

4.9 NEW ISSUES

Smitu Kothari in his work writes that significant new issues have become part of the agenda of human rights groups — issues that will be crucial in the coming decades.¹⁸ According to him these issues are —

1. **Natural Resources** — it reflects the increasingly precarious situation of the rural poor and this calls into question the dominant view of development itself.
2. **Community Identity and Social Conflict** — A wide range of conflicts, some new, most having deeper historical roots in both the socio-cultural and the political, have threatened the rights of very large numbers of people. The inter-religious and inter-ethnic conflicts [Hindu-Sikh, Hindu-Muslim, Hindu-Christian], Gorkha National Liberation Front, Jharkhand Movement. The exploding violence is bringing into question the assumption that the forces of modernization would wipe out these ‘archaic’, ‘primordial’ sensibilities. Human rights groups and others

17 D'Monte, Darryl, “How Concerned Citizens Tackled Delhi Riots”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, November 17, 1984, pp. 1943-45

18 Smitu, Kothari, Op.cit.

concerned about these issues are asserting these debates and demanding creative use of social spaces and institutions towards a more harmonious state civil society interaction.

3. **Gender Conflicts** — The gender conflicts are attempting not only for equality but they bring to light the oppression and violence in the public and private sphere. These issues need to be taken up as they are attempting to push at new interconnections between women and ecology, with culture and religion, with work and with democracy and politics.

5.1 THE LEGITIMACY OF THE INDIAN STATE

The breakdown of political order in contemporary India puts into question the future capacity of the Indian state to govern. The crucial issue related to the issue of eroding authority can be seen in the legitimacy enjoyed by the state over the past two decades, a legitimate and moderately stable state that was confident of its ability to lay out India's agenda for socio-economic change has evolved into a reactive state. Atul Kohli writes "the state is omnipresent, but feeble; it is highly centralized and interventionist, and yet seems powerless".¹⁹

5.2 AFTER INDEPENDENCE

India's problem of governability has been there since pre-colonial times. During the times of the colonial rule, there was an attempt towards centralism. In the post-independence period, there was the establishment of constitutional democracy and the one party system created unity.

19 Atul Kohli, **Democracy and Discontent**, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991, p. 8.

Congress was a party of consensus — within ranks, with dissenting ranks; with the leadership of the opposition. Rajni Kothari writes that the one-party dominance as found in India was based on consensual authority and not simply on civil or military power.

Kochanek²⁰ writes that Congress experience was that of two full decades of dominance but never as a monolith. It was a highly centralized and oligarchic organization but has gone through gradual change from being a decentralized centre to a lot of interdependence between the centre and state and the state and district Congress units. Since the Congress Party was the most important party, it had almost become synonymous with the social, political and economic development of India.

The present political crisis is the crisis of legitimacy of the political authority. Habermas in his work “Legitimation Problems in the Modern State”²¹ writes that the legitimacy means that there are good arguments for a political orders’ claim to be recognized as right and just. We speak of the weakening of legitimization process when the situation arises in which the supply of legitimization to the political authority becomes more and more scarce and it can no longer take its claim to legitimacy for granted. The present political crisis is the crisis of legitimacy of the political authority. No political party today, even if returned to power with massive electoral majorities obtained through the open electoral process, is in a position to command the loyalty of the people on a sustained basis.

20 Kochanek, Stanley,

21 Habermas, Jurgen, “Legitimation Problems in the Modern State”, in **Communication and the Evolution of Society**, Heinemann, London, 1979, pp. 178-205.

D.L. Sheth writes that the state of non-crisis in the Indian polity can be identified as the period of the Congress system.²² The Congress system could successfully handle problems because it kept the public realm structurally separated from the bureaucratic and legislative process and maintained, in the former, a low level of politicization.

This approach of the Congress led to the state getting highly centralized and omnipresent, but the leverage of its leaders to initiate meaningful change had diminished. Atul Kohli²³ has described three striking features of a crisis of governability —

1. absence of enduring coalitions where there is no stability of social support due to weak organization;
2. policy ineffectiveness when the government repeatedly fails to accomplish its stated goals;
3. an incapacity by the state or the citizens to accommodate to political conflict without violence because it does not possess institutions for peaceful resolution for normal political conflicts.

During the tenure of Mrs Indira Gandhi as the Prime minister there was an erosion of existing institutional model but there was no attempt to build an alternative model. Instead there came up a politics of personality. There was the development of a highly centralized polity so that it aggregates discontent and direct it all upwards, i.e., at the central apparatus of power instead of dealing with it at various levels and in a disaggregated and decentralized manner. The civil liberties movement very strongly

22 D.L. Sheth, "Social Basis of the Political Crises", *Seminar*, 269, January 1989, p. 31.

23 Op.cit

reflects that after this institutions could not deal with the backlash from the established section which comes in the form of atrocities towards the weak and resort to settling conflicts outside the institutional framework through the use of money or the muscle.

Centralism once thought of as an instrument of purposive interventions by a cohesive and disciplined elite turned into a system where it had withdrawn completely from the lower levels of system, leading to a breakdown of the party system and the federal structure and of wider affiliations that were built through them.

But the judiciary really has been one political institution which has been of a great assistance to the PUCL. In the Anglo-Saxon common law only the aggrieved person has the *locus standi*, that is the standing to petition the court for redress of grievance. In the *Asiad* decision Justice Bhagwati writing for the Bench, accepted a different solution.

Enlargement of *locus standi* to allow members of the public to move the court on behalf of those unable to do so, such as the workers engaged in the construction for the Asian games.²⁴

6.1 PUCL AND DEMOCRACY

India has a record of flagrant violation of rights at every level. From a situation of lawlessness created by the state through undemocratic legislation [not illegal], to arbitrary acts of both policy and intervention, successive governments have attempted to maintain policies that deny to a majority of citizens the right to a

24 PUCL MB, November 1987, p. 18.

civilized human existence. The struggle of PUCL has been reduced to simple freedoms reflected often through the struggle for bread, shelter and work.

The potential of democratic institutions lies in their capacity to transform the empirical will of the people into one which is more rational and enlightened. But it cannot be assumed that citizens will normally feel obliged to comply with the decisions that have been made not by them but in their name, so the threat of negative sanctions must be applied in order to force them to do what the law requires them to do. The state exists to safeguard the rights and liberties of citizens who are ultimately the best judge of their own interests and the state must be restricted in scope and restrained in practice to ensure the maximum possible freedom of every citizen.

The struggle of PUCL has been for basic fundamental rights which can be achieved only through the democratization of the state, i.e., it should be made subject to producers that ensure maximum accountability.

7.1 PUCL AS A NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENT

The analysis of PUCL as a new social movement not what it tries to achieve but in the politics underlying it.

To begin with its attempts with reference to civil society, it can be seen that civil liberties is an exercisable domain within the civil society — in the life and everyday existence of most deprived communities. Jean L. Cohen has described new social movements as a “self-understanding that abandons revolutionary dreams in favour of the idea of structural reform, alongwith a defence of civil society that does not seek to abolish the autonomous functioning of political and economic systems —

in a phrase self-limiting radicalism”.²⁵ This self-limiting radicalism eschews a notion of change for a more incremental enlargement of autonomy within the civil society the rhetoric of new social movements is laden with the vocabulary of decentralization, plurality, autonomy and participation. The PUCL, even though it deals directly with the state power, it does not work towards the capture of power. It works as a continuing process for social transformation.

PUCL as the other movements came to stay when there had been an erosion of the legitimacy of the state institutions. PUCL works for the marginalized where the erosion of the traditional resource base has been severely affected and its dependence on the state has grown manifold.

PUCL has worked beyond class confines — in the area of gender, environment, communalism.

Members of the PUCL has sometimes described their role as trying to use those liberal elements that still exist in the state and the political process chiefly judicial review and the power of public opinion — ‘to create spaces’ outside of repressive control where movements can experiment with different strategies for social change.

PUCL like any other NSM has immense potential for democratization and politicization. This politicization of the civil society questions the legitimacy of the Indian state.

25 Jean L. Cohen, “Strategy of Identity: New Theoretical Paradigms and Contemporary Movements”, *Social Research*, 52, 4, 1985, p. 664.

PUCL as a movement came up against the penetration of the state and the economy. It does not seek to gain state power but forces it to provide a justification for its rationality. Not only this, it forces the state to accept the 'irrationality' of the power apparatuses. PUCL makes the invisible power visible for political negotiation.

With reference to the formation of identity, it can be said that to an extent it does facilitate the identity of individuals as citizens. This gives them a sense of solidarity to demand for a decent and democratically rightful existence.

All these issues become even more critical as are realized that the traditional problems of justice and rights for the oppressed are going to be either subsumed under or overwhelmed by problems of ethnicity, regional identity and cultural assertions and demands of specific communities. The failure of the state to meet the maximum norms of dignity and decency has produced a situation where the highly plural society is tearing apart and ethnic identities are becoming basic strivings for dignity, autonomy and freedom.

CONCLUSION



In recent years major assertions of people's rights from several vantage points have emerged in India. Though, there is a decline of faith in institutions, the common people's faith in participatory collective action is on the rise. The NSMs reflect a democratic upsurge in India.

A study of the three movements has given an insight into the theoretical issues around which their existence is created.

We see that there is a demand for economic restructuring and redistribution of resources and opportunities. SEWA demands an economic restructuring in the sense that it is fighting for an acknowledgement of the informal sector workers. It also seeks a redistribution of resources in terms of allotment of assets to women. This aspect brings in the interplay of gender with class.

Chipko also demands an economic restructuring and redistribution of resources. The problem in the region of Tehri-Garhwal has been due to the changes in the 'big structures'. The locus of power shifted out of the local centre and this altered the daily life of the people. The movement is the result of this alteration.

Though PUCL does not make the above demands, it works at the grassroots level amongst those who are economically marginalized. It pressurizes the government to protect their rights.

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The principle of autonomy is another demand which these movements make. The principle of autonomy refers to the rights over one's own life and opportunities.

A study of these three movements reflects that SEWA and Chipko makes a direct demand for autonomy whereas PUCL makes a demand for the defence of the rights pertaining to autonomy by the state.

The demand for autonomy is related to an overarching bureaucratic-managerial apparatus. Though SEWA seeks autonomy, it sometimes does try to negotiate with the bureaucracy. Its attempt does not completely decry the state apparatus but at the same time it keeps its option open for a confrontation. Chipko with its Gandhian principles is against the excessive penetration of the state. Similarly, the PUCL makes demands for a limitation and justification of state power.

All these three movements reflect a sharp decline in the role of the state as a mediator. SEWA has had many confrontations with the state and so has Chipko. PUCL makes a direct attack on the state as it fails to fulfill a mediatory role in times of conflict. This context gives rise to NSMs and can be analyzed on the basis of the classical paradigm where the emergence of a movement was a psychological response to a breakdown.

As we have seen, all these three movements function out of the arena of traditional party politics. Though SEWA and PUCL try to pressurizes and negotiates with the state to fulfill their demands. Chipko is completely out of traditional politics. But none of these movements seek to gain the state power. Though Ela Bhatt was a member of the Rajya Sabha and headed the National Commission on Self-Employed Women, she did not participate in politics and went back to SEWA

after her term. She put all her energy for the betterment of the self-employed women all over the country.

As we see in all the three movements, there is an emphasis on self-empowerment as opposed to welfare. These actors of NSMs want self-reliance instead of dependence. PUCL does not deal with the direct issue of self-empowerment but the guarantee of civil liberties without an interference or repression of the state would also amount to a situation of self-empowerment and freedom.

A study of these NSMs has reflected a shift from quantity to quality. These three movements like the other NSMs operate with an idea of a good life.

SEWA and PUCL very explicitly demand for a redefinition of social status and challenge not just the power of the economically powerful but also question the traditional caste hierarchy. Chipko also questions the traditional economic hierarchy. These efforts expose the 'invisible power' and create spaces for exchange.

All the three movements operate within the area of civil society. SEWA, PUCL and Chipko reflect an extension of the public space. This extension helps in the exposure of invisible exploitation, the politics of silence and violence to be exposed. This helps in the control of these malpractices.

The above study has reflected some similarities and some dissimilarities between these movements. But all three of them with their distinct features qualify as NSMs on the basis of the theoretical discussions.

A study of the three movements puts forth some concerns of the citizens —

1. to ensure the creation of the best circumstances for all humans to develop their nature and express their diverse qualities and needs;
2. protection from the arbitrary use of political authority and coercive power;
3. involvement of citizens in the determination of the conditions of their association;
4. expansion of economic opportunity to maximize the availability of resources.

For democracy to flourish today, it has to be reconceived as a double-sided phenomenon: concerned on the one hand, with the reform of the state power and on the other hand, with the restructuring of the civil society.

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