

**POLITICS OF ARTICULATION, MEDIATING  
STRUCTURES AND VOLUNTARISM:  
FROM 'CHAURAHA' TO 'CHAUPAL'**

**By**

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## Abstract

There is a considerable concern in India about the 'silence' of a large number of disadvantaged groups who have either learned to be helpless or articulate their problems rather feebly. The nature of articulation, mediating structures or platforms for dialogue or negotiation be it political channels or voluntary arenas have to be analysed as a basis of alienation of masses from the state. Emergence of the social movements encompassing ecological struggles particularly in backward regions indicates the limits of the patience of the poor disadvantaged people.

One can hypothesize that NGOs emerged or became stronger when the political channels got partly choked so that people could neither remodel the nature of their representation nor communicate with/through state bureaucracy. The transition in mediating structures has been studied through five metaphors i.e. from counter to corridor; corridor to courts; court to 'Chaurahas' (cross roads); 'Charuahas' to 'Char diwaris' (four walls) and finally from 'char diwari' to 'chaupal' as a future solution.

The voluntary initiatives in this context could also reflect a way of reducing transaction costs, fulfilling one's urge to go beyond the mandated responsibilities or just to provide a channel of articulation to those who find the existing channels and platforms non-accessible or non-fulfilling. We have presented discussion on articulation, mediating platforms and voluntarism through following four questions in different parts of this paper.

- (i) What are the major transitions in the process of articulation? Does the design of platform for negotiation influence the nature of discourse? What are the trends in articulation at central, state, district and local level with particular reference to the problems of deprived groups in backward drought prone regions?;
- (ii) What are the mediating structures or set of strategies providing a basis of dialogue or conflict resolution between state and the people particularly around environmental issues? To what extent voluntary initiatives and organisations supplement the efforts of legal, legislative and bureaucratic channels of communication?
- (iii) What are some of the key trends in rural development voluntarism? How does one contrast the spirit of voluntarism with the nature of voluntary organisation?;
- (iv) What are the implications of increasing international attempt to by pass state structures for routing aid through NGOs instead of existing public or private channels? The future scenarios are discussed in the last part.

## **Politics of Articulation, Mediating Structures and Voluntarism:**

### **From 'Chauraha' to 'Chaupal'<sup>1</sup>**

Anil K. Gupta <sup>2</sup>

Nature of crisis

The crisis of a democratic Third World welfare state is the increasing mismatch between nature of social articulation and design of platforms for negotiation. Historical process of deprivation had desensitised the consciousness of a large number of disadvantaged social groups. Participation in political process over a period of time has raised their aspirations. Ability of state to provide goods and services to match rising expectations depends upon, among other factors, the following. :

- a) Availability of budgetary resources;
- b) Allocation of scarce resources amongst productive and not so productive sectors and spaces;
- c) Feed back from the users of the services as well as the excluded ones from the same;
- d) Willingness of the elite to participate in the transfer pricing system so that people with low purchasing power can obtain the same goods and services at lower than the market price;
- e) Ability of public bureaucracies to compliment or counteract the tendencies of market forces; and
- f) Ability of the by-passed social groups to articulate their needs through available institutional channels and be heard.

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<sup>1</sup> Invited paper for edited volume on "Terms of political Discourse in India" Coordinated by Prof. T.V. Satyamurthy, University of York, 1990. it is a preliminary draft and may not be quoted without prior reference to author. Author has benefited from discussions with Harsh Sethi and Prof Kuldeep Mathur. Muralidharan has provided very useful work processing help. Usual disclaimers apply. Comments are very cordially invited.

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It is obvious that over a period of time the softer options are preferred in the 'softer' states. The budget deficit is allowed to widen so that slowly and slowly a stage comes when even basic needs cannot be met through state resources. India is facing such a crisis at present. But the seeds of this crisis were sown several decades ago when the mediating structures between state and the people started getting distorted.

The first casualty was the village democratic institutions. Instead of generating an ethic of self-reliance through voluntary contributions or self-help, foreign aid was used to start community development programmes implemented through panchayats.<sup>1</sup>

Once a political institution sought its legitimacy through patronage from state, its ability to remain accountable to its clients went down. Its constituents<sup>2</sup> nevertheless had to be served so long as the resources were available. After a while factional conflicts among the constituents generated dissatisfaction even among the constituents. The logical fall out was supersession of Panchayati Raj bodies and direct interventions of the state.

The second distortion occurred when local bodies at district level started becoming more assertive and conscious of the mismatch between local concerns and central or federal perceptions. The leaders at this level started competing with the members of Legislative Assembly and the Parliament. It was easier for bureaucracy to deal with representatives whose peer groups were at a distance (i.e., at State or Central level) and whose constituents were more broad-based than the members of local bodies. The inability of these bodies to generate internal resources by reducing their dependence on federal assistance also contributed to their decline.

Finally even these bodies were superseded. By mid 70s international aid agencies had started clamouring for 'direct' attack on poverty to increase their accountability towards the donor

communities.<sup>3</sup> The pressure for centralised, standardised and bureaucratically implemented programmes increased. This further weakened the local platforms for negotiation, dialogue and debate to generate diversity in the systems of delivery. The patterns of demand were becoming more and more diverse at the same time. Inability of state to deliver what it promised to masses in rural or urban unorganised sector generated violent and non-violent social struggles.<sup>4</sup>

In some parts of the country the disadvantaged groups were being organised for a revolutionary overhaul of the state. In other parts they were being organised as political vote banks through massive distribution of subsidies in centrally sponsored programmes<sup>5</sup>. Subsidies were financed through internal as well as external debts.

It was obvious that such a policy of continued reliance on borrowed resources was not sustainable. At the same time the tendencies for using capital intensive technologies in agriculture as well as industrial sector continued to gain strength. The employment prospect therefore, became bleak in both the sectors<sup>3</sup>.

Generating employment whether in Khadi and Village sector, urban or rural informal or non-farm sector became a necessity. Gandhian institutions having got fossilised failed to provide any

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<sup>3</sup> When attempts to have 'Bureaucratic Reorientation did not succeed in making administration more responsive to the people, bypassing state structures was considered necessary. Recognition of voluntary organisations (and not voluntarism) as a major conduit for routing aid was emphasised. It may be added that willingness of many third world countries to accept conditionalities such as these emerges from their precarious balance of payment problem. Author is aware of at least two cases in which Indian government accepted involvement of NGOs or other such policy modifications as almost a precondition for receiving aid for certain developmental programmes. In another case a European country insisted that its technological and financial aid for industry will be available only if the government also allowed it to support watershed development through NGOs. It was a different matter that this country had no technical superiority over India in this matter. Further, the NGOs concerned also did not have any technological support system which was insistence of this kind had become more evident in recent years because budget deficits due to internal and external borrowing has widened.

<sup>4</sup> The trend of the voluntary movement and violent struggles is briefly reviewed in part two of the paper.

<sup>5</sup> We have excluded mobilisation around religious identities which has become important only in the recent past except in a localised manner in previous decades.

viable alternative. Keeping unemployed or underemployed people patient became a major enterprise for the most centrist and the right parties. Left maintained its commitment to urban organised sector without generating among them any (or much) responsibility or the concern for the unorganised sector or social responsibility of public institutions<sup>4</sup>.

The political channels recognised that nature of representation did not necessarily depend upon the legitimacy of ones relationships with the clients. Instead a combination of patronage, populist reliefs and coercive intimidation served their needs no matter to which political ideology such representatives belonged.

Exceptions were far and few in between. One can hypothesise that NGOs emerged when the political channels got partly choked so that people could neither remodel the nature of their representation nor communicate with/through bureaucracy. Reliance on voluntary associations, sponsored NGOs, other grievance redressal channels or even courts became necessary.

Some others argue that the voluntary initiatives reflect a way of reducing transaction cost, fulfilling ones urge to go beyond the mandated responsibilities or just to provide a channel of articulation to those who find the existing channels and platforms non accessible or non fulfilling.

Voluntary organisations need not necessarily be voluntary associations of people imbued with altruistic values. The voluntary organisations could in some cases perform the same role as performed by the community development program during early fifties and sixties.

To pursue

- (a) The implications of increasing reliance on NGOs without at the same time reconceptualising the role of state,
  - (b) Accountability of NGOs to people, and
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(c) Greater organisational space for individual and social creativity, we present discussion on following five questions in different parts of the paper :

1. What are the major transitions in the process of articulation? Does the design of platform for negotiation influence the nature of discourse? What are the trends in articulation at central, state, district and local level with particular reference to the problems of deprived groups in backward drought prone regions?
2. What are the mediating structures or set of strategies providing a basis of dialogue or conflict resolution between state and the people particularly around environmental issues? To what extent voluntary initiatives and organisations supplement the efforts of legal, legislative and bureaucratic channels of communication?
3. What are some of key trends in rural development voluntarism? How does one contrast the spirit of voluntarism with the nature of voluntary organisation?
4. What are the implications of increasing international attempt to bypass state structures for routing aid through NGOs instead of existing public or private channels?
5. What are the directions in which platforms for political discourse in future need to be modelled?

## **Part I**

### **Nature of Articulation, Design of Platform and**

### **Ecology of Response**

Theoretically one can understand the process of articulation as a transition from recognition of a need to its aggregation into demand from the client side. At the same time, which needs are recognised as relevant and worth demanding may itself depend upon the design of the response institutions, channels of articulation and platform for negotiation or discourse<sup>5</sup>. Depending upon the perceived image of an institution and its ability to act on demands made on it, people may articulate their grievances. On the other hand an individual or social group may not feel the need for a service or good even if he/they had access to the institutions providing that facility. Over a long period of time people have unfortunately learned to live with indifferent institutions. Not recognising possibilities of change they may not even 'feel' the need for it.

Conversion of an unmet need into a felt need becomes a political as well as psychological process. It is believed by some administrators and scholars that such a role (of conversion) is beyond the public administration. There are others who argue that administration cannot be neutral and therefore it has to become involved in the process of transition of unmet need into a felt need. Whether this transition takes place through exasperation, desperation or aspiration, the issue remains that the level of consciousness has to be transformed. The transformation may be transient. People may come back to their old level of indifference. Cultural homeostasis in societies with feudal or semi-feudal past can generate a great resilience.

However, once a need was felt, its articulation may depend upon whether people have capacity to demand or have hopes of their demand being responded if made. The articulation may also take place through different channels. Through caste groups, kinship networks, electoral processes, intermediary organisations or directly by contacting the 'providers'. The articulation may be one time or 'episodic' in nature or it may be sustained or institutionalised. It may be isolated, by individual and disjointed in nature or may be aggregated, well connected and concentrated.

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The nature of channel or platform which is chosen for articulation may also influence the degree and method of aggregation. For instance, a letter of protest sent to press may not necessarily require a group action and may still have some impact depending upon the severity of the situation. On the other hand a bureaucratic functionary is less likely to feel pressurised through an isolated protest. Once an unmet need has been converted into felt need and the articulation has taken place in an aggregated manner the response will depend upon whether the need is registered and if so considered serious enough or genuine enough worth-responding by the supply side. The articulation-response model thus on one hand deals with transition of need into a registered and responded demand. And on the other, it deals with the available modes of access to the institutions; skill or abilities of the people (technical, institutional, social and political) to convert access into investments and assurances about the consequences of articulation or fall back options in the case of failed encounters<sup>7</sup>.

Another dimension of the process of articulation is the nature of the platforms for political discourse. We have identified essentially four transitions or shifts in the platforms.

Transitions of platforms for discourse:

1. From counter to corridor
2. From corridor to courts
3. From court to 'Chaurahas" (cross roads) and
4. From 'Charahas' to 'Char diwaris' (four walls)

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<sup>7</sup> Historically there are several channels non-institutional in nature used by the state to generate feedback. For instance, the court jester (vidushak) often would articulate the problems in a humorous or jocular manner. In modern states such informal channels rarely seem to exist.

If goods and services could be traded across counters in private public or any informal institutions, the need for bargaining, using intermediaries or organising influence or jumping queues in the corridor would not arise. NGOs may be redundant. However, when the transaction costs increase, either because of size, frequency, uncertainty or other factors associated with the transaction some intermediary structure is bound to emerge. The corridors provide 'room for maneuver'. Studies have shown that when cost of entering into transactions increase for the dominant part it may try to incorporate the other party within boundary of its control<sup>8</sup>.

The state by providing insufficient counters for delivery of services or goods may generate corridors. Various types of touts or middlemen may mediate the transactions such that both the parties feel apparently satisfied though not necessarily equally. Voluntary organizations may also discharge the functions of a bridge, broker or even a benevolent patron or 'bania'<sup>9</sup>. It will suffice to state that once the political discourse about programmes, policies or patronage shifts from counters to corridor, the influence of informal culture and power of 'good connections' and other socio-cultural values are bound to increase.

It is possible that even after using corridors the problem remains unsolved and one moves to the court. The courts are both an arena and institution. As an arena they provide a legal framework for settling disputes and interpreting the constitutional obligations of state towards its constituents. As an institution courts suffer from all those problems which any other public institution suffers

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<sup>8</sup> For instance, the firms integrate vertically when the transaction costs are higher than the coordination costs (increased on account of incorporating that function within the boundary of the organisation).

<sup>9</sup> Anil K. Gupta (1989). "Banking the Non-Bankable Poor: bridges, Brokers, Banias and Bankers, final report of NABARD supported study on Poverty Control Through Self-Help, Centre for Management in Agriculture, Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, Mimeo.

NGOs may 'bridge the gap between the demand and supply side by bearing the extra transaction costs itself. These may even act as a broker and charge the brokerage from one or both the parties (in some cases these may charge it from third parties as well). They may even act like a sympathetic lender or a 'benevolent bania' who tries to help either through interlocking of factor and product markets. Or tries to enter into future markets or forward trading providing relief to the people in the short run. The rent may be extracted either directly or through the influence so gained.

from. The transaction costs in obtaining justice may be so high that one may need intermediary groups or legal aid committees or legal activities to help if possible at all.

There arise occasions when either judgements of the courts are not respected or the matter is taken to the streets or the 'Chaurahas' i.e. cross roads (the courts often take a conservative view of the human rights and basic entitlements). It is here that one notices various peculiarities of Indian socio-cultural diversity<sup>10</sup>.

Once the matter is articulated through popular platforms, the rules of the game change. The issues which attract the largest number of people become more dominant than issues which are more important but around which it is difficult to organise the consensus among large populations<sup>11</sup>. Another way to look at discourse at popular platforms is to treat it as an opportunity for mass participation in modification of public perceptions of national priorities and responsibilities. Gandhian strategies did involve meetings at cross roads just like the left oriented street theatre groups have tried to do that. But Gandhian tactics to withdraw call for social struggle even at the slightest hint of leadership passing into hands of more radical hands institutionalised a specific mode of exploiting human consciousness. It is not surprising that in the post Gandhian era, 'Chauraha' ceased to be the platform for 'satyagrah'. It shifted to the streets of New Delhi and lawns, of Boat Club. As if the struggles in any other arena were not legitimate or did not deserve attention. Even the social strategies of articulation witnessed centralisation of arena of expression. But if that also failed. Negotiations may given way to manipulation.

The transition from cross roads to "char diwaris" is the most complex. The "char diwari" refers to a clique or intrigue based partisan moves. For instance, during the recent political crisis arising out of the resignation of the Dy. Prime Minister, different factional groups withdrew into their four

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<sup>10</sup> The "Nukkad" style "baithaks" in Northern India are quite different from temple premises or other styles and structures of social communication in south.

<sup>11</sup> The recent write-off of bank loans is one such instance.

walls to design various manipulative moves. The state may also resort to secretive repressive measures when faced with popular articulation on the streets or cross roads. Mrs. Gandhi used first the 'charuahas' when courts failed her. Later by imposing emergency she resorted to 'char diwaris' for discourse. That is a stage where third party interventions are seldom useful except in rare cases. For instance, when Naxalites kidnapped six sympathetic IAS officers to demand release of other colleagues of theirs in the state custody, interventions of voluntary organisations having mutual trust did succeed. The provocation and the solution was indeed organised in the "char diwaris".

The purpose of discussing these platforms for political discourse is to illustrate the need for comparing the process of articulation with the characteristics of platform used for the purpose.

To illustrate this aspect further we refer to the studies of articulation process at the level of Parliament, State Assembly and District. Since the deprivation levels are very high in drought prone regions having weak markets and limited surplus, the study of articulation would provide a basis of understanding the scope for mediation by different forces including voluntary groups.

### **Parliament Debates**

Analysis of Parliamentary debates on the issue of drought was taken up for the last several droughts to identify the questions raised and the response received by the Members of Parliament<sup>12</sup> Debate during 1971-73 and 1984-87 the two periods experiencing severe drought – were taken up for study (Mathur and Jayal, 1989). In the earlier period most questions related to the quantum of Central assistance provided to the States for drought relief activities. The issue of strategies adopted by different State governments for mitigating effect of drought was rather ignored. The other questions were regarding starting irrigation schemes, relief works and need

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<sup>12</sup> Kuldeep Mathu and N Jayal (1990), Political Articulation for Managing Drought: an analysis of parliamentary debate during 1971-73 and 1985-87, Centre For Political Studies, JNU New Delhi. This is a part of a large interdisciplinary study on 'Sustainable of High Risk Environments' coordinated by Anil K. Gupta at IIM –A.

for futuristic planning. There was only one question each on the Centrally sponsored Drought Prone Area and Desert Development programmes. No supplementary questions were asked with the solitary question on DPAP. There was no indication that a long term perspective on drought was either sought or provided in the Parliamentary debates. The standard reply of the Government on every question regarding drought was to catalogue schemes for four sub-sectors i.e. minor irrigation, soil conservation, afforestation and water conservation. On these four major plants of the policy the question pertained only to the first. Authors underlined the fact that, "one question each on drinking water supply, wages on the famine relief works and rural electrification exhausts the contributions, over a three year period, of MPs from these two seriously drought affecting states" (Mathur and Jayal, 1989:36). Both the MPs and the Ministers seem to agree that recurrent drought was essentially a climatic phenomena and as one Minister said, "nothing can be done except waiting for the rainfall". In the Phase I, one could conclude that the dominant perspective on drought in the Parliament was that of a natural calamity caused by unexpected and unfavourable weather conditions<sup>6</sup>. The best response to such conditions could be a fire fighting strategy backed up by heavy Central investments to mitigate the suffering of the drought affected people. As we shall see later it is the failure of political discourse at higher level in articulating strategic concerns of the people which may lead to demand for extra institutional space at local level in the form of NGOs.

While in Phase I questions were primarily from Rajasthan and Gujarat, in Phase II (1984-87) there was a much wider articulation because incidence of drought itself was much more wide spread. Most of the people referred to the phenomena of drought as a result of man's interference with the ecological balance through destruction of forests and exploitation of ground water. A few even asked for better scientific investigation into the causes of drought. The concern indeed was expressed that even areas in Haryana and Punjab and Konkan in Maharashtra were experiencing drought. Perhaps broad-based nature of the problem generated

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much greater diversity in the discourse through the attendance during the debate was extremely low. Searching questions were raised about the procedures adopted for extending relief. It was regretted that Central study teams did not consult with MPs and MLAs. Interestingly the MPs suggested need for closer cooperation between them and the officials of Central and State Governments. They wanted them to be associated with the relief works. There was a suggestion that MPs and MLAs could be made the members of monitoring committees at district level with Collector as the Presiding Officer. Failure of bureaucracy was highlighted. An interesting suggestion was made that next two sessions of Parliament be cut by half to enable MPs to spend more time in their villages. In marked contrast to the debates during '70s, i.e., the Phase I, there was considerable emphasis on the need for formulating a national policy. Some suggested a need for a natural commission on drought.

If the drought affected, 67% of the districts as against half or one-third of it in the earlier period not only the intensity but also the pattern of articulation got changed quite understandably. Members, it seemed, remained unconvinced about the Government's claims about policy of consistent long term perspective. The authors also pursued political speeches in the Assembly election and found that candidates did not try to raise the level of political debate by educating their constituents and clients about various dimensions of the problem. The local concerns inevitably were highlighted.

What do we learn from this important study of discourse:

- (i) The debate in '70s and '80s conspicuously missed the role of local bodies, Panchayati Raj institutions and NGOs in either implementation or monitoring or planning of the developmental strategies;
- (ii) There was a great eagerness for Members of Parliament to be involved in the administration of relief at local level. But corresponding concern for involving local leaders and their constituents in the planning of national policy was not manifested;
- (iii) While environmental awareness was increasing it was conspicuously more in the well-endowed regions. Interestingly, only when the MPs from such regions faced the problem they articulated the concerns even for other regions much more cogently;
- (iv) The MPs from the backward regions had perhaps reconciled with the model of dependent development.



- (v) The low participation in the debate indicated lack of wider concern in the issue, and ,  
lastly

- (vi) Inability of the top level political discourse to articulate
  - (a) The need for long term policies
  - (b) For region specific variabilities in its implementation and
  - (c) Greater involvement of people in design, implementation and monitoring, justifies the need for autonomous even if disjointed articulation at local level.

### **Political Discourse at State Level**

We looked at the entire proceedings of the legislative debates in Karnataka Assembly during last eight years<sup>13</sup>. Out of about 30-40 days of legislative discussions in a year, the maximum time spent on drought was about nine per cent during 1987 and minimum was about 0.2 per cent during 1980. The entire discussion was divided among 43 different subjects ranging from industry, power, food and civil supplies to agriculture, rural development, drought, horticulture etc.

Unlike the discussion in Parliament the quality of debate at state level was far more rich in terms of identification of problem and generation of solutions. One MLA suggested that Government could use, decline in the beef prices as an early Warning signal for the drought<sup>14</sup>. Another MLA asks the question as to why Government could not consider breaking the Western Ghat mountain range at a particular depression so that the monsoon winds could move to the interior parts. Still another member suggested need for preparation of a drought atlas on the basis of past information and decried the tendency of 'digging well when the house was on fire'. There was a concern expressed on the absence of a permanent unit for planning and monitoring drought.

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<sup>13</sup> S. Subramany and Anil K. Gupta, 1990, "Policy Articulation for Sustainable Development of High Risk Environment: A Study of Legislative Debates in Karnataka, 1980-1989", CMA, IIMA, Mimeo.; part of our study on Sustainable Development at IIM-A.

<sup>14</sup> Although beef is eaten by hardly one per cent Muslim population of Karnataka, the demand is fairly constant. The Disposal of livestock is the first response after pastoralists apprehend drought. Since prices are still high once the supply increases with constant demand more and more people enter the market and prices start declining. This indicates that drought has set in. Most studies including my own work during last 10 years on drought have ignored this insight. Not one public document refers to this.

Members were very critical that once the drought was over no effort was made to learn the lessons.

Political discourse at state level reveals several useful insights:

- (i) The need for long term planning was articulated far more comprehensively and consistently than at the level of Parliament,
- (ii) Suggestions for the long-term mitigation of drought were very specific and concrete,
- (iii) Ninety per cent of the long term issues were lost because in 10 years only 23 subjects were referred to the Assurance Committee of the Legislature,
- (iv) The closeness to the field appeared to generate more grounded understanding of reality and more responsible agenda for action.

The pity was that bureaucracy systematically down played the importance of suggestions and political leaders could not persist with some of the very good ideas.

If MLAs were little more articulate and if bureaucracy was responsive scope for voluntary initiatives perhaps would not have been so much necessary in identification of problems as in the implementation. However, as our review of news-clippings on drought in local vernacular press for six years showed there were areas of conspicuous gap between what the representatives of the people perceived and what was perceived by the press, popular movements, social groups and in some cases even individuals. In the absence of proper briefing given to the MLAs their ability to represent their clients and constituents only improved with experience.

The MLAs from the backward districts or talukas, it turned out, were less articulated even at the State level. There was a good possibility that if local bodies at district and mandal or sub-district level were allowed to grow, the political platform will be able to incorporate most of the genuine concerns of the people.

## **Articulation of District Level**

In recent study we looked at all the complaints articulated by people to district collectorate in a drought prone district<sup>15</sup>. Even though a very famous experiment on Reorganisation of Collectorate was undertaken in this district, the rules of the game for the people had not changed much. In a district of over 20 lakh population, hardly 644 people chose to articulate their concerns in one year. The number of complaints were far higher from the developed talukas of the district (except on the per capita basis). Majority of these complaints emanated from taluka headquarters. Two-third of the complaints emanated from taluka headquarters. Two-third of the complaints were made by the individuals directly. Only about 2.50 per cent complaints were communicated through political parties. About 12 per cent complaints were sent by the groups of people rather than individuals. There was none through the voluntary organisations. As expected majority of the complaints (47%) out rural regions pertained to land related disputes. Problems about agricultural and rural development, police, bureaucracy, employment, etc., were the other issues on which people articulated their concern.

Lack of awareness about the process and authority to complain was responsible for a large number of people for non complaining even when they had the problem. Illiteracy, poverty and the pressure from politician and their henchmen not to complain, were the three other factors (in the order of importance) considered responsible for low articulation from backward areas.

The articulation at district level and below clearly indicates that the political discourse is following very different rules of the game at different platforms and levels in the society. At local level people had more or less learned to live with the development programmes as they obtained. They did not articulate many problems about quality of food given under Food or Work or Employment Guarantee Scheme, extent of wages and duration of employment, corruption at fair-

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<sup>15</sup> Anil K. Gupta, S.T. Patil and Rakesh Singh, 1990, " Designing Accessible and Accountable Administrative System or Why do not People Protest: A Case Study of Grievance Redressal in a

price shops etc., (issues which many social activists took up in their protest(s). The nature of articulation even about drought seemed very different in Parliament, State Assembly and at district level. The response of bureaucracy was also quite different. The discourse on policies was almost absent at district level and was very weak in the Parliament.

It appears that process of articulation at different levels leaves enough scope for imaginative interventions to be made by concerned groups laterally as well as vertically<sup>16</sup>.

At the same time the policy articulation from the NGOs suffered from the same weaknesses as the one found with public policy analysis. By and large NGOs were far more emotive in their approach and rhetorical in their analysis. Perhaps their strength was their ability to act and not analyse and assimilate.

The accountability of the State towards the people is neither being enforced nor being demanded adequately through the available institutional channels. Thus every intervention demands a new institution and pleads for district interaction with the State agencies without investing or building upon the political institutions.

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<sup>16</sup> it needs to be noted that it was a public interest litigation which influenced the wage policy under drought relief in Rajasthan and not a question in parliament or assembly. Likewise, it were the NGOs which steered popular discontent in the aftermath of Bhopal Gas leak or on the issue of rehabilitation of oustees of Narmada project. The monitoring of implementation of the promises made by government was also being done by the NGOs such as ARCH (Action Research for Community Health). There are NGOs which have forced the administration to provide better drinking water facilities. There are some who have given training to local level Mistris (artisans) for repair of drinking water had pumps. Large number of voluntary organisations organised cattle camps to provide fodder and shade for the livestock during the drought of 1987. it would have been impossible for the State Government to face the calamity of that order without the help of voluntary organisations. The motivations of course were different for different participants in the relief. A majority of them emerged and got support because of religious sentiments of Hindu community with cow protection. Once the rains came the problem was dismissed. Many NGOs complained that there was no help available either from State or from the people for those suffering still from the losses incurred during the drought.

Also see the study by D L Sheth and Harsh Sethi (1989) Representation and Reality: The NGO Sector, Centre For Developing Society, New Delhi, Mimeo; for a very sympathetic and comprehensive analysis of the role of NGOs in development.

The competition between the political institutions and the voluntary groups for local support and patronage is slowly becoming intense. Some of the NGO leaders have started taking part in electoral politics. Most of them had always their political leanings. Once this competition intensifies either the organised political channels such as political parties would become less important and more and more interest groups would participate in brokers as they have often done in some parts covertly or overtly. By either case the pressure for institutions be it bureaucratic, legislative or legal to be weakened by sheer indifference may increase. We will look at some of the pointers emerging in this regard in the next part.

## **Part Two**

### **Ecological Variability, Diversity of Articulation, Mediating Structures and strategies of discourse: eco-conflicts and response of the state**

Literature on Organisational Behaviour and Public Administration includes many references to the need for reappraising current methods of analysing interactions between people and institutions<sup>17</sup>. However, these concerns have excluded any reference to the way social formations emerge in different ecological contexts, for instance Nef and Dwivedi (1981), Khadwalla (1984,1988- ). Comprehensive review of Indian studies on Organisational effectiveness after 1976 (Khandwalla, 1984) does not include a single reference on the need for taking variability introduced by ecological endowments in social experience, articulation and interaction with organisations.

How has the question of 'space' or 'region' figured in the study or governance? Jain felt uneasy that due to the conflicts between centre and states, an uneven situation exists in various states regarding environmental management and the implementation and/reinforcement/of national policies (1984:303). The remedies for inappropriate implementation of environmental policies included

- (a) Greater technical competence in Department of Environment and the Board set up at state level;
- (b) Funds for setting up expert committees, preparation of environmental appraisal projects, and
- (c) Greater attention by the state governments.

It was believed that "financial stringency, coupled with inadequate attention being paid by state government to their whatever environmental departments/committee that exist is affecting the dedication and motivation" (Jain 1984:303-305). This is an example of the problem identified

quite rightly by the Third Review of Social Science Research in India by ICSSR (New Delhi, 1986). This report observed, "social scientists have responded more to the problems as perceived by governmental agencies than to the issues facing society" (1986:8). Whether the dedication and motivation of the leaders and officials at central level should be affected adversely when variability in the endowments, needs and historical context of different states are ignored in the guidelines issued by the centre is not disputed by Jain.

The issue is whether the analysis of this demotivation should include the perceptions and needs of the people in states also? Why such perceptions get created can be better understood if we look at the way environmental policies evolved at the central level.

It was in fourth Five Year Plan that the government realised the limits of standardised solution to regionally differentiated problems. Fifth Five Year Plan saw the evolution of a large number of eco-specific programmes such as for Hill areas, coastal regions, drought prone areas, deserts, tribal-forest regions etc. This was perhaps the period when ecological sensitivity was being taken into account while designing public systems, at least to some extent. Even among these programmes, DPAP, to begin with, had greater flexibility in evolving programme content, administrative strategy and organisational structure. Not only this flexibility was removed in sixth Five Year Plan but standardisation was taken to its extreme extent in Seventh Five Year Plan in the form of Integrated Rural Development Agency (DRDA). With increasing tendencies for administrative centralisation, the central government has shown lesser willingness to accommodate variabilities in the programme design and content. It is ironical that role of NGOs was given maximum attention in the Seventh Five Year Plan but not for generating feedback on the poor fit which existed between central policies and regional realities. Instead it was to either bypass the 'different' administrative system so that 'governance' is done by 'non governmental organisations' or to incorporate NGOs in speedily implementing the centrally sponsored development programmes. In Eighth Five Year Plan, even the remaining thrust is being diluted in

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<sup>17</sup> This section draws upon my Paper on Managing Ecological Diversity ... , IIM WP 825, 1989, op



the name of so called decentralisation. Never before one had such a disoriented planning commission. While the share of state governments in the financial burden of centrally sponsored programmes is being instituted explicitly no attempt is being made to redefine the accountability of state towards the people. The dominance of culture of 'char diwari' was never so intense because claims about open government were also not made so strongly earlier. Even on the issue of environmental management the policies have been so muddled and influence of one or the other lobby (be it from industries or NGOs) so explicit that one can hardly find any trace of a policy. The situation becomes paradoxical if in the name of participation, Delhi based NGOs, activist groups or 'families' acquire disproportionately large influence in the body politic. There are some other features too in this incorporation of selected voices which should cause concern.

### **Role of Environmental NGOs**

Several typologies of NGOs have been proposed with regard to the environmental issues. Jain (1984) divided the environmental NGOs into three groups

- (a) Those involved in enhancing environmental awareness (CSE)
- (b) Those involved in practical development as well as environmental awareness (Shahdo Group, Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad-KSSP, Dasholi Gram Swarajya Mandal-DGSM) and
- (c) Environmental activists (Bombay environmental action group-BEAG).

It is obvious that such a typology is inadequate largely because each of these roles that is, awareness, action and activism could be simultaneously pursued by various groups. For instance the CSE has been involved in activism as well as in promoting environmental awareness. What is more important to notice is the positive role that the author visualises for NGOs such as:

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cit. See the original for all the references.

- (a) Pressing State Governments to implement the guidelines issued by the Department of Environment and
- (b) Forcing the states to allow DOE to 'study and analyse potential environmental impact of critical projects'.

The weaknesses identified are

- (a) Weak linkages between the State and NGOs
- (b) Weak role in enactment of environmental legislation
- (c) Inadequate links between city based NGOs and their rural counterpart and
- (d) Lack of 'perfect' understanding of environmental problems of NGOs.

There are several problems with such a conceptualisation of the role of NGOs. With increasing centralisation in the public policy the suggestion for stronger NGOs – State (Central authority) linkage might further weaken the tendencies for greater federalisation of the State. Instead of strengthening the institutional capacity at the state level the NGOs can be used to bypass the local level structures. Whether this would help in evolution of eco-specific policies and procedures in public administration is an issue for further research. On the other hand there are examples of NGOs articulating the concerns of people struggling against government's short sighted policies (Agarwal, D'Monte and Samarth, 1987).

Other weaknesses identified in NGOs are

- (a) Lack of trained personnel with NGOs,
- (b) Limited access to authentic data
- (c) Lack of statutory support and judicial sympathy for the efforts of non officials
- (d) Apathy of public towards sustained campaign and
- (e) Weak inter NGOs coordination (Mathew 1987).

The successful cases recalled by Mathew in this context are: Silent Valley Project, Appiko Movement, DGSM, Save the Western Ghat Movement. The possibility that any institutionalised

space for negotiation may lead inevitably to emergence of hierarchies and bureaucratic structures has not been adequately appreciated. The voluntary nature of many of these NGOs become weaker as they become institutionalised in state structures (Lokayan Bulletins, 1981-1986). However, several initiatives for policy reform would not have been taken but for sustained pressure by concerned NGOs such as IDS in Dharwar, Karnataka and Vikalp, Saharanpur; Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi; Bombay National History Society, Bombay; etc.

### **Articulation through Ecological Movements: Emergence, Evolution and Interaction with the State**

Conceptually the process of feeling deprived or aggrieved had been considered responsible for political action on social issues. On the other hand the resource-mobilization theorists have considered grievance as ubiquitous. They believe that grievances could not partly explain participation in political protest. The collective-theorist (Olson 1965: Hardin 1982 in Opp 1988:853) argue,

that in large groups, grievance (i.e. preferences for collective goods that have not been provided to a sufficient extent) are not incentives for collective action because a single member has only a negligible influence on providing collective goods. Contrary to the classical model, this theory assumes a conditional effect of grievances: a multiplicative relationship between the preferences for public goods and influence on providing the goods and collective action. Since in large groups influence is assumed to be negligible, the preferences for public goods do not affect SMP (Social Movement Participation).

The grievance could lead to Social Movement Participation (SMP) if opportunities for participation are available. After studying 121 opponents of nuclear energy in West Germany before and after Chernobyl accident on April 26, 1986, it was found that the pre Chernobyl grievances did not lead to post accident SMP. However, a positive effect of grievances was noted across the panel.

those low in grievances before Chernobyl became more aggrieved. Nor was a reciprocal relationship found between legal and illegal forms of protest. Grievances affecting legal (illegal) protest had no indirect effects on illegal (legal) protest. The data refute frustration-aggression arguments. Social-movement participants chose actions they regarded as most effective for success. This supports the assumption made by

resource-mobilisation theorists that actions are chosen rationally for political reasons (1988:862).

The results explained the 'legal' rather than the 'illegal' protest regarding both the simultaneous and the lagged effects. It was hypothesised that selective incentives were much more important in explaining illegal than legal protest. Also perhaps illegal protests were much more spontaneous. It was also felt that ideology also generated discontent not captured in the study. For instance some people justified their actions by referring to the health problems as well as the discontent with the capitalist system (1988:862). The author looked into the public choice theory framework in which the availability of common good and associated costs and the benefits may help the participants in framing their moves. I present next a brief review of the events in India about conflicts noted in the last few years from the point of view of strategy and style chosen for protest.

While there are several studies of social movements and agrarian struggles (see for a recent discussion Gore, 1989; Desai, 1986; Das, 1983; Alexander, 1980) the studies that deal with ecology and social movement have been far fewer (Oovedt 1984, Bandyopadhyay and Shiva 1988, Kothari 1985, Agarwas 1983, Rao 1989; Guha 1983). The relationship between tribal movements, ecological conditions and protest have not been clearly established in many studies.

The perception of society about distribution of power and its bearing on control over resources has been considered to be a major factor explaining emergence of protest movements around ecological issues (Fernandes 1984). It has been further observe that the rural and urban poverty get linked up in urban slums which elite characterise as pollution of urban environment. Given the powerlessness of the poor they either become totally helpless or assume that public administrators would do some thing about their problem. Sometimes when the grievances do not result in any action they internalise the perception of elite about the system and poor people. The result is that they may develop a lower self image which comes in the way of mobilisation or articulation (Fernandes 1984). This illustrates the weakness of grievance induced SMP. Another

view is that the conflicts around natural resources are inherent in the very concept of development which we have adopted (Agarwal, 1983; Gupta, 1981, 1985; Ninan, 1980; Khosla, 1983).

While analysing the probability of emergence of extremist struggles it has been hypothesised that the areas where movements would emerge could have

- (a) High percentage of tribal population,
- (b) Difficult terrain and forest area
- (c) Failure of land reform
- (d) Exploitation by outsiders and
- (e) Tendency towards increasing disparity in income (Das, 1983:73).

While reviewing various tribal movements (Sen Gupta 1988, Dubey 1987, Singh 1987) we notice that an integration of the perspectives from the ecological, political-economic, anthropological, historical, psychological and sociological disciplines remains to be achieved.

It has been argued that in North East the alienation of tribal population from the mainstream society and solidarity with the similar people in the neighbouring countries generated strong sense of deprivation and alienation. Sub-nationalism was generated in the economically backward regions in North East. Isolation, low population density, ecological endowments making very low rate of capital accumulation possible coupled with high literacy rate generated new identity (Bose 1967, Dubey 1987). The ethno-political movements of tribals continued with their exploitation (Dubey 1987). The Christian identity is suggested to have also fuelled the alienation (Ninan 1980). I see these explanations as a part of continuing search for frameworks that explain why so few people protest despite so widespread deprivation.

Guha (1986) regrets that otherwise a very comprehensive and pioneering effort, the Report on the State of India's Environment (CSE 1985) ignored the militant movements of ethnic minorities

in Chota Nagpur and North East. He emphasises that this neglect could be an outcome of the assumption made by the editors about the 'Vanguard' roles for voluntary agencies.

It is added "the ecological innocence of our political parties is not an adequate reason for the abandonment of traditional forms of political expression" (Guha 1986:626). It is not that the environmentalist have not been sensitive to the contradictions in the development process, it is just that the role of state, voluntary agencies and historical consciousness in the society has not been made very explicit.

This problem as mentioned earlier has been characteristic of some of the most eminent environmental professionals/scientists. For instance Dr. Swaminathan exhorts the people to live harmoniously in rural and urban regions for ensuring sustainable ecological and social development (1986). He had earlier coined the phrase, "Ecological Refugees" (also mentioned in CSE 1985) to characterise the migration of people to urban areas. He like many others failed to notice that if only people from drought prone regions, tribal or hill areas migrated to cities it was not just an ecological phenomena though it had ecological origin. The politics underlying such conceptualisation needs to be made explicit.<sup>18</sup>

Undoubtedly the spectrum of ideological position of various ecological movements may range from Gandhian to Marxian (Guha 1986). However, to suggest that these two tendencies were creating the space for appropriate technology as a third strand is to perhaps misread the situation. The 'appropriateness' of technology in different time frames has been widely considered a matter of political choices. Various technological combinations reflect a whole range of these choices.

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<sup>18</sup> It is useful to refer to a similar plea in the Report of National Commission on Development of Backward Areas (planning commission, 1981) where it was suggested that one should not try to retain people in the backward regions lest the supply of cheap labour for large irrigation and other development projects is affected adversely. Internal colonialism was never articulated perhaps more explicitly.

In fact there are several other dimensions of these movements which remain to be properly assimilated in a comprehensive framework. For instance the involvement and perception of women is seen to be influenced some times by factors totally different from the one influencing involvement of men. It has been suggested that Chipko Movement began by the men of regions protesting not so much against deforestation as for a share of the forest produce. While men opted for fruit and timber trees women are reported to have preferred fuel and fodder trees (Majumdar 1986:102-103, Jain 1988, Rao 1989). Otherwise the women studies have generally ignored the ecological dimensions altogether. (Exceptions are the studies by Indian Social Institute, New Delhi; Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi; Lokayan, and Dietrich, 1988 etc.). In the model curriculum designed for women studies (Raj, M.K. 1986) no consideration was shown for the study of very systematic relationships between women, ecology, deprivation and public policies. It has not been understood that the proportion of the women headed household is maximum in drought prone regions and hill areas. It is also important to note that public policies for various systems such as banks discriminate against women borrowers (Gupta 1983, 1985). Recommendations for removing the requirements of male co-obligants for such women borrowers have been dismissed at the highest policy making levels (Gupta 1983). If such concerns do not occupy central attention of the ecological movements it is obvious that the politics emerging from such assumptions would only serve limited purpose. Of late the bias against gender issues has been giving way. In fact some very exhaustive but polemic studies (Shiva 1988) and other more rigorous but impressionistic ones (Agarwal and Narayan 1985, Rao 1989) have contributed in focussing attention towards women issues in ecological movements.

To illustrate the way ecological movements re incorporating deviance or plurality of perspectives the example of Save the Western Ghats Movement (SWG M) is useful. Dr. Madhav Gadgil had presented a view point of technocratic participate reforms which was contested by the participants in SWGM from Kerala. The critic objected to the idea of limiting the desirable goals by the criterion of feasibility. They said,

Definitely planners, sociologists and ecologists should have in mind only what is desirable for the majority of the population and not for the microscopic minority of the population and not for the microscopic minority of the urban elite. Dr. Gadgil sets great store on feasibility and one cannot but point out that even at the conceptual level it would mean further degeneration (sic) of the environment and further impoverishment of the masses ...

Another point of disagreement was Dr. Gadgil's proposal "to seek the involvement of the Central and State government efforts." The Kerala delegation asked in the note,

Does he seriously believe that Wimco Match Industries, West-Coast Paper Mills, Harihar Polyfibres, Western India Plywoods, Gwalior Rayon and other similar paper, pulp or plywood industries can be trusted with the responsibility of taking care of our environment, especially the eco-development of the ghats (1988:36)?

The critique further objected to the proposition to include armed forces in a forest station. The SWGM was considered to be the legitimising mechanism for what they called the repressive apparatus of the State. They also did not like appeal to the religious sense of the masses which to them was a wrong way to do the right thing (also see, Gadgil, Prasad and Ali, 1983; Gadgil, 1984).

It must be mentioned that not all these points are valid or even helpful in developing a viable strategy for the movement. To see contradictions in terms of agriculture or industry or to label any instrument of state such as the Army as monolithic and uniform in its character may not be very logical.

What is important to note here is that the movement has shown the maturity to contain plurality without any insistence on agreement on major approaches to achieve a goal which fortunately is shared by most members of the movement. It is also fortuitous that the Kerala group rejected the need for an organisation. This is one of the most useful lesson for the students of political science and public administration. When should movement become an organisation and or an institution is in issue which still remains to be properly analysed and understood.



One of the most innovative feature of the movement was collection of empirical data about resource availability and its use in various villages on the route of march of SWGM and feeding back this analysis to the people as well as the members o SWGM. Hundred and sixty villages were surveyed (Malhotra, 1989). This has been a major lapse in most branches of social sciences. The findings of research are very rarely shared with the people from whom the data is collected (Gupta 1987).

The need for networking with international movements to resist similar nexus between the state and MNCs has been noted but rarely practiced. The National Fishermen Forum (Layan Bulletin 1986,86-92) is one of the oldest movements having established links with fishermen's union in different coastal states and organisation in other countries. The demands of the NFF have included ecological, economic and institutional support necessary for their continued survival. The relation between degradation and diminution of commons on one hand and the so called needs of society/nation for foreign exchange through exports led technological change on the other is brought out most precisely in this case.

The willingness of government to tolerate NGOs supported by foreign agencies may increase in direct proportion to India's vulnerability due to negative balance of payment.

## **Strategies and States of Conflict Resolution Around Environmental Issues and Negotiation**

### **Process:**

There are limitations of the data used in this section based on their content, categorisation and interpretations by journalists who provided the maximum insights on interaction between nature of articulation, platform for discourse and the response of state.

### **Conflicts and Negotiation: nature of data**

We looked at a wide range of sources primarily for last five years but in some cases for last ten years to scan writing on ecology including 55 journals, 83 books and reports, 24 news papers and magazines.nmbg.

In table 1 the physical and moral pressure tactics have been presented for 63 cases. It may be added that each case may have many events/reports. Various physical pressure tactics implied either threat, rasta roko (obstructing the movement of traffic or the officials of the concerned agencies), gherao (physical encirclement of the concerned officials/decision makers, resource destruction such as uprooting the plants (for instance Eucalyptus seedlings were uprooted in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu by the people's movements). Morcha (procession of people) has been distinguished from Satyagrah. The latter is included in physical pressure tactics in the sense that is coercive whereas the Satyagrah is persuasive.

Moral pressure tactics include fasting (individual or groups), invoking religious sentiments, issuing appeals etc. what is ;most remarkable is to note that the fasting s a means of Gandhian technique to persuade the opponent did not seem to be very popular with the protesters. In the absence of longitudinal data we can not suggest whether there is a declining trend. The fasting implying Hatha Yoga has been a longstanding method of putting moral pressure on others through self torture. In contrast issuing appeals seems most popular option among the moral means of protest compared to Morcha and physical obstruction among the physical means.

Another feature which strikes us is that only a minuscule number of protesters have chosen to use resource destruction as a means of protest. Apparently the non-violent persuasive strategies seem still to have primacy over more militant alternatives. If we take out Morcha out of physical tactics and shift it to the moral methods of protest the difference between the two groups become much more significant.

The message is that if public administrators and policy makers continue to resist pressure for negotiations and dialogue there is no escape from protesters using more militant means of articulation.

The styles and legal means of protest are described in Table 2. The primacy of forest and dam based protests is maintained. Among various strategies of campaign, public meetings followed by informal associations, procession and press seemed more popular. The fact that post card campaign or interstate networking were of very minor importance perhaps indicates the localised nature of most campaigns. The implications of such a style are that it would be easier for the state to put one group against another or ignore till the mass mobilisation takes place.

There were only thirteen cases of legal activism which we could locate. It is true that the actual number is much higher and would require review of All India Reporter. Interestingly the academics and consumer associations have not yet been attracted by these means of articulating their concerns. We may however, record that Professor Baxi and others have indeed supported various groups interested in legal redressal of their grievance. There are a few other leading advocates in different cities as a part of People's Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL) and People's Union of Democratic Rights (PUR) who have supported these movement. Such efforts would not be classified under academics led legal activism.

The type of negotiation strategies used are presented in Table 3 along with the levels at which these negotiations have taken place. Open bargaining seems to be slowly becoming as important a process as traditional means such as appointment of committees or dispatch by government of study teams. The right to information is still being resisted by the state in contravention of the democratic ideals which society seems to cherish. The recent example of debate between government, scientists and the concerned people on the Kaiga project in Karnataka is a good case in point. There are cases where government felt pressured to abandon or freeze a particular policy measure. The case of forest bill illustrates such a process.

Among various levels of negotiation the state government level turn out as most important. It is pity that hardly any efforts have been made to strengthen institutions at state level. The state level land use boards have remained more or less defunct and the national level Land Use and Conservation Board has not met for two years. Despite all the rhetoric on Panchayati Raj the role of village panchayat in negotiation around ecological conflicts has remained quite insignificant. This is another area where researchers have to study to draw long term implications. The management of common properties cannot but be done at village or taluk level depending upon the nature of resource. (Of course in the case of Ozone layer around the earth the commons can even be global. We will revert to this later).

The region and resource-wise cases and events of conflict are given in Table 4. The Forests and Irrigation projects are the major resource or sectors around which the conflicts took place. What is most noteworthy is the significantly less number of cases in Eastern and Central India where tribal population is maximum. Excepting the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and related struggles in Bihar, West Bengal, the Bodo movement in Assam and protests around dams, mining, riverine lands in Bihar the East and Central India presents a disquieting picture. One implication is that people in these regions have 'learnt to be helpless'. Other implications could be that the bureaucracy is much more oppressive and thus does not let people organise and the day to day needs of survival take precedence over medium and long term goals requiring sacrifice of short term subsistence.

There may be several other explanations such as lack of horizontal communication and limited awareness about which demands to make, where and how (Arun Agarwal, 1989).

That this could be a possibility is borne out by the experience of farmers' movements. When have we heard about farmers' agitation for prices of bajra, sorghum, minor millets, pulses or raw wool, hides and skins, minor forest produce etc. The dry regions are characterised by severe deprivation. The ability of poor people to articulate, aggregate, register their demands with the supply or delivery system to pressurise these to respond, as mentioned earlier, is very limited.

### **Nature of Protests**

While evaluating the strategy of social protests Gamson (1975:143) observed, "If it costs so much to succeed, how can we be confident that there are not countless would-be challengers who are deterred by the mere prospect". The problem indeed is, why do so few people protest despite widespread deprivation.

The illustrations thus have to be seen as reflective of persistence shown by various social groups who are not prepared to accept a relationship with the resources that is mandated by the state. One must not infer that there has not been any attempt on the part of the state to modify the resource relationships compared to what they were years ago. For instance in the case of the Narmada Irrigation cum Power Project controversy there has been a fairly wide ranging debate although it has not always been treated in a professional manner by the state. For instance some of the signatories on an appeal sent to the Prime Minister for reconsideration of the project were forced to withdraw their signatures using the facility of the state patronage as a carrot or a stick. At the same time there are voluntary organisations (like ARCH) which are taking government at its face value and are ensuring that every oustee gets all the privileges provided in the project documents (also see, Satyanarayan, 1988).

The pity is that the entire debate is taking place either at the level of economics or ecology apart from social cost that oustees are expected to bear. The working of the Institutions, participation of different stake holders, sharing of information and capacity in the institutions to implement commitments being made in the development plans are not being systematically studied by the

researchers. Also what prior rights the oustees should have in the ownership and control over the Dam, irrigation channels, power grids etc., being built has not been looked into. Arguments that the tribals have not benefited by being there where they have been ignored. Whether their historical contribution to the preservation of resources should be offset against allotment of five acres of land is an issue that has not been discussed. The struggle for a better rehabilitation policy has been transformed into a debate against big dams (Sethi, 1989). The new forms of sharing ownership of assets is not on the agenda<sup>19</sup>. Whether the bureaucratic growth could be checked by ensuring management of canals and other systems by the associations of oustees has not been even considered.

While the Chipko movement succeeded in getting a ban put on the logging of trees the studies have indicated reduced employment opportunities and consequent hardship to rural youth. In the first phase when complete ban was put the amount of hardship was so high that Bahuguna had to reportedly dilute the demand. This is a case where without providing for short term survival of people the long term sustainability of forest could not be achieved (Dogra, 1988). One of the likely reasons for removal of the latest state minister of environment was that she ignored such pleas from the hill people. It was ignored that the Tree Protection Act as it stood at present, came in the way of removing even a few trees without making a reference to central government such that construction of engineering colleges and important link roads was held up. The result was that when the power of this minister declined, not many tears were shed except by some NGOs.

Studies have shown that many panchayats in Northern India as well as Western India had given their common lands to forestry department for so called social forestry just in order to prevent this land being used by the landless harijans owing livestock in the villages. Without exception the most fertile land was given first (Gupta, 194, 1983).

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<sup>19</sup> The literacy rate in Jhabua increased from 5% to 7% during 1971 to 1981. There is nothing to romanticise about their life style and living conditions.

The NGO interactions with state many times have ignored the social contradiction between different classes, between cultivator and pastoralists, between sheep owners and cattle owners between small producer or a larger producer.

Legal activism as we mentioned earlier has played an important role in defining the boundaries of debates around ecological issues. After 42<sup>nd</sup> amendment in the constitution in 1977 two articles i.e. 48A and 51A have defined the duty and responsibility of state as well as people. In a perceptive analysis Prof. Baxi (1984) has stressed that the most fundamental flaw with the institutional design of law particularly in environmental arena was its neo-colonial orientation. Overloading or statutory authorities was another mechanism for perhaps deliberate non performance or mal-performance of statutory task. It was paradoxical that environmental experts or the law commission were never consulted by the environmental law making or modifying committee. He adds:

If legislation is an important component of planning, and if planning is intended to achieve results, then we must abandon the odd belief that the law is merely a technique, not relevant at the stage of policy formulation, which can be pressed into service at the level of converting the settled policy into a binding enactment (1984:12).

Recently the new environmental law passed in the Parliament curbed the right of environmentalists to go to court on ecological issues. They were expected to give notice to the government of their intention to make complaint atleast 60 days before actually doing so. Civil courts were barred from entertaining any such suit against central government. The Government officers were also protected if they had acted in good faith and without negligence (The Tribune, 1986). Obviously this is the case of reverse activism of the law makers to thwart attempt for policy reform.

In the Shriram Oleum Leak Case Supreme Court has suggested setting up of environmental courts to deal with the cases of environmental pollution, and resources degradation. It was suggested that such courts could have one judge and two experts. One could appeal against the decision of the court in supreme court. For there it was suggested that a high powered authority to be set up to oversee the functioning of hazardous industries in the country. An Ecological

Science Research Group should also be set up comprising of experts of different branches of Science and Technology to act as the information bank for the court and government departments (Telegraph, 1986). Undoubtedly any action on this advice would take the society towards a culture of more informed debates. At the same time it would be difficult for the national leaders to test the gullibility of the masses by presenting simplistic scenarios of resource management. There is no doubt that more frequent intervention by Supreme Court such as in case of closure order for all but three mines at Dehradun would push the public administrators towards equally strong defence mechanisms (S), 1988).

The overview of various conflicts around natural resources indicate a need for developing proper framework to conceptualise a fresh 'the eco-sociological' or 'eco-political' resource relationships. The role of state and its instruments in fulfilling the constitutional obligations cannot be understood unless the nature of this relationship is properly defined. The NGOs we may add are helping in redefining these relationships because political parties including the left are ignoring these debates. They are abandoning the task of mobilising public opinion in a decentralised and diversified manner. The party line from the top would determine even a local response to a local problem. Rather than building democratic structures linked laterally to available centres of knowledge and expertise, the parties try to maintain centralised structures learning, as if, nothing from the changes in Eastern Europe.



### Part –Three

#### Trends in Voluntarism and Voluntary organisations for Rural Development in India

I don not disregard the niches which market forces and state/public agencies leave unfilled. But I argue that these niches can be filled not necessarily only by the third sector or voluntary organisations but by the 'developmental deviants' or 'entrepreneurs' or 'volunteers'. These volunteers while remaining in mainstream public or market organisations, can create new alignments (by playing an insurgent function) between social needs and institutional support. The excessive attention on voluntary organisations by aid agencies – national and international – seems misplaced in so far as these agencies almost completely neglect the 'developmental volunteers' (DVs).

By reducing pressure for reform and self-renewal on the public and market agencies, the support to only NGOs may become dysfunctional not in distant future. NGOs led by managers or leader from often urban context by their own creativity suppress or fail to nurture creativity of local disadvantaged groups. The social change thus becomes slower because it becomes dependent more and more on external leaders.

In a classic paper on Organisational Forms using transaction cost framework, Ouchi (1981) suggested that markets worked best under competitive condition of information dissemination and existence of a moderate amount of trust. The clan form evolved when trust is maximised, supervision and control are minimised. The bureaucratic form signify absence of trust and thus maximisation of transport. NGOs can behave like a private sector firm, a bureaucracy or a clan with feudal or democratic values. There is nothing innate in the category of an organisation that should make it suitable for any purpose per se. It is for this reason that Sheth and Sethi (1989) face a problem in classifying NGOs.

Social purpose does not necessarily underlie a non-governmental form of the organisation. NGOs could also include institutional grouping such as the underground Mafia networks or country liquor manufacturers networks.

It is also important to note that NGOs do not emerge in certain sectors as easily as other. For instance, in the field of Science and Technology there are far fewer NGOs which are engaged in development of technology adapted to region specific conditions. Though there are many which are engaged in the process of technology transfer.

Rural development as a part of social change is defined here as a process of

- (a) Widening the decision making horizon and
- (b) Extending the time frame for appraising investment and consumption choices by the rural disadvantaged people collectively and not necessarily at village but even at higher levels of aggregation.

There seems to be a conceptual confusion in the political discourse on organisation of equity and design of delivery systems. It is assumed that providing equal opportunities to everybody will fulfil the constitutional obligations. What is ignored is that historical disadvantage has not been uniformly experienced by the poor in all the resource markets. Thus three groups for instance, may have varying disadvantage in terms of their respective access to resources, say, to land, labour and livestock, their skills to convert resources into investment and the quota of assurances or ration of assurances required by them to deal with the uncertainties and risks in each of the resource markets. It is not enough therefore, to provide equal opportunity to all the three groups in all the three resource markets. The challenge is to organise inequity in the delivery of services such that historical disadvantages and knowledge resources<sup>20</sup> of the poor people could be adequately compensated or built upon.

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<sup>20</sup> It is pity that 'knowledge rich' people are classified as 'resource' poor as if knowledge is not a resource. One area in which most NGOs have failed is to not only acknowledge the science underlying innovations developed for survival but also to build upon this only remaining resource

NGOs have faltered in this regard as often as public institutions. The notion of profit is considered bad, the services are not charged, the clients are made thus dependent upon services for which they have not paid. And thus when the aid is withdrawn the system breaks down and people sometimes are worse off because of their impaired potential for self-reliance.

A question can be raised as to whether one should conceptualise the role of NGOs as systems which remedy errors in the delivery of goods through markets of public systems; do they fill gaps left by both; do they signal the weak links so that systems can repair its inadequacy well in time or do they provide space for innovations that require different norms of discourse and governance than are possible in public and marketing systems. In our view different NGOs could meet different needs mentioned above. What is important is to recognise that not just the organisational form but the human urge to take a voluntary step to go beyond once formal institutional responsibility is what constitutes the biggest challenge today. The form of organisation are important in so far as the boundaries have to be drawn for use of any resource in sustainable manner. The accountability towards society and mechanisms of democratic governance would ultimately determine whether one form has an advantage over another. Voluntarism may affect any one or more subset of developmental triangle of access, assurance and ability of the people and thus many remain restricted in its impact. Propositions given next deal with the way voluntarism has been related to the process of social change in India. Given the range of experiences it is indeed a synoptic account.

1. Voluntarism triggered by a natural crisis like flood, drought, cyclone etc. may legitimise entry of outsiders in a given region. But depending upon the mobilisation process NGOs emerging in response to such crisis often diversify into other areas of social development and remain community oriented rather than class oriented.

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reserve with them (be it in the form of knowledge about traditional medicine or farm implements or other forms of indigenous knowledge)

Several Church based NGOs came into existence when international aid agencies offered relief at the time of Bihar famine in Sixties. Most of the relief was in the form of consumables like foodgrains, clothes, medicines, etc. The organisational structure for distribution of such aid was different from the structure for managing durable assets like rigs for drilling wells, transport, buildings, etc. From relief to reconstruction attracted several young people. Instead of going back to pursue their professional career, they remained behind to organise people in some cases, manage food for work programme, drill wells or provide health and educational facilities in other cases.

Many aid agencies sought legitimacy through relief but indulged in other interventions subsequently. The reaction of state agencies was to incorporate such volunteers or voluntary organisations as appendage of public relief and development programmes. Such an incorporation also took place in case of many NGOs which came into picture much later. An interesting feature of these organisations was that having begun with community approach (relief was needed by all – big or small), they continued to use an electric approach to development.

Social conflicts were just noted by some and participated in by others. The institutionalisation of voluntarism in intermediary support or funding organisations or grassroot organisations gave a techno-managerial start to the intervention strategies. A negative feature of such aid was that in regions prone to frequent natural calamities, people started losing their self-help initiative. State relief in the form of employment or food was not linked with mobilisation of voluntarism among people. Dependency so created made the task of many radical NGOs even more difficult. People could not understand why mobilisation around a radical ideology should be a reason for foregoing immediate material benefits.

2. Voluntarism triggered by man-made disasters such as Bhopal tragedy could get caught in the dilemma of legitimising state's indifference by becoming part of urgent relief and rehabilitation vis-à-vis questioning the basis of tragedy and complicity of state in its consequences.

Ravi Rajan (1988) while analysing rehabilitation and voluntarism observed four distinct styles,

- (i) Intervening organisation took upon provision of relief and rehabilitation as primary task, became dependent on government and with dimunition in governments' own commitment to the cause, collapsed soon;
- (ii) Volunteers served as 'conscience keepers', pursuing change through systematic research reports;
- (iii) Trade union activists demanding charge of the industrial plant to provide employment through alternative use of plant and machinery; and
- (iv) Perhaps the most significant strategy by volunteers was rejecting the idea of voluntarism as propounded by the state.

Sustained mobilisation, struggle for better relief, access to medical data, questioning the secretiveness on the part of the government (seen as a sign of its complicity with MNC – Carbide), legal activism and questioning the right of government to price the life of poor so low. Voluntarism of this nature is difficult to mobilise in backward rural areas given the dispersed nature of settlements and weak social articulation, low media attention and poor networking among interventionists.

### 3. Voluntarism manifested in sixties in the form of

- (a) Protest against agrarian disparities (in the form of naxalite left violent movement), and
- (b) For social reconstruction (initiatives by students, professionals in the mainstream organisations, or voluntary organisations) has undergone a sea change in the wake of recent economic liberalisation.

Radical groups using violent means of social change had sought support essentially from Maoist philosophy. After the Chinese aggression in 1962, the covert support to these groups had increased. With the decline in this support these groups faced some of the similar dilemmas as faced by the other groups supported from the right. The income disparities intensified after first phase of 'green revolution'. Technological change had provided the spur for a large number of

young people particularly from West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh to plunge into the field of violent social change. The attempt was to annihilate rich farmers and other symbols of perceived oppressive classes or considered class enemies. There were few groups like the one in Warli in Maharashtra which decided to remain dependent upon local people even for their subsistence needs. The possibility of such groups losing local support were remote. Likewise due to the ability of another group in Andhra Pradesh to dispense justice at low cost in cases of intra and inter-group conflicts among the tribals, even the lower level bureaucracy started using these forum for the redressal of their grievances.

Another stream of volunteers entering the field of rural development came with innovative ideas for providing relief during 1964-66 drought in different parts of the country. These volunteers became crucial instruments of social dynamics. War in 1965 with a neighbouring country had led to slowing down of U.S. aid to India. Search for indigenous alternatives became intense and legitimacy of voluntarism increased.

The 1966 to 1971-72 period was full of economic crises. Economic environment in the preceding decade and had been aimed at closure of Indian economy through import substitution. Droughts, wars (1965,1971), devaluation of currency and inflationary pressure created an environment of social unrest in organised and unorganised sector. The starvation deaths are supposed to have been eliminated (almost) after 1965-67 drought. Maharashtra started Employment Guarantee Scheme during drought of 1972. In the wake of large scale violence in 1966-67 by left radical groups, the report of a confidential enquiry committee by a committed civil servant (Appu) set up by Ministry of Home argued for immediate thrust towards target group oriented programmes of rural development suited to location/ecology and class specific needs.

The Small and Marginal Farmer and Agricultural Labourer Development Agencies, Drought Prone Area Programme, Tribal Development, Hill Area development plans etc. followed. The decentralised development in the policy was accompanied by greater political centralisation for a

little while (1970-77). A movement based on Gandhian values calling for total social revolution was spearheaded by Jaya Prakash Narayan in 1973-74. It attracted a large number of young people particularly in Gujarat, Bihar and Maharashtra many of whom have continued with voluntary work.

Government declared emergency during 1975 till 1977 after prolonged railway strike and even urban people realised for the first time the implications of a non-democratic coercive state. Voluntarism, was also sought out as a sign of despicable deviance. People had option to be incorporated into the repressive state structure or be put in jail or victimised. Most chose softer options but many did not. The Post 1977 phase of change in the political continuity through single party rule brought many Gandhians committed to decentralised development into the mainstream. Tax concessions for voluntary initiatives by commercial companies were introduced first time by Janata government in 1978. Lot of innovative organisations came into being. Several developmental volunteers working in commercial organisations found this an opportunity for exploring new organisational space. Some misused this option but many did not.

For the first time, professional and young activists were offered competitive salaries in addition to autonomy for work unheard of in the mainstream organisation by and large. This was also accompanied by a change in the policy of international aid agencies which started shifting from funding better implementation of government programme bureaucratically to better implementation by NGOs. It was rather unfortunate that creative avenues in NGOs got generally fossilised due to the proximity to state and participation in implementing standardised programmes.

Change of government in 1980 and restoration of the rule by Congress party led to

- (a) Expected withdrawal of tax concessions,
- (b) Centralisation of voluntarism i.e. companies could contribute to Prime Minister's fund for rural development and seek fresh grants from it for action programmes,
- (c) Direct transfer of funds from a commercial balance sheet to the social (less easy to account) balance sheet was stopped,
- (d) Standardisation of developmental programmes such as IRDP (Integrated Rural Development Programme),
- (e) Withdrawal of higher allocations in IRDP for backward areas and putting them at par with the rest;
- (f) Merger of earlier eco-adaptive or responsive programmes into uniform standardised IRDP with credit-linked subsidy as the dominant mode of relationship etc.

Another interesting development was the phenomena of the return of naxalite underground workers into the mainstream non-violent but articulate strategies of social change. For the first time, several ex-naxalities fought election in 1977 and some got elected also.

The social space for alternative development was filled by volunteers having varying backgrounds:

- (a) Ex-radicals,
- (b) Liberal or social democrats dissatisfied with the working of state and wanting to the influence distribution of resources,
- (c) Enthusiastic urban activists looking for a career, failing to get one, returning to mainstream professions rather quickly,
- (d) Young professionals with technical or other disciplinary background launching action-research projects or supporting other professional groups (notable being PRADAN set up by Mahajan, an alumni of IIM-a),



- (e) Retired civil servants, ex-Gandhians, lawyers etc. who formed independently or with the support of aid agencies large NGOs and
- (f) Quasi-state organisations promoted to provide technical, financial, marketing or other support to NGOs, artisans and other beneficiaries of state sponsored developmental programmes.

At the time when social space for volunteers was widening, opportunities for career growth in mainstream organisation also started increasing. First phase was the growth in Banking sector after nationalisation in 1969. A large number of bright young men and women with background in science, humanities or engineering joined banks, insurance corporations and other such systems. 'Brain Draft' as against 'Brain Drain' took its heavy toll by depriving academic disciplines of bright students and luring some 'professionals on the margin' away from other direct social development systems.

Post 1980 boom in consumer goods industry and continued growth of banking and other public and private ventures further increased the flow of young people towards such careers. The opportunity cost of those who chose to work in NGOs did indeed increase.

The question we want to address next is, what are the processes by which voluntarism in the mainstream organisations can complement the efforts of NGOs in not merely bringing about social change at micro level but also influencing public policy in favour of disadvantaged?

#### Implications for Actions and Research

1. Generating extra-organisational space for developmental volunteers within mainstream organisations is a necessary conditions for sustainable social development.

A recent study on Bank and NGO Interface for poverty alleviation in backward regions, noted that

- (a) There was no NGO working in 50 most backward talukas (sub-regions) of Gujarat (S. lyengar, 1988),

- (b) The state organisations like National Bank could not gain credibility in supporting NGOs if they did not provide opportunity for exploration and experimentation to volunteers within their system,
- (c) NGOs often did not recover even the operating costs of many services from people. In the process, such NGOs remained perpetually dependent upon aid agencies,
- (d) Accountability of NGOs towards poor was rather low so much so that most NGOs did not aim at inducing poor people in their own management structures quite explicitly.

A nationalised bank invited the clerk to volunteer for two years village development work in an area of their choice without any loss of seniority or service on return<sup>21</sup>. It triggered numerous innovative experiments by DVs.

The hands of DVs in technology generation, adaptation and diffusion system working on unpopular problems of larger social concern needed just as much attention? How to sustain professionals who disregard professional rewards and devote attention to such problems but can not put pressure for reform on their own organisations? Empowering them will require recognition of their voluntarism by a body of concerned scholars and activists. No national award has been given till date to any bank officer for initiating innovative scheme. So much so that about ten million rupees for new innovative schemes for rural development provided at national level remained unspent because no system existed for identifying and recognising DVs with in the mainstream system (Khanna, 1990).

- 2. How to resolve the paradox of developing rural poor's ability to manage their affairs by urban volunteers having inherent cultural limitations?

Poor do not cooperate with developmental organisations because we do not even acknowledge richness of their cultural and moral fiber. Findings of our research are seldom shared with those from whom we collect data (Gupta, 1987). Involving rural poor as co-researchers of social phenomenon, building upon cultural roots of voluntarism, respect for common property institutions can be invoked. Acknowledgement of local initiatives can provide spur for their transformation into innovations.

- 3. Documentation of people's knowledge and identifying scientific merit of some of the sustainable resource management alternatives can rekindle their experimental ethic.
- 4. Institution building requires dispensability of external leadership, recognition of inverse relationship between status and skills and discrediting values generating helplessness. 'Lateral learning' among developmental volunteers as well as NGOs can be triggered to provide empirical basis of building theory-in/of action.
- 5. Search for culture specific metaphor and concept of voluntarism such as Zakat among Muslims, Gupt dan (anonymous charity) among Hindus, Kar Seva (voluntary labour for common good among Sikhs etc. are some examples of positive basis of different religions for building organic institutions. Different languages have words like "andi" (Haryanavi) and 'dhuni' (Hindi) implying a person obsessed with ideas generally for social good. Why has appreciation for

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<sup>21</sup> It may not shock left parties that the workman unions affiliated to them opposed such an opportunity to the workmen for giving vent to their urge for social innovation and voluntary work. I am not suggesting that such voluntarism will do away with the need for structural reforms. What I am suggesting is that there is no alternative to generation of internal feedback on policies for rural poor. Such initiatives could have served such a purpose.

this trait gone down<sup>22</sup>? We submit that 'anonymous voluntarism' as a uniquely eastern concept has been subsumed under 'voluntary organisations'. The latter often believe that voluntarism can not exist in non-volunteer organisations. Should all innovations necessarily evolve into institutions? or should we aim at institutionalisation of culture which permits DBVs to explore the uncharted territories?

6. Finally, NGOs and developmental volunteers cannot succeed unless encapsulating and inhibitory values ingrained in the mind of poor during feudal historical past are questioned boldly.

Voluntarism in rural development in India has not been accompanied by pressure for policy change except around environmental issues. Often action at local level has not been linked with lobbying at macro level. Recognising that state and markets perform better if kept under constant check, developmental volunteers within the organisations will have to perform a sort of 'insurgent' function so as to align, anonymously, with grassroots activities, NGOs and professionals.

International agencies can strengthen local social change by feeding not just the local ideas and innovations into global thinking but by providing global space for developmental volunteers to validate their hypothesis. Right Livelihood Awards constitute one such source of international recognition. If rural poor of India could communicate with homeless in America, surely the cultures of deprivation will provide ground for collective action. Social innovators and DVs world over are struggling for the similar space in society where one does not have to go through a phase of unbridled accumulation followed by guilt, charity and benevolence for the have nots.

We doubt whether the term voluntary organisation by itself is much helpful. There are organisations carrying this label having no voluntary spirit amongst its members. At the same time there are volunteers in the public or market institutions who sometime perform insurgent

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<sup>22</sup> I can imagine discomfort among some conservative left intellectuals on suggestions for building upon cultural symbols justifying contribution of private resources for common good. The framework of common property regime allows for such an institutional framework in which collective goods can indeed be generated through social sanctions and moral boundaries. The class contradictions in economic sphere get redefined at other planes cultural, religious, ethnic, spatial, ecological. The challenge is to build bridges across these planes of consciousness. No one can argue that equality of economic opportunities can be denied on any ground moral or social. But ideals of economic equality may by themselves not sustain urge for social transformation. This is an issue which NGOs have ignored as much as the left political parties.

function and sometimes extend the boundaries of responsibility of these organisations toward society.

The key concept is deviance and innovation. Space for providing scope for positive variance has to be created in each institution of society. It will be wrong to argue that all the individuals having voluntary spirit or an urge to go beyond their mandatory responsibility must move into NGOs or voluntary organisations. Absence of volunteers or socially committed professionals in the public or private organisations would make the task of NGOs nearly impossible.

Sustainability in nature and society requires players, whistle blowers, spectators, rules and the creative chaos. DVs are arguing that the losers in a game should not lose the right to play in the same field again. Asking them to play only in separate fields (in the form of volags) will eventually rob the game of the chaotic waves of sorrow and joy. Should we let it convert the spectators into warriors?

## Part – Four

### NGOs and the Foreign Aid: Shifting Locus of Accountability

Considerable concerns have been expressed over increasing dependence of foreign aid in spawning, supporting, sustaining or distorting voluntary organisations in the country. The dependence could influence the agenda, the accountability, the institutional norms of governance and finally even commitment to the clients' concerns of the clients.

Easy money that many of these aid agencies extend has contributed to the emergence of large number of organisations with eraser dubious technical competence or organisational capacity. Sometimes the retired government servants or scientists may be involved in such organisations to gain legitimacy and garner funds. This is not to say that international aid agencies do not support genuine NGOs at all. However certain patterns in this relationship are very evident.

- (a) Many international NGOs or aid agencies have realised that they should train their own professionals through the agencies. Once we received a request from Canadian NGO to organise a training programme involving assignment of Indian NGOs so that young Canadian professionals likely to be appointed in their diplomatic services could be given proper orientation. When we asked as to whether this programme could involve equally competent professionals from African and Indian context as well, we never heard anything back. The programme finally did take off through an Indian NGO involving professionals from various institutions. Likewise in the field of so-called wasteland development and environmental restoration several agencies have started posting their interns as local experts for ostensibly monitoring and evaluation purposes but in reality for on the job training. The tragedy begins when these interns start considering themselves as 'experts'. The cost of the learning is paid by the people.
- (b) Despite acknowledged strength of the Indian social science community, many of these aid agencies sponsored studies without building adequate accountability or scrutiny by Indian professionals. A study on NGOs and their role in technology generation and diffusion has been by Ford Foundation to Overseas Development Administration in U.K. duly cleared by Government of India. Thus it is not merely direct support to NGOs but also indirect support for study of NGOs which influences the agenda of bilateral or multi-lateral negotiations.

We have no quarrel with such studies as long as they are taken up under scrutiny of relevant academic peer groups in respective countries. We question the need for accepting foreign aid for such purpose.

As mentioned earlier in one particular case a European economic power did threaten to delay or deny the aid if the component on poverty alleviation/watershed development was not accepted. Interestingly enough a Church based organisation in that country was involved for organising implementation structures in Western and Southern states. Having insisted on the involvement of voluntary organisations (regardless of their competence or accountability towards people) the aid also involved several expert missions and involvement of Indian Church based organisation – again without much experience in the matter.

- (c) It is not surprising but certainly disturbing that none of the aid agencies particularly the international ones has ever insisted that balance sheet of NGOs supported by these agencies are shared and explained to the people with whom this NGO works. It is doubtful that structures which are not accountable themselves will be able to invoke accountability of the state or market institutions. One is not suggesting any state institution to which an organisation need to be accountable. Our insistence is on accountability of an NGO towards its own clients and not just the constituents.
- (d) The contribution of reliance on aid be it from national or international agency should be distinguished from the effect of accountability towards national or international peer groups. If a NGO is accountable towards its clients and the constituents the source would make little difference to its agenda. However, the dependence in itself may reduce pressure for self reliance and generating right prices for costing of services of groups. In certain cases networking with international NGOs will be necessary for building up pressure for reforming the policies of international agencies.
- (e) It has been seen that aid agencies may have lower quality standards than a professional association in so far as evaluation of an organisational structure or its impact is concerned. Thus many times false sense of achievement may be derived by such NGOs. In the process reducing pressure for excellence. There are very few organisations which maintain their own internal standards of rigor and quality and thus are not vulnerable on this account. Whole scale borrowing of terms like (Rapid Rural Appraisal, bureaucratic reorientation etc...) enslaves even the intellectual apparatus of these NGOs and in some cases of some 'eminent' professionals working with them. Instead of emphasizing longitudinal studies, shortcuts to 'learning' are imbibed without any reflection of introspection. Damage such tendency causes is more serious in the long term because indigenous capacity to think critique and, generate rooted concepts is compromised cultural interaction will have no problems. The problem arises due to financial dependency leading to intellectual dependency.
- (f) International aid to NGOs is also used for creating alternative structures at local level without the involvement of the state with following possible implications:
  - (i) It can insulate local groups and bodies from the bureaucratic encounters and save energy for more productive use; or
  - (ii) It may generate new identities or affiliations which may in due course assume centrifugal tendencies and even challenge the legitimacy of the state itself.
  - (iii) It is also possible that these structures may impede the flow of feedback from people to state and thereby generate pressure for greater alienation.

- (iv) In some cases these structures may provide an umbrella for taking more logical units of planning than just the administrative boundaries. This is particular true for watershed management. The support of such structures by foreign agencies ignoring the instruments of state would have implication for sustainability of these structures and the investments emanating from them. It is well known that pilot projects often fail to replicate because costing of the attention and investments made is not done properly.

Also the lateral links with the local and external institutions are not built.

The greatest danger which I see emerging out of such structures is a tendency to draw a quick inference at the highest level that certain functions can better be relegated to voluntary organisations because state is incapable of performing them. Since such an attitude would often be taken for the functions which will not attract market forces state can justify involvement of NGOs on that account too. To what extent balanced regional development can be achieved through sporadic NGOs is an open question. Studies in Gujarat have shown that 50 most backward talukas were ignored not only by the state and market forces but also by the NGOs. The pattern in other states may not be very different.

## **Part – five**

### **What Next?**

In the last few years a culture of national seminars and workshops had assumed tremendous importance in the national polity. Consultation it was assumed were best achieved through these seminars and involvement of NGOs was considered guarantee of having heard the concerns from the grass roots. Invariably the larger NGOs capable of articulating their concerns in English and that too with sophisticated vocabulary tended to get invited to such meetings. It was very obvious from the way these meetings were organised and the extent of homework which was done that there was no genuine desire on the part of a state to solicit feedback or modify its perceptions. Absence of analytical rigor and debate on ideological positions further indicate that agendas drawn in such a manner can never generate a vision of a sustainable society.

In the aftermath of Naxalite movement and Emergency lot of left oriented activists chose to set up their own small people-oriented organisations in different parts of the country. As a recent discussion on NGOs revealed many of them realised after working with people for nearly two decades that socio ethos, religious consciousness and cultural anchors of rural society required modification in the ideological foundations of the Left parties<sup>23</sup>. It was recognised for instance for instance that ethnic and cultural identities did not get transformed even after sustained participation in secular politics. It was particularly true when some of these identities provided either moral light posts or kinship based safety nets. In either case affiliation with such groups had to be accepted as authentic affiliation. Multiple identities and not a sensitised (and so called pure party based) identity will be the order in future. Inability of the Left to give priority to the institutional concerns of the unorganised sector and continued reliance on the organised workforce as a basis of support also alienated some of these workers. The biggest impediments to the creation of larger party based affiliations in my view is unwillingness of left to recognise the human need to live at multiple planes.



Policy dialogues, institutional restructuring, accountability in ethical and human terms and generation of authentic democratic plurality are some of the issues on which coalitions of forces on the Left is required. The fact that Green Movement in Europe took away more people from the left rather than Right in its fold teaches us a lesson. And that is the inevitable decline which will take place in the support base of Left parties if they did not provide diverse institutional platforms for discourse on various concerns ranging from environment to education, science and technology or policy for foreign aid. And providing the platform for discourse is not enough. The youth demands an opportunity of practical politics. Under the grab of ideological struggles, arm chair theorising has gone on for too long.

Time is ripe for generating scope for expression of voluntary urges to go beyond one's mandated responsibility. Success with urban organised sector is in fact the reason for failure of left in providing 'chaupal' based political and economic programmes. Transition from 'chauraha' to 'Char diwari' has to move to 'Chaupals'.

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<sup>23</sup> Aruna Roy, 1990, Personal discussion at a seminar organised by Kavita at IDS, Jaipur

## **Voluntary Initiatives, Institutions and Cultural basis of non-articulation<sup>24</sup>**

The individual urge to extend one's responsibility for social change beyond mandated or formal duties is far more pervasive than is generally assumed. However, not each individual with such an urge takes voluntary initiatives. In still fewer cases, are initiatives transformed into innovations. It is only rare that innovations are institutionalised in society.

### **Part I : Voluntarism in Eastern Societies**

It has not been appreciated widely that roots of voluntarism are quite different in Eastern, in particular Indian, and Western societies. The result has been the implanting of an alien culture in most Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

'Aparigrah' – s Sanskrit word – implies values of non-accumulation or not keeping anything more than necessary for one's bare minimal needs. The concept of sacrifice and charity are also differently rooted in Indian mind. When one gives away the dearest object to a needy person the sacrifice could be considered a charity. If giving away is only for one's own self-purity and not aimed at some one else's well being, it is 'Tyag' (sacrifice) but not a charity. Contrast this with the Western notion of giving away something one can do without, or one needs less or one has much more than one's sumptuous needs.

I am not implying that the motivations of voluntarism in India are in any significant way related to the notion of 'Aparigrah'. But what I do suggest is that for strengthening voluntarism in Indian society, the support systems and organisations cannot ignore the cultural anchors of the spirit of voluntarism. Even if few people believe in 'aparigrah' in urban upper and middle class society, there remains a large mass of rural people who do respect a volunteer who follows the principle of 'aparigrah'.

The voluntarism based on 'aparigrah' has another dimension. And this is the willingness to receive knowledge from whoever is knowledgeable. Thus, giving away ('pradan') is accompanied by 'grahan' – the inculcation or assimilation of humility and duty towards others. The voluntary organisations emphasising 'giving' as the basis of relationship with the poor people are either seen as paternalistic by the people or as a source of external resources and skills. Hardly any voluntary organisation tries to tap the historical reserve of knowledge (technical, institutional and social) of poor. The term 'resource poor' masks the 'richness' of the economically poor people. The 'grahan' or 'assimilation' of knowledge from poor does not constitute 'richness' by many NGOs. Lest this 'richness' of poor becomes a paradox, let me explain this in cultural terms.

In Western society, there are only a few words, say aunt or uncle, nephew or niece for characterising a whole range of relationships from mother's or father's side.

In Indian languages, each class of relationship has a specific word. People thus have a web of relationship, many of which are operated at different planes. Richness of the ability to maintain subtle differences in protocol and mutuality provides a 'safety net' of kinship linkages.

In developmental paradigms the neglect of the role of cultural roots, religious identifies and philosophical basis of social responsibility has led to a crisis among many voluntary organisations. Recently in a meeting of voluntary organisations (mostly with Marxist-Leninist leanings), organised by Institute of Development Studies, Jaipur, it was admitted that despite one

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<sup>24</sup> This section and the earlier discussion on trends in voluntarism in rural development is drawn from author's paper, Anil K. Gupta (1990) Initiatives, Innovation and Institutions: The Study of Emerging Trends in Voluntarism in Rural Development in India, The Nonprofit Sector (NGOs) in United States and Abroad: Cross Cultural Perspectives, 1990 Spring Research Forum, Working Papers, Independent Sector and United Way, Boston, March 15-16, 1990, 293-310.

and a half decade of mobilisation of people around social and economic causes, there was wall of silence between people and volunteers on the issues of cultural, religious and caste/ethnic identities. A question, "where do you come from? Or to which village/region do you belong?" was considered unacceptable in developmental dialogues as a basis of relationship (Aruna Roy, 1990). Any effort to build on spatial or other ethnic identities was considered reinforcement of parochialism.

Another cultural element of voluntarism is reciprocity. Reciprocity includes both giving and receiving but not in the form of exchange. As Ellis (1989:1) puts it, 'it is the giving and not the gift that is important'. Eastern as well African societies have evolved ways of keeping track of reciprocities. Ellies adds that reciprocities are characterised further by

- (a) Wealth being equated by one's esteem or prestige in society based on giving behaviour and
- (b) Assurance of good return because lot of people owe it to the giver.

Two other dimensions of reciprocity are,

- (a) Poor use longer time frame to settle reciprocities than rich and
- (b) In high risk environments like drought prone areas, generalised reciprocities dominate the specific ones (Gupta, 1981,1984).

The studies on voluntarism have not exploited the potential of reciprocal economics as against exchange economics for fostering collective action.

### **Cultural Roots of Complaint Behaviour :**

The extent to which initiatives calling for deviance from accepted norms, even for social good are sanctioned by different societies also differs in West and the East. Cultures which provide the concept of 'Aparigral' and 'Tyag' (selfless sacrifice) also contain codes of sanction against deviance from certain social order. The exploitation of the poor, may thus become possible not merely through 'selfishness' of dominant social classes but also through 'learned helplessness' (opposite of voluntarism) by the poor people.

To illustrate how cultural codification of compliant and conformist behaviour takes place, a story from Mahabharat – an Indian epic may help.

Dronacharya was a renowned teacher having an Ashram (a type of school based in forests) in which royal families considered it their privilege to send their children. He had taken a vow to make one of the five royal brothers (Pandavas) viz., Arjun as the best Archer in the world. One day a tribal boy – Eklavya – approached Dronacharya to seek admission into the Ashram. He very hesitatingly took this initiative. Dronacharya refused admission saying that only the children of royal family could be admitted in his school. Eklavya returned dejected, built an idol of Dronacharya (whom he had accepted as his teacher in his mind) and started practicing archery.

One day Dronacharya was moving in the forest accompanied by Pandavas. A dog started barking and disturbing their conversation. Eklavya, practicing nearby, herd it. He filled the mouth of the dog by arrows. Dronacharya could not believe it. He told Pandavas that if somebody was such a good archer than he surely needed to be met. They soon found Eklavya and asked him, how he had learned such a good archery. Eklavya recognising Dronacharya, attributed excellence of his skill to his teacher – Dronacharya himself. Dronacharya was flabbergasted because he about how he worshiped Dronacharya's idol and practiced archery, Dronacharya asked for 'Dakshina' – a sort of fee for providing that knowledge. Eklavya immediately agreed. Dronacharya asked the thumb of his right hand which Eklavya immediately cut and gave away, becoming unable for ever afterwards to practice archery. This story has been heard by almost everybody in India no matter where he/she lived to essentially ingrain two values;

- (i) Obedience and deference towards teacher and

- (ii) Virtue of perseverance.

Whenever I asked students or professionals from developmental organisations to speculate upon the dilemma of Dronacharya and Eklavya, they admitted that their parents had never told them about these questions. With some effort, they could speculate upon Dronacharya's dilemma, e.g., fear of

- (i) Not being able to make Arjun the best archer;
- (ii) Not getting wards of royal families in future as students in his school because he might not be treated as the best teacher;
- (iii) Possibility of Eklavya – a Bhil or tribal passing on this skill to other tribals who might challenge the given social order dominated by the 'higher' castes and royal families etc.

But nobody ever thought that Eklavya also might have had some dilemma. Almost everybody argued that it was 'natural' for Eklavya to accept the order because thus he is remembered; or he proved his excellence because cutting of his thumb was a sort of certificate of excellence given by the best teacher. He achieved his life's objective. But did he?

Whether Eklavya had any loyalty towards his kith and kin in the village who fed him and spared him from the normal chores of hunting and food gathering, did not occur to any student or professional. Aspirations of other tribals of training their children under Eklavya never seemed to matter. In other words, the professionals from voluntary agencies or commercial organisations and students from different disciplines completely failed to identify the dilemma in the mind of dalits (down trodden) for whom, compliance and conformity to a given social order seemed almost the only choice. Further, deference towards teacher was ingrained to such an extent that even an unethical behaviour or the part of teacher was not to be questioned.

Enculturation of compliance and conformity through such powerful metaphors does come in the way of people talking initiatives and questioning the given social order. Initiatives are taken less by those whose social conditions must change for the better most. But it does not imply that poor have no concrete alternatives for change. It is just that innovations needed for survival are quite different from innovations for accumulation.

Just emphasising the 'giving' behaviour by many voluntary organisations without 'acknowledging' or 'assimilating' knowledge of people often weakened the self-help potential of people and curbed the growth of voluntarism among people themselves. The institution building process in the society suffers when outside volunteers do not plan for their redundancy through development of local leadership. In another meeting of voluntary organisations organised at the Institute of Rural Management, Anand, it was acknowledged that building people's own organisations without even needing outside professionals was a distant dream (Jain, 1990).

Our contention is that there are thousands of 'Eklavyas' dispersed in different mainstream organisations. They have a strong sense of taking initiatives and achieving excellence in skills that may be needed in society. However, middle class conservatism prevents them from becoming entrepreneurs. The voluntary organisations do not consider fostering/nurturing such initiatives as part of their major role. Tremendous reserve of potential human energy in the form of untapped voluntarism/initiative available in the mainstream organisations generates frustration on both the sides – the NGOs/volags which find bureaucracy stifling and generally unhelpful and the minority of deviants or 'compliant and conformist' Eklavyas who do not find organisational or societal space for merging pursuit of excellence with search for socially useful innovations. If the linkage between volunteers in public/private/commercial organisations and the enabling voluntary organisations can be forged, possibly the institutional capacities in society for self renewal can be increased considerably.

## Notes

- (1) Studies have shown that it was more to keep communism at bay rather than trigger genuine 'community development' that the C D programmes were started. Undoubtedly, in this objective this intervention was admirably successful. Hegemony of local elites in bureaucratic scheme of subsidy linked delivery of inputs factionalised the village polity vertically across castes and communities – a facet of rural life often ignored by the political scientists talking in terms of with one or the other dominant groups. Privilege of answering ones' nature's call or even collecting grass and weeds from private lands were traded in return of voting.
- (2) The distinction between client and constituent has generally been made on the basis of their different role in providing source of power and support to the representative of an official. The clients are those who have to be served while the constituents are those who elect the official / politician and thus get served on priority. The de facto accountability is rather more intense towards the constituents rather than the clients, (see J P Viteritti )(1990), Public Organisation Environments: Constituents, Clients and Urban Governance, Administration and Society, Feb, 21(4) 425-451.
- (3) The emphasis on informal sector or non-farm sector for providing employment to the increasing population has thus spawned large number of volags as the new delivery channels for unorganised and landless artisans, craftsmen or petty hawkers or producers.
- (4) The experience of West Bengal has only confirmed that reordering rural relations can indeed pay long term and short term political dividends. However, to infer that a new social ethics has been achieved in the process will be to misread the situation. The relation between organised and the unorganised sectors have not been transformed or attempted to be so done. The policies for mass education whether in terms of environmental movement or sustainable of sources management still have to be evolved. Experiments by forestry department in West Bengal on involving people as partners in regenerating forestry have indeed achieved national attention. Experiments of that kind do provide a new idiom for conceptualising the role of state and building upon voluntarism among officials and the people. The role of private sector in providing basic needs through cross subsidisation remains to be tried.
- (5) See for literature review on this subject, Anil K Gupta (1989) " Design of Resource Delivery System : Socio-Ecological Perspective" International Studies of management and Organisation, viii (4) 64-82.

- (6) For studying various implications for public administration of conceptualising drought as a problem of risk or uncertainty, see, Anil K Gupta 91989) "managing Ecological Diversity, Simultaneity, Complexity and Change: An Eco-Political Perspective", IIM Working Paper no.825, IIM – Ahmedabad, Paper prepared for Third Survey On Public Administration, ICSSR, New Delhi. We have dream upon this paper extensively in second and third part.

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