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development digest

04

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This digest features important articles on development and social transformation in order to reach those working in the field and not having knowledge of these documents. It is aimed at promoting further reading of the originals, and generating public debate and action on public issues. The articles are compiled and edited for easy reading and comprehension of the concepts, and not so much to reproduce the academic accuracy of the original texts.

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New Millennium Voluntary Agencies

Examining the role of voluntary agencies, **Vijay Mahajan** traces the shift from early 'Volunteerism' to the 'Professionalism' of the nineties. He sees NGOs, not as over-institutionalised entities, but rather as a process of moving from critique to working for improvement. **He argues that we need to strengthen the institutions of Civil Society, as they play a vital mediating role today.**

Neera Chandhoke views this role with a tinge of cynicism - and feels that the idea of civil society has been hijacked by NGOs, - as if they constitute the entire civil society.

Chandhoke cautions that the emergence of the Global Civil Society Organisations (GCSOs), dovetails with the consolidation of neo-liberal consensus. Civil society is thus cast as a gradualist alternative to revolutionary, radical change. Yet, Chandhoke sees that GCSOs do provide elements of an alternative internationalist vision.

Far from being cynical, **Sunita Narain** concludes from a very recent experience, that we need to engage the State, that in this engagement we can influence the State, and make the practice of democracy real.

These apparent contradictions call for an integrating, overarching vision, for autonomous processes to create an agenda that links emancipatory politics, social movements, and people's economics.



The Pain of Others by *Vijay Mahajan*. *Humanscape*, Vol 10, Issue 11, Nov 2003. <http://www.humanscapeindia.net/humanscape/new/nov03/thepain.htm> [C.ELDOC6008049]

Civil Society Hijacked by *Neera Chandhoke*. *The Hindu*, Jan 16, 2002. <http://www.hinduonline.com> [C.ELDOC6003856]

Democracy Must be Worked at by email from *Sunita Narain*, Centre for Science & Environment, February 26, 2004. [C.ELDOC6008277]

The Pain of Others

Vijay Mahajan

Two of the fountainheads of voluntarism – charity (parmaarth) and service (seva) are part of the Indian tradition.

In the nineteenth century, the origins of voluntary action can be traced to enlightened Christian missionaries, who went beyond proselytisation and decided to attend to the worldly problems of the people they were working with in rural and tribal areas.

Partly in response to such efforts, Indian organisations such as the Ramakrishna Mission were formed and began voluntary work. **However, Mahatma Gandhi can be called the father of the modern voluntary movement in India. Gandhiji's first "satyagraha" in support of the indigo labourers in Champaran, while primarily a political struggle, also had elements of voluntary action or "constructive work"** (as Gandhiji called voluntary action), such as training villagers in hygiene, educating children, building roads and digging wells.



After this, Gandhiji made constructive work an integral part of his political strategy, where periods of intense struggle for Independence were interspersed with long periods of voluntary action for the alleviation of suffering and social and economic upliftment of the poor.

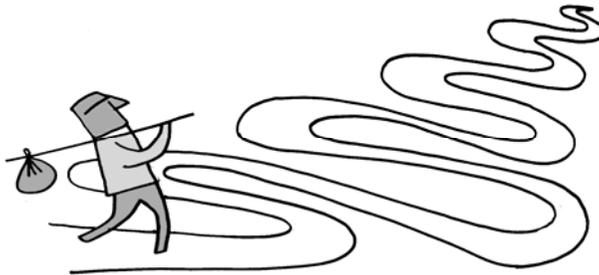
Gandhiji established these activities around interested individuals, who eventually established organisations such as the Harijan Sevak Sangh, the Hindustani Talimi Sangh and the All India Spinners' Association, from where they carried out these various activities. These organisations constituted the beginning of indigenous voluntary action in India.

Voluntary sector and the State: a difficult relationship

In some ways, the difficulties in the relationship between the State and the voluntary sector began soon after independence, with some of Gandhiji's followers opting for politics and power and others for voluntary constructive work.

In 1966, the country had a major drought, and as a result near famine conditions prevailed in many parts, particularly in Bihar. This resulted in an upsurge of voluntary relief efforts, often spearheaded by Sarvodaya workers who had established ashrams all over Bihar. Jaya Prakash (JP) Narayan was the leader of this movement, working from the Sakhodara Ashram in Nawada district. After the relief efforts, many of the workers, including JP, decided to take up longer term efforts to reduce dependence on rains, increase agricultural production and generally work for rural development. JP also helped establish the Association for Voluntary Action in Rural Development (AVARD), as an all India forum for such efforts.

At the same time, many idealistic youth rejected the route of voluntary action in favour of more militant activism. The inspiration for this was the Naxalite movement, which began with an armed uprising of peasants in the north Bengal village of Naxalbari in 1967, and became entrenched in parts of the Bengal and Bihar countryside. It attracted many individuals with good education, who were disenchanted with the system and were inspired by the work and ideas of Mao Zedong, Che Guevara and Indian proponents of the armed struggle – Charu Mazumdar and Kanu Sanyal.



From volunteerism to professional voluntarism

Since the late seventies, the voluntary sector began to be professionalised with the formation of specialised agencies like the Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency (MYRADA), to rehabilitate Tibetan refugees. Many NGOs such as ASSEFA, AWARE, Seva Mandir and Gram Vikas, began to expand their work to multiple districts and states. New NGOs came to be established by people with

higher educational and professional backgrounds, who were concerned about the problems of the mainstream institutions and wished to explore alternatives in social action. Many support NGOs with technical specialisation came up, such as Action for Food Production (AFPRO) for water resources and animal husbandry, Bhartiya Agro Industries Foundation (BAIF) for cattle/rural development, Voluntary Health Association of India (VHAI) for primary health, Society for Promotion of Wasteland Development (SPWD) for afforestation, PRADAN for providing technical and management assistance to voluntary agencies, Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) for training and research.

The Institute of Rural Management came up at Anand and along with some schools of social work established earlier, such as the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Bombay and the Xavier Institute of Social Service, Ranchi, it provided a steady supply of young professionals to the voluntary sector. A large crop of young professionals joined the sector since the mid-eighties. The voluntary sector's response to this was polarised. On the one hand were those who equated "**voluntarism**" with "**volunteerism**" and found professionalisation unpalatable. Such people considered self-abnegation and "**sacrifice**" as the hallmarks of voluntary action. The young professionals joining the sector since the mid-eighties found it difficult to be accepted in many non-government organisations. Thus some gravitated to funding agencies, or became development consultants, trainers or "**policy advocates**", while many others established and continue to work at the grassroots for many years.



The nineties

In the early nineties, the flow of foreign funds went up significantly in the same period as northern governments began to channel more of their aid through their respective country NGOs.

This was partly a result of the Reagan-Thatcher ideology in the US and the UK, under which the welfare state was dismantled and the "**private sector**" was encouraged to take over many of the roles that the state was playing. In the social and development sectors, this meant that "**private voluntary organisations**", as they are called in the US, were to take the lead.

The same ideas were imported in a typically watered down version to India.

Voluntary action in the next decade, and beyond

There are at least five roles for the voluntary sector in India. They are not mutually exclusive, in the sense that in the sector one can simultaneously find some agencies playing one or more of these roles.



The first is as a “public service contractor”.

This term implies that the non-government organisation is a service provider in return for a fee, and can do the job better and more efficiently than government agencies or work in situations where private, for-profit service providers will not enter.

The second role for the voluntary sector is as a collaborator of the government and the private corporate sector in activities where community participation is necessary (e.g. watershed management, forest protection, and resettlement of project affected persons). Here the collaboration includes playing a role in design of the programme and in policy reform if required.

The third role for the voluntary sector is as social innovators, experimenting with new technologies (e.g. treadle pumps), new services (e.g. savings and credit through self-help groups), and new methodologies of social organisation (e.g. joint forest management). In this role, they need to be given policy support and flexible funding by the government, and the activities need to be carefully studied by senior officials for the purpose of possible replication across the system.

The fourth role is as social critics and policy advocates for specific issues (e.g. child labour, environmental protection). Non-government organisations adopting a stance of critics without having an appreciation of systemic constraints or positive alternatives leads to unnecessary confrontation and impasse. On the other hand, voluntary agencies can become more effective if they are able to span grassroots work with policy analysis, and build bridges with sympathetic people within the system who are as eager to bring about changes.

The fifth role is that of building civil society institutions.

The primary challenge in the forthcoming period is to build the strength of **civil society institutions** (CSIs). People's organisations at all levels need to be strengthened and enabled so that they can together act as

strong civil society institutions. NGOs themselves need to become more democratically governed, participatory and accountable. They also need to be more thorough and professional in their chosen fields of work, be it grassroots action or policy advocacy. Only then can the voluntary sector develop the internal strength to become a progenitor of civil society institutions and also become an



integral part of it.

Building effective civil society institutions

We hypothesise that the following resources are crucial for the survival and growth of civil society institutions.



Inspiration

The primary resource for voluntary action for collective good is inspiration. In the earlier days, it used to emanate from religion. All the religions extol the value of serving others. Interestingly, in the nineteenth century, it was the western liberal tradition, which fostered voluntary action to a great deal.

The only passion seems to be with people in terrorist movements and religious fundamentalists. Thus, the task before civil society institutions is to create systematic opportunities for young people to establish a wider worldview.

Leadership

Voluntary action is triggered by individuals, usually by those who feel strongly about some social condition. Usually, such people are from among the upper echelons of society or have had education and/or

professional opportunities of a high order. There is nothing contradictory about the elite origins of the leaders of social change. Indeed the elite is the only class that can afford the opportunities required to be adequately equipped for social action in today's complex world. This is of course a double-edged sword, for the elite have the main vested interest in favour of status quo. Also, giving up on mainstream opportunities is not easy for someone from the elite. Nevertheless, this is where leaders are drawn from.



Having said this, we are not denying that leaders of voluntary action can come from elsewhere – from religious orders, social movements and political parties.

Thus, civil society institutions need to systematically look for socially motivated individuals in the government and in the corporate sector to induct into civil society institutions. One way to initiate them is to invite them to serve on the Boards of civil society institutions. Eventually, some will step over on a full-time basis. This would also improve governance of the institutions and help build bridges with the other two sectors.

Legitimacy

In the public field nothing of significance can be done unless it is seen to be legitimate by a vast majority of the people.

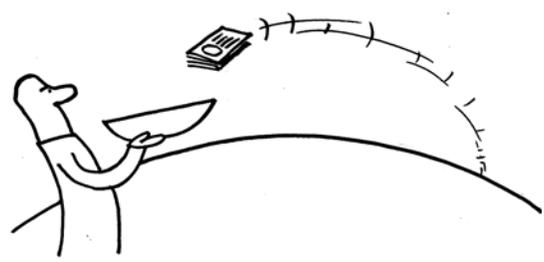
In addition to ideological background, there is the issue of personal conduct. Legitimacy can be earned by ensuring that the personal conduct is consistent with the cause for which a person is working.

Many young people who were drawn into development work in the 1970s went through a phase of ***“identifying with the poor”*** in various ways – living in remote villages, taking very little salary, etc. However,

as the complexity of the problems became better understood, it became obvious that effectiveness is more desirable than self-abnegation. Now, it is accepted that one could work for the rural poor and draw a decent professional salary, and even live in a city.

Funding

Closely linked to legitimacy is the question of where the funding comes from. For some, accepting funds from government is not acceptable, as it is seen to reduce autonomy. For others, accepting foreign funds is a sure sign of **“working at the behest of foreign masters”**.



Within this, finer distinctions are made – some find American money to be a problem but not Scandinavian money, etc. Yet another cleavage is in accepting funds from the corporate sector. A grant from say, the Tata Trust, to an activist organisation is seen as an attempt to **“buy them”**.

Finally, a few non-government organisations which have made serious attempts to raise funds through cards, events and appeals are seen as primarily in the business of fund-raising and treating their founding mission as secondary.

The summary is that no source of funds is seen as completely legitimate by everyone, just as no ideological predilection or professional background of the leader is.

Linkages

By this term, we mean the complex web of relationships that any civil society institution has to establish to function effectively. Institution building theorists Rolf Lynton and Uday Pareek talk of five types of linkages: **enabling, functional, collegial, normative** and **diffuse**.

Diffuse linkages are a spill-over category, by which an organisation interacts with the rest of the world – such as by being a neighbour, a corporate citizen, a member of various associations.

Epilogue

The central thesis of this essay has been that civil society institutions (CSIs) have to play a mediating role between the excesses of the State and market institutions, and to do this well, they have to be strengthened in numbers and become more effective.

In suggesting this, the author is painfully aware of the ills of over-institutionalisation in any sector, including the CSIs. There is no guarantee that CSIs, if they become dominant, will not become another oppressive form, reducing rather than increasing human welfare. Indeed, there are examples of this in history.

Communism, in its utopian form, attracted reform minded individuals into

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forms of state control. Many Gandhian voluntary institutions have completely lost their original sense of purpose and continue to exist and draw on State resources due to historical reasons.

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In this battle, the primary source of hope is nascent formations – splinter groups, social reformists, religious sects, environmental protesters, entrepreneurial spin-offs, corporate start-ups, even cyber-radicals.

These nascent formations represent the evolutionary process in all three types of institutions – they embody the best practices of the established institutions but also have a critique of the establishment. More importantly, the nascent formations that are likely to survive and make an impact, are the ones who go beyond critique to improvement. If the improvement is found useful by society, the nascent formation derives more support, till it eventually becomes part of the established institutional structure. Then the process of atrophy and decline starts.



And the cycle begins afresh!

About the author: *Vijay Mahajan is the Managing Director of BASIX, a micro-finance institution, comprising a non-banking finance company and a non-government organisation.*

Civil Society Hijacked

Neera Chandhoke

The claims that have been made by global civil society actors reflect perfectly the values of the most powerful states in the western world.

If WE, imitate fashion designers and carry out even a random survey of which political concept is 'in' and which is 'out' today, the concept of civil society would rank rather high on our 'in' list. For, since the late 1980s, the idea of civil society has exploded onto the political scene, to command both political vocabularies and activism as well as shape political visions.



The Failure of the Revolutionary State

The astonishing success of civil society makes sense only when we remember two things. For one, the state in third world countries has simply failed to deliver basic conditions for human well-being. At one point in human history, it had been hoped that the developmentalist state would be able to carry out a '**revolution from above**', and thus transform people's lives and destinies. However, it was precisely this state that lapsed into the unabashed pursuit of personalised power.

Even as the nationalist dream petered out and democracy was compromised, the people, as the subaltern group of historians stated baldly, failed to come into their own. And that '**revolutions from below**' had bungled the revolutionary project itself, became all too painfully obvious. Recollect that we were to see agitating and agitated crowds in Central/Eastern Europe bringing down some awesome and powerful 'socialist' states like proverbial nine pins.

For, leaderships that had once led dramatic social revolutions had pulverised the same dreams of freedom that had inaugurated revolutions in the first place. It was at this historical moment of complete disillusionment with the two political options that had been available to the people that the civil society argument offered an attractive third option.

Enter Civil Society

Actually, in front of the kind of fervent imaginations and political passions that revolutionary dreams evoke, the imagery of civil society is tame and practically bland. It promises no dramatic or radical change in the lives of people.

What it does do is proclaim that ordinary men and women have the political competence to make their own histories in small but sure ways. By engaging in an activity called politics in a free civil society, they realise their selfhood and recover agency, even as they acquire the political confidence to bring the non-performing and non-responsive state to order and hold it accountable.

The argument also excites the hope that a vibrant civil society, inhabited by concerned and ethically motivated citizens, may be able to restore the same political ardour that had roused masses to action during the anti-colonial struggles.

But history has its own way of playing tricks with well-meaning projects and inspiring concepts. ***For the idea of civil society was to be quickly hijacked by a relatively new set of actors that emerged on the national scene. These were non-governmental organisations, which were to intervene increasingly in areas crucial to collective life. In fact, these actors were to proceed upon their tasks on the blithe assumption that civil society means the non-governmental sector.*** Even as we saw NGOs subcontract for the state in areas that have traditionally fallen within the provenance of state responsibility such as the social sector, civil society, proclaimed many scholars and activists, represented a third sector of collective life. The other two are

the state and the market.

Global Civil Society Organisations

Something of the same kind happened on the international arena - the emergence of global civil society organisations (GCSOs). The power of these organisations was first dramatically visible at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, when about 1,500 NGOs came to play a central role in the deliberations. By putting forth radically different alternatives, by highlighting issues of global concern, and by stirring up the proceedings in general, GCSOs practically hijacked the summit.

At the 1994 Cairo World Population Conference, increasing numbers of GCSOs took on the responsibility of setting the agenda for the discussions. And by 1995, this sector almost overwhelmed the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. Almost 35,000 NGOs, consisting largely of advocacy groups and social activists, completely dominated the meet.

From then on, we have seen that GCSOs either participate directly in international conferences or hold parallel conferences, which incidentally attract more media attention than the official meets.

Some scholars were to conceptualise these events as the advent of a global civil society. ***The power of the nation state – which is now considered to be one of history's serious mistakes – has finally ended, they were to state with some relish. We now, they went on to add, see the advent of a post foreign policy world.***

Others suggested that GCSOs mediate and limit not only state sovereignty, but also question the ordering of the international economy, as well as the power of giant corporations that straddle the world as if national boundaries are just not there. Therefore, ***GCSOs it is agreed, provide an alternative to both the state-centric global polity as well as the exploitative economy.***

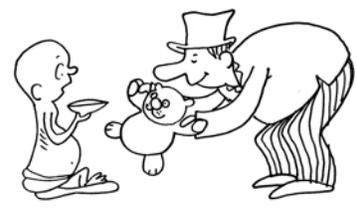
It is true that GCSOs have expanded the agenda of international

concerns in major ways. And they have been able to do so because they possess two properties not generally available to states. One, civil society actors networking across the globe are able to collect a host of information on specialised issues via the information revolution.

What is more important is that these actors are seen to possess moral authority, simply because they have charted out an international instead of national vision on issues that range from human rights records, to nuclearisation, to ecological concerns, to people-friendly development.

Playing into the hands of the neo-liberal consensus?

The idea that GCSOs provide an alternative to the power driven state-centric global order, or to the exploitative global economy, is, however, riddled with ambiguities. Recollect for instance that the growing size, sophistication, and influence of the GCSO has been facilitated and indeed actively encouraged by one main factor - the neo-liberal consensus that emerges from the power centres in the West.



Among other things what the consensus dictates is ***(a) that the state in particularly 'third world' countries should withdraw from the social sector, (b) that the market should be freed from all constraints, and (c) that 'communities' in civil society should organise their own social and economic reproduction.***

Note that the very people who lack access to primary goods are now told they are responsible for their social reproduction and well being. Also note that the state has been liberated from its traditional responsibilities of providing the conditions of human flourishing.

What is important is that all this provided an unprecedented opportunity for NGOs to organise the social reproduction of communities faced with

an indifferent state. The entry of GCSOs is further facilitated by the fact that globalisation has drastically eroded people's capacity to order their own affairs. These developments are in turn legitimised by the globalisation of liberal democratic ideology, which, it is suggested, is the only ideology available to societies in the aftermath of the collapse of communism.

The emergence of GCSOs dovetails neatly with the consolidation of the neo-liberal consensus, globalisation, and the diffusion of democratic globalism via the aggressive foreign policy of Western states and political conditionalities attached to economic aid.

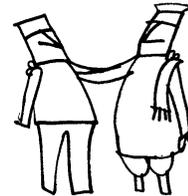
Admittedly, GCSOs have instituted a normative discourse in international forums. The project, however, may not be quite as autonomous of power constellations as is generally believed. For, the claims that have been made by global civil society actors – the kind of human rights that are on offer for instance – reflect perfectly the values of the most powerful states in the Western world. After all it is political and civil rights not social and economic rights that have been globalised today.

Therefore, *even as we recognise that global civil society actors articulate a new moral vision for global politics, there is nothing to suggest that this vision transcends the norms of powerful Western states.*

Arguably, the imaginings of global civil society actors seldom move beyond the space of liberal, even neo-liberal projects, and the agents themselves remain mired within the limits of liberal thought. In any case, the overlap justifiably gives us cause for thought.

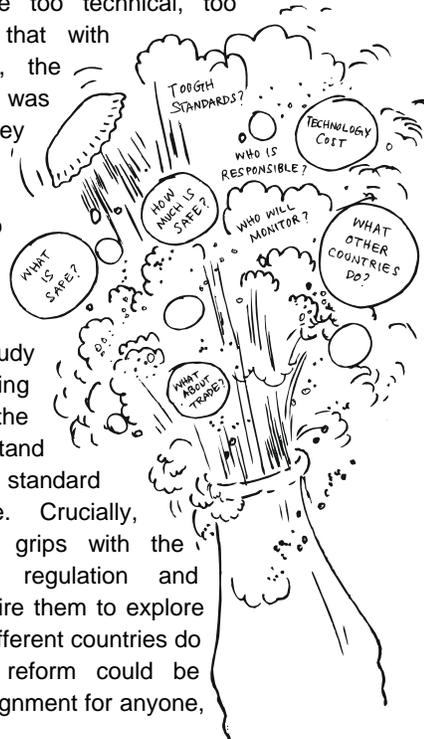
Democracy Must be Worked at

Sunita Narain



A Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) was set up to investigate the issue of pesticides in cold drinks. It was charged with determining if the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) study on pesticide residues in soft drinks was correct or not, and to suggest criteria for evolving standards for soft drinks, fruit juices and other beverages, where water was the main constituent. Everyone told us that we had reached a dead end. Parliamentarians aren't interested, we were told. The issues were too technical, too contentious. Cynics added that with elections round the corner, the committee's outcome was predisposed towards big money and powerful corporations.

The committee had to determine the veracity of our findings. But to do this, it had to understand both the science of the analytical study and the science of determining safety in food and drink. ... the JPC also had to understand regulations on food safety, standard setting and pesticide use. Crucially, members had to come to grips with the institutional framework for regulation and enforcement. This would require them to explore global best practices – what different countries do – so that a roadmap for reform could be suggested. It was a tough assignment for anyone,



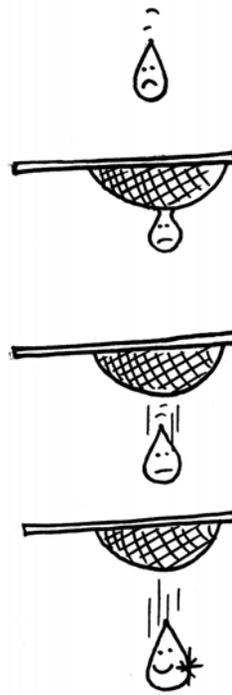
let alone busy parliamentarians in a time of election fever. Our first interaction with the committee was stereotypical. Corporate disinformation had reached them: we were pushing European Union (EU) norms, which would destroy Indian industry...it was a plot to weaken our trade... and destroy our competitive advantage. In addition, we were seeking publicity sans science. We were not credible.

But their reaction changed as we stated our positions. What stunned us was their willingness to be engaged in knowledge. There were hard issues at hand; they asked tough questions. But they also took their responsibility seriously. They were prepared to be informed, without arrogance or fixated minds, like that of “experts”.

For instance, we were asked: why did we want such stringent standards for pesticide residues in water? Industry had said that we were asking for the “surrogate zero”, an impossible standard. Would this not damage Indian industry and its competitiveness?

A fair question. Our reply was: we want tough standards for pesticide residues in water. Because the world over, regulators agree that pesticides serve no purpose in water. ... Furthermore, technology to clean residues exists; the cost isn't prohibitive. Most importantly, we argued, India cannot afford contamination, for the clean-up cost was too high. Therefore putting in place precautionary and preventive principles was vital to future water security.

Certainly we were not asking for the same stringent standards (EU norms) for all industries. ... But regulations for distinctly



different categories of products – with different ingredients, technologies and scale of operations – would have to differ. In other words, you could not club soft drinks with fruit juices, or malt beverages.

We asked JPC to consider the nutrition and poison trade-off in pesticide regulations. ... It became evident we were not asking for EU norms for all food. We had to do what the EU or the US does: set our own pesticide residue standards keeping in mind our diet and trade interests. The entire system of mandating and enforcing food safety standards had to be urgently overhauled. ... ***The parliamentarians listened.***

Their report sets out a firm and progressive reform agenda for food safety. ...This will be an important precedent to hold corporations accountable, in a world speedily globalising. ... Most importantly, the report says that a government cannot abdicate its role as the protector of the health of its people.

We have learnt. For democracy to succeed, it must be worked at.

NOTES

Me Marx, You Foucault... continued

Post-modernists criticise modernists (Marxist, liberals alike) for their belief in objective knowledge. This means that phenomena can be correctly observed and analysed by an individual mind outside the system.

Postmodernism argues that what we call knowledge is only a story, which uses words and pictures specific to a particular culture, or a dominant section of that culture.

Thus we see through tinted glasses - tainted by our language, culture, meaning system etc.

This view has been used to explain many contemporary issues like colonialism, feminism and caste. This is particularly true where earlier simple class-based analysis proved inadequate to motivate some of the new social movements like the dalit struggles, tribal movements against the onslaught of 'modern' development, anti-consumer movements and the women's movement.

In her article, **Nalini Rajan** argues that the "extreme anti-modernists" insist on the assertion of autonomous, fragmented group identities, rather than see it within the larger framework. That's why we have not been able to present a united front against rising communal forces.

In the first part of this article, Nalini Rajan outlines the theoretical context of what she calls the third category in the tradition versus modernity debate.

She analyses this category's view of caste, by grouping them into "moderate anti-modernists" and "extreme anti-modernists", both of whom play into the hands of the right.

With great timing, **T Kannan** reviews a collection of articles on Dalit

Identity edited by Ghanshyam Shah. The volume provides a wide range of reading on the politics of dalit identity for those who wish to go deeper into some of the issues raised by Nalini Rajan, and for those who wish to probe the further relevance of these issues of identity politics.

Apart from the range of theoretical perspectives that the editor has managed to collect, Kannan adds, **‘The book assumes significance for its amazing range of empirical data on the state of Dalit politics in India.’**



Left-liberalism and Caste Politics, by Nalini Rajan. Economic & Political Weekly, Vol 38, No.24, June 14 - 20, 2003.
<http://www.epw.org.in/showArticles.php?root=2003&leaf=06&filename=5917&filetype=html> [C.ELDOC6007176]
Differing Boundaries by T. Kannan. Deccan Herald.
[C.ELDOC6007069]



Left-liberalism and Caste Politics

Nalini Rajan

In the ongoing debate on tradition versus modernity, there is a new 'third'. At the time of Indian independence, group categories like caste were regarded as anti-modernist when considering the relationship between the state and the citizen. Today, for post-modern theorists, the enemy is secular, universalising modernity rather than community-centred tradition. Their critique often leads to bringing back the pre-modern.

The Extreme Anti-Modernist

The extreme critique of modernity positions itself as the dalit-bahujan (lower caste) opposition to radical secular politics. From this perspective, since upper caste intellectuals occupy most positions in public institutions like universities, any inquiry into issues concerning the lower castes is suspect. (*Post-modernists call it anthropologism, which is that a subject who stands outside the 'object' cannot 'know' authentically, because the outside subject is biased to his own culture, language, experience - Ed*). Extreme anti-modernists would argue that authentic knowledge may only be produced by the experiencing subject when she is allowed to speak for herself and to record her own history.

In a sense, by insisting that only dalits can represent dalits, extreme anti-modernists tend to freeze (hypostatise) the dalit identity within a closed, airtight box.

In fact, the actual writings of dalit-bahujan leaders like Bhimrao Ambedkar, Jyotiba Phule, and E V Ramaswamy ('Periyar') show that dalits themselves need not take such an anti-modernist or narcissistic view. For instance, for firmly positioning himself on the side of scientific rationality and opposing all manner of superstition and religious dogma, Periyar may be dubbed a 'modernist'.

Be that as it may, for the extreme anti-modernist, there is no significant difference between the caste-blind nationalist and the class-conscious Marxist, or even the upper caste conscious Hindutva ideologue. The anti-modernists concede that 'brahminical' secular-modernists and left intellectuals have shifted from a state of plain embarrassment ('the unspeakability of caste') to accommodation and flexibility with regard to caste-based reservation and caste group politics. Left-liberals today accept the fact that, along with the citizen and the state, a third category of community should be taken into consideration in the discourse on rights. However, the anti-modernists perceive that such an attitudinal change signifies the typical wily pragmatism of the upper castes.



Extreme anti-modernists are also likely to uphold 'positional' ethics – that is, only a dalit can represent other dalits. When any upper caste intellectual tries to do so, his views would be dismissed as brahminic or engaged. Thus cultural boundaries become ethical boundaries. By making a case for extreme group relativism, the extreme anti-modernist can then defend anything that happens or is articulated within dalit groups without confronting the issue of accountability. The phenomenon of embodied experience as a dalit provides the licence for doing anything.

(The above arguments mainly address the views in Aditya Nigam's 'Secularism, Modernity, Nation – Epistemology of the Dalit Critique', Economic and Political Weekly, November 25, 2000 - Ed)

The moderate anti-modernist

Debates among dalits themselves, reveal that there is a concerted move among many towards rigorous and rational debate, and away from just the kind of ideological polemic without responsibility that the extreme anti-modernist endorses.

Moderate anti-modernists, like the extreme anti-modernists, lump together the state representatives, right-wing libertarians, left-liberals, orthodox Marxists, and even Hindutva ideologues. The moderate anti-modernists see a grand conspiracy on the part of supporting the modern nation-state, against Dalit attempts to universalise the dalit issue, particularly at the Durban Conference on Race, 2001.

Left-liberals are likely to be sympathetic to the idea of internationalising the dalit issue. However, since they are considered as secular and rational modernists, their motives will be suspected by both extreme anti-modernists and moderate anti-modernists. While the extreme anti-modernists view left-liberals as being unworthy of consideration, the moderate anti-modernists hold a more optimistic view regarding the latter's redemption.



The moderate anti-modernists say that in order to understand why dalits wish to see caste as being analogous to race, it is important that left-liberals do not employ 'brahminical' or academic categories, but consider the question from the perspective of 'lila' or play. Rationalism itself must be bent to accommodate the irrational. Apparently, one now needs "***a theory of rationalism that can account for the magical***". Creative storytelling is the order of the day.

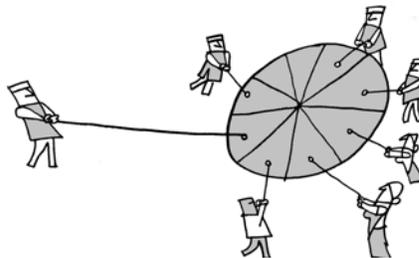
A light-hearted, liberating sense of play is now pitted against the left-

liberal's dreary, staid manner of finding solutions to problems, with or without the help of the State. Thus is the dalit discourse pitted against Mandalism. The former sees politics as witchcraft, symbol, rage; the latter boringly and painstakingly “works within the paradigms of Indian democracy, the Constitution, Socialism, the Nation State, affirmative action and electoralism”. The possibility that the dalit discourse can – and indeed must – coexist with so-called Mandalism, as posited by left-liberals, is not even considered. Having said this, moderate anti-modernists and left-liberals are capable of joining hands for a common cause.

(The above arguments mainly address the view expressed in Shiv Visvanathan's 'The Race for Caste – Prolegomena to the Durban Conference', Economic and Political Weekly, July 7, 2001 and 'Durban and Dalit Discourse', Economic and Political Weekly, August 18, 2001)

Splitting the left, radical and subaltern

We have reached a situation in this country where both the state and civil society are ravaged by communal forces – the most egregious illustration of which is Gujarat in 2002-03. Instead of devising ways and means of confronting this scourge by presenting a united front, radical, subaltern, left and liberal forces are engaged in bitter ideological battles among themselves. While there is some possibility of a dialogue between left-liberals and moderate anti-modernists, there is none with extreme anti-modernists, at least as long as the latter cling doggedly to the notion of group-centred embodied experience, to the exclusion of everything else.



For the extreme anti-modernists, the overriding need of the day is not a broad secular front, but the assertion of autonomous, fragmented identities like the dalit's, without contextualising them in a larger socio-economic framework. No doubt these identities are important for reasons of self-respect and self-worth. But, it is also true that where there have been significant lower caste movements – where Hindus as a community have been made conscious of definite divisions among themselves – communalism has also taken a back seat.

When the lower castes together struggle for their rights against the upper castes, there is little possibility of looking for "otherness" in other lower caste groups (which mainly serves to make a scapegoat of the other groups). It is precisely in those states like Gujarat, where there have been no strong dalit-bahujan leaders, that the lower castes themselves are divided, even stratified into upper caste and lower caste dalits! Against this backdrop, it is fairly easy to mobilise some dalit and shudra-dominated other backward castes (OBCs) against minority communities like Muslims and Christians.

The point that I am trying to make here is that caste – or more specifically the dalit issue – is not isolated from broader issues concerning the community or the nation. In other words, the emergence of the third category of group-centred embodied experience, in order to bypass the tradition-modernity or communalism-secularism dyad, may turn out to be without much substance.

The extreme anti-modernists are convinced that for dalits, secularism is not an overriding consideration – which is why Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Mayawati is apparently perfectly justified in aligning with an upper caste, communal party like the Bharatiya Janata Party. But the issue may be more complex than that. When the OBC-dominated



Dravida parties in Tamil Nadu vie with each other to forge alliances with the Hindutva forces, we perceive this phenomenon as the politics of expediency. When Mayawati's Bahujan Samajwadi Party does so in UP, why should it be any less opportunistic than the Tamil Nadu case? These issues of accountability must be pondered over – but this would imply some commitment to truth claims and normative claims.

Anti-modernity – playing into the hands of the Right

When Indian anti-modernists posit that there is no difference between right-wing individualist libertarians and left-liberals, we may recall an analogous situation during the 2002 French presidential elections. The cynical claim being made just before the elections began was 'Jospin, c'est Chirac' – which is why most radical intellectuals did not even bother to go out and vote for the socialists. Why should anyone, indeed, if Jospin is Chirac? The unintended consequence of this cynicism on the part of the radical and left forces was the emergence of the fascist and crass racist, Jean-Marie le Pen, and the elimination of the socialist, Lionel Jospin, in the first round of the presidential elections. Thus during the second electoral round, we witnessed the singular phenomenon of French radicals and leftists shedding their apathy and desperately voting for an eminently right-wing politician like Jacques Chirac, in order to eliminate the fascist forces.

In India, we were faced with a similar situation before the Gujarat state elections. ***If we cynically believe that the left front is the Congress, and the Congress is the BJP, why should we be surprised when Narendra Modi gets a massive electoral mandate?***

But the alternative is only slightly better. In the face of fragmented left and radical forces, are we ready to accept a corrupt, effete political party like the Congress as a viable alternative to the agents of communal violence?

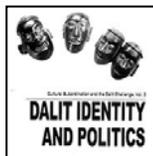
Faced with such sorry options, is it not time that left and liberal forces put aside their differences and built a common, unified front to confront



the scourge of communal forces?

Differing boundaries

T. Kannan



Dalit Identity and Politics
Ed Ghanshyam Shah
New Delhi: Sage, 2002,
pp 363, Rs. 299
[B.L18.S1]

The politics of Dalit identity is encountering certain insensitive, practical and theoretical problems of real politicking that increasingly pull it in opposite directions - primarily, in the realms of negotiation with the state, heterogeneity from within, compulsions and contradictions marking its aspirations to political power.

In this highly sensitive context, the book under review assumes significance not for its theoretical insights into the problem of real politic but for its amazing range of empirical material on the state of Dalit politics in India.

Thorat and Deshpande's paper seeks to show that the theoretical framework of neoclassical and Marxian economics is insensitive to the distributive consequences of the institutional structure of the caste system in contrast to Ambedkar's analytical framework, which captured it.

The paper implies that caste does not feature prominently in the Marxist analysis of perpetuation of inequality because it is a constituent institution of the superstructure.

This particular theoretical position leads to a serious problem of misinterpretation of Marxism as a monolithic social theory, for *it conveniently ignores the differing voices like that of Sharad Patil*. For Patil, Jatis are entities of the base structure, as he sees them as the basic units of production and exploitation in pre-capitalist societies.

In his paper, *Gopal Guru* interprets the Category of Dalit as a socially and historically constructed category as radically differentiated from the other essentialising and legal categorisations like 'Harijan' or 'Scheduled Caste'.

He admits that the category of Dalit has not penetrated deeply into the political discourse. However, he is keen on according an all-powerful 'centrality' to the category of Dalit, conveniently hiding the repressive process of forming a unified and homogenous identity by negating the differences within. Indeed in states like Tamil Nadu many Dalit castes are increasingly articulating themselves as caste-specific identities and communities.

Quite contrary to *Guru*, *Iliah's* paper understands Dalitism and Dalit identity essentially as opposites of Brahmanism and Brahmanical identity - now a well-rehearsed essentialising position of *Iliah*, which again misses the existing multiple community identities and ignores the ongoing confrontation between the Dalits and the non-Brahman upper/dominant castes.

The anti-Brahmanism or the non-Brahmanism of the Dalit movement. In his effort to build up an epistemology for dalit-bahujan, he equates materialism with Dalit-Bahujan world views, locating it in their activities of production and reproduction of nature and material reality.

As a result of this simplistic equation, he is forced to interpret 'Lokayata' as the pre-Buddhist Dalit philosophical tradition and is prevented from developing an epistemology from the philosophically sophisticated and hardcore materialism of 'Samkhya'.

There is no dispute about the anti-brahmanical heterodoxy of the 'Lokayata', but its materialism is not only raw but also undialectical.

Even though Ambedkar marks his presence throughout the book, chapters six to ten discuss his liberative political initiative and

philosophy vis-a-vis Dalits in greater detail.

Zelliot's paper mainly discusses how the image of Ambedkar as a messiah and a symbol of assertion for Dalits is constructed in various parts of India. She presents a clear idea of how images of Ambedkar are increasingly leading to an emotional rather than rational realisation of his leadership.

Omvedt in her paper analyses how the Dalit movements of the post-Ambedkar era have failed to engage in transformative politics in India.

Gopal Guru, in his second paper in the volume, criticises the Dalit politics of the post-Ambedkar era - not for its failure to do a transformative politics but for its failure to recognise the importance of cultural traditions of Dalits in order to prevent the privileging and dominance of urban-based Dalit literary movement over other forms of cultural performing arts. But he sees a renewal and revival of Dalit cultural movement among the Dalit women in their use of folk traditions.

Lobo's paper discusses the problems and dilemmas of Dalit Christians in India. He says that the Dalit Christians have developed a kind of dual identity: of their caste (such as Mahars) but also hyphenated labels (such as Christi-Mahars). He dismisses the common argument against extending reservation by pointing out the existence of a wide gap in each religion between belief and practice. He holds the church responsible for the twice alienated situation of Dalit Christians.

The last three chapters, focusing on Uttar Pradesh, try to understand the politics of Dalit identity by addressing the linkage between parliamentary politics and the politics of movement, and the transition from the politics of movement to parliamentary politics.

The book is indeed a very important contribution to the emerging field of Dalit studies.▶

NOTES

The Politics of Convergence

In the period before the seventies, Immanuel Wallerstein saw two parallel anti-systemic forces: the Social Movements (class struggle) and the National Movements (anti-colonial).

After 1968, a new set of movements,

- a) green, feminist, racial or ethnic minority movements
- b) human rights and civil society organisations and
- c) anti-globalisation movements

are seeking to establish themselves as "anti-systemic movements".

The modern world system is in structural crisis. According to Wallerstein, those in power are no longer seeking to preserve the system, they are trying to change it, to cement the worst features of the current regime, namely hierarchy, privilege and inequalities. It is a period of transition, where there is no known outcome. The 'other' forces do not have a 'historically determined role'. They have to invent it. They have to carve out their strategy.

The basic framework of the World Social Forum probably reflects this uncertainty. Wallerstein highlights four components of the strategy for the 'other' forces:

1. Open debate about this transition, which the WSF represents, but will it be able to maintain this openness?
2. Not to neglect short term defensive action including electoral action. Eg. the NBA type of action, as well as the recent decision by some organisations in Madhya Pradesh to contest elections?
3. Middle range goals of setting up alternative institutions of de commodification, cooperative systems of welfare in health, education, local markets etc. like the CMMS, SEWA etc
4. Develop the substantial meaning of long term emphases on a really democratic and relatively egalitarian system.

In short, it is a call for convergence under a new overarching ideology. Such a convergence is probably possible only if groups by whatever description – movements or agencies, foreign funded or indigenous, revolutionary or reformist – can work autonomously, yet join the convergence, and relate with the larger efforts.

The convergence should be able to take on board and engage with criticism, keeping in mind the larger movement ideals and thus effectively address these challenges. Such should be the shape of the new transparent politics of convergence.



New Revolts against The System, by Immanuel Wallerstein. New 
Left Review, Nov 2002. <http://www.newleftreview.net/NLR25202.shtml>
[C.ELDOC1071733]



New Revolts against The System

Immanuel Wallerstein



The *longue durée* of resistance to the established order: after a hundred and twenty years of socialist and nationalist revolts, does the World Social Forum represent a qualitatively new alignment of forces and strategies for change?

I coined the term '**antisystemic movement**' in the 1970s in order to have a formulation that would group together what had, historically and analytically, been two distinct and in many ways rival kinds of popular movement—those that went under the name 'social', and those that were 'national'.



Social movements were conceived primarily as socialist parties and trade unions; they sought to further the class struggle within each state against the bourgeoisie or the employers.

National movements were those which fought for the creation of a national state, either by combining separate political units that were considered to be part of one nation—as, for example, in Italy—or by seceding from states considered imperial and oppressive by the nationality in question—colonies in Asia or Africa, for instance.

Both types of movement emerged as significant, bureaucratic structures in the second half of the nineteenth century and grew stronger over time. Both tended to accord their objectives priority over any other kind

of political goal—and, specifically, over the goals of their national or social rival. This frequently resulted in severe mutual denunciations.

*The two types seldom cooperated politically and, if they did so, tended to see such **cooperation as a temporary tactic**, not a basic alliance.* Nonetheless, the history of these movements between 1850 and 1970 reveals a series of shared features:

1. *Most socialist and nationalist movements repeatedly proclaimed themselves to be **'revolutionary'***, that is, to stand for fundamental transformations in social relations. It is true that both types usually had a wing, sometimes located in a separate organization, that argued for a more gradualist approach and therefore eschewed revolutionary rhetoric.

2. Secondly, at the outset, *both variants were politically quite weak and had to fight an uphill battle* merely to exist. They were repressed or outlawed by their governments, their leaders were arrested and their members often subjected to systematic violence by the state or by private forces. Many early versions of these movements were totally destroyed.



3. Thirdly, over the last three decades of the nineteenth century both types of movements went through a parallel series of *great debates over strategy that ranged those whose perspectives were **'state-oriented'** against those who saw the **state as an intrinsic enemy*** and pushed instead for an emphasis on individual transformation. For the social movement, this was the debate between the Marxists and the anarchists; for the national movement, that between political and cultural nationalists.

4. What happened historically in these debates – and this is the fourth similarity – was that *those holding the 'state-oriented' position won out*. The decisive argument in each case was that the immediate source of real power was located in the state apparatus and that any attempt to ignore its political centrality was doomed to failure, since the state would successfully suppress any thrust towards anarchism or cultural nationalism. In the late nineteenth century, these groups enunciated a so-called two-step strategy: first gain power within the state structure; then transform the world. This was as true for the social as for the national movements.

5. The fifth common feature is less obvious, but no less real. *Socialist movements often included nationalist rhetoric in their arguments, while nationalist discourse often had a social component*. The result was a greater blurring of the two positions than their proponents ever acknowledged.

6. *The processes of popular mobilization deployed by the two kinds of movements were basically quite similar*. Both types started out, in most countries, as small groups, often composed of a handful of intellectuals plus a few militants drawn from other strata. Those that succeeded did so because they were able, by dint of long campaigns of education and organization, to secure popular bases in concentric circles of militants, sympathizers and passive supporters.

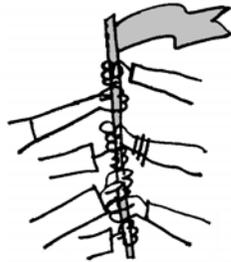
When the outer circle of supporters grew large enough for the militants to operate, in Mao Zedong's phrase, like fish swimming in water, the movements became serious contenders for political power.



We should, of course, note too that groups calling themselves **'social democratic'** tended to be strong primarily in states located in the core zones of the world-economy, while those that described

themselves as **movements of national liberation** generally flourished in the semiperipheral and peripheral zones.

7. The seventh common feature is that *both these movements struggled with the tension between 'revolution' and 'reform' as prime modes of transformation*. Endless discourse has revolved around this debate in both movements—but for both, in the end, it turned out to be based on a misreading of reality. Revolutionaries were not in practice very revolutionary, and reformists not always reformist. Certainly, the difference between the two approaches became more and more unclear as the movements pursued their political trajectories.
8. Finally, *both movements had the problem of implementing the two-step strategy*. Once 'stage one' was completed, and they had come to power, their followers expected them to fulfill the promise of stage two: transforming the world. **What they discovered, if they did not know it before, was that state power was more limited than they had thought.**



Analysis of the world situation in the 1960s reveals these two kinds of movements looking more alike than ever. In most countries they had completed 'stage one' of the two-step strategy, having come to power practically everywhere.

Communist parties ruled over a third of the world, from the Elbe to the Yalu; national liberation movements were in office in Asia and Africa, populist movements in Latin America and social-democratic movements, or their cousins, in most of the pan-European world, at least on an alternating basis.

They had not, however, transformed the world.



1968 and after

It was the combination of these factors that underlay a principal feature of the world revolution of 1968. The revolutionaries had different local demands but shared two fundamental arguments almost everywhere. First of all, they opposed both the hegemony of the United States and the collusion in this hegemony by the Soviet Union. Secondly, they condemned the Old Left as being 'not part of the solution but part of the problem'. This second common feature arose out of the massive disillusionment of the popular supporters of the traditional antisystemic movements over their actual performance in power.

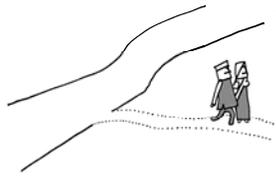
The populations of these countries were adjured by the movements in power to be patient, for history was on their side. But their patience had worn thin.

The conclusion that the world's populations drew from the performance of the classical antisystemic movements in power was negative. They ceased to believe that these parties would bring about a glorious future or a more egalitarian world and no longer gave them their legitimation; and having lost confidence in the movements, they also withdrew their faith in the state as a mechanism of transformation.

This did not mean that large sections of the population would no longer vote for such parties in elections; but it had become a defensive vote, for lesser evils, not an affirmation of ideology or expectations.

From Maoism to Porto Alegre

Since 1968, there has been a lingering search, nonetheless, for a better kind of antisystemic movement—one that would actually



lead to a more democratic, egalitarian world. There have been four different sorts of attempts at this, some of which still continue.

The first was the efflorescence of the multiple Maoisms. From the 1960s until around the mid-1970s, there emerged a large number of different, competing movements, usually small but sometimes impressively large, claiming to be Maoist; by which they meant that they were somehow inspired by the example of the Cultural Revolution in China. Essentially, they argued that the Old Left had failed because it was not preaching the pure doctrine of revolution, which they now proposed. But these movements all fizzled out. Today, no such movements of any significance exist.

A second, more lasting variety of claimant to antisystemic status was the new social movements – the Greens and other environmentalists, feminists, the campaigns of racial or ethnic ‘minorities’, such as the Blacks in the United States or the Beurs in France. These movements claimed a long history but, in fact, they either became prominent for the first time in the 1970s or else re-emerged then, in renewed and more militant form. They were also stronger in the pan-European world than in other parts of the world-system.

By the 1980s, all these new movements had become divided internally between what the German Greens called the fundis and the realos. This turned out to be a replay of the ‘**revolutionary versus reformist**’ debates of the beginning of the twentieth century. The outcome was that the fundis lost out in every case, and more or less disappeared.

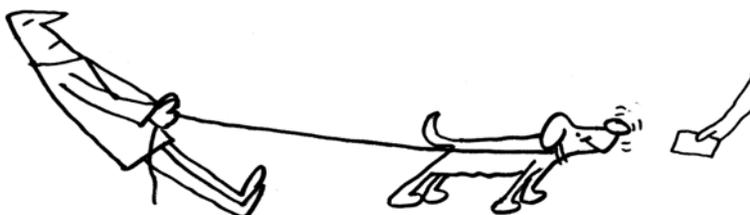
The third type of claimant to antisystemic status has been the human-rights organizations. Of course some, like Amnesty International, existed prior to 1968, but in general these became a major political force only in the 1980s.

The human rights organizations claimed to speak in the name of ‘**civil society**’. The term itself indicates the strategy: civil society is by definition not the state. The concept draws upon a nineteenth-century distinction between *le pays légal* and *le pays reel* – between those in power and those who represent popular sentiment – posing the

question: how can civil society close the gap between itself and the state? How can it come to control the state, or make the state reflect its values? The distinction seems to assume that the state is currently controlled by small privileged groups, whereas 'civil society' consists of the enlightened population at large.

These organizations have had an impact in getting some states – perhaps all – to inflect their policies in the direction of human-rights concerns; but, in the process, they have come to be more like the adjuncts of states than their opponents and, on the whole, scarcely seem very antisystemic.

They have become NGOs, located largely in core zones yet seeking to implement their policies in the periphery, where they have often been regarded as the agents of their home state rather than its critics. In any case, these organizations have seldom mobilized mass support, counting rather on their ability to utilize the power and position of their elite militants in the core.



The fourth and most recent variant has been the so-called anti-globalization movements – a designation applied not so much by these movements themselves as by their opponents.

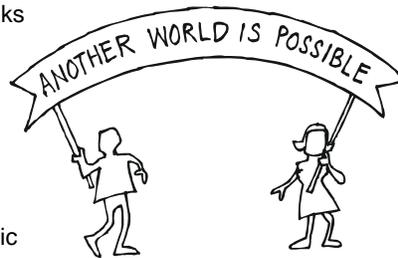
Following Seattle, the continuing series of demonstrations around the world against inter-governmental meetings inspired by the neoliberal agenda led, in turn, to the construction of the World Social Forum, whose initial meetings have been held in Porto Alegre.

The characteristics of this new claimant for the role of antisystemic movement are rather different from those of earlier attempts.

First of all, the WSF seeks to bring together all the previous types and a common respect for each other's immediate priorities. Importantly, the WSF seeks to bring together movements from the North and the South within a single framework.

The only slogan, as yet, is 'Another World is Possible'.

Even more strangely, the WSF seeks to do this without creating an overall superstructure. At the moment, it has only an international coordinating committee, some fifty-strong, representing a variety of movements and geographic locations.



While there has been some grumbling from Old Left movements that the WSF is a reformist façade, thus far the complaints have been quite minimal. The grumblers question; they do not yet denounce.

A period of transition

I have argued elsewhere that *the modern world-system is in structural crisis, and we have entered an 'age of transition' – a period of bifurcation and chaos* – then it is clear that the issues confronting antisystemic movements pose themselves in a very different fashion than those of the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries.

Such a period of transition has two characteristics that dominate the very idea of an antisystemic strategy. The first is that *those in power* will no longer be trying to preserve the existing system (doomed as it is to

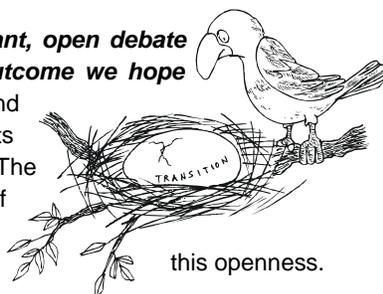
self-destruction); rather, they *will try to ensure that the transition leads to the construction of a new system that will **replicate the worst features of the existing one – its hierarchy, privilege and inequalities***. They may not yet be using language that reflects the demise of existing structures, but they are implementing a strategy based on such assumptions.

The second fundamental characteristic is that *a period of systemic transition is one of deep uncertainty, in which it is **impossible to know what the outcome will be***. History is on no one's side. Each of us can affect the future, but we do not and cannot know how others will act to affect it, too. The basic framework of the WSF reflects this dilemma, and underlines it.

Strategic considerations

A strategy for the period of transition ought therefore to include four components – all of them easier said than done.

The first is a process of constant, open debate about the transition and the outcome we hope for. This has never been easy, and the historic antisystemic movements were never very good at it. The structure of the WSF has lent itself to encouraging this debate; we shall see if it is able to maintain



this openness.

The second component should be self-evident: an antisystemic movement cannot neglect short-term defensive action, including electoral action. The world's populations live in the present, and their immediate needs have to be addressed. Any movement that neglects them is bound to lose the widespread passive support that is essential for its long-term success.

The third component has to be the establishment of interim, middle-range goals that seem to move in the right direction. I would suggest that one of the most useful—substantively, politically, psychologically—is the attempt to move towards selective, but ever-widening, decommodification. It means we should create structures, operating in the market, whose objective is performance and survival rather than profit. This can be done, as we know, from the history of universities or hospitals—not all, but the best. Why is such a logic impossible for steel factories threatened with delocalization?

Finally, we need to develop the substantive meaning of our long-term emphases, which I take to be a world that is relatively democratic and relatively egalitarian. I say ‘relatively’ because that is realistic. There will always be gaps—but there is no reason why they should be wide, encrusted or hereditary. Is this what used to be called socialism, or even communism? Perhaps, but perhaps not.

That brings us back to the issue of debate.

We need to stop assuming what the better (not the perfect) society will be like. We need to discuss it, outline it, experiment with alternative structures to realize it; and we need to do this at the same time as we carry out the first three parts of our programme for a chaotic world in systemic transition.

And if this programme is insufficient, and it probably is, then this very insufficiency ought to be part of the debate which is Point One of the programme. ▶



Globalisation from Below

The bottom-up approach (not baring one's backside to the evangelicals who propagate neo-conservative market fundamentalism), but redeeming the essential globalising nature of human endeavour, and giving it a democratized flavour – is what the writer Ronaldo Munck posits, and what his reviewers enthusiastically endorse.

We are often seen as die-hard protestors against everything new, modern, and of global-public interest.

These reviews turn the debate on its head and argue convincingly, and cogently, that chauvinistic nationalism and protectionism (witness the current outsourcing debate in the US and Europe) have no place if we are to take the battle for equity, fraternity and liberty to its essential meaning and practice. The focus here is on labour and related issues.

This is no going back to the Old Style Labour International and Solidarity of the Organised and the Cream of Labour. This is a call to make possible another Globalisation that is inclusive of All Labour - Northern and Southern, Organised and Unorganised, Formal and Informal, Male and Female, Adult and Child, Rural and Urban.



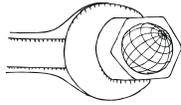
Workers and Globalisation, by *C.T Kurian* , Frontline Magazine, 
Volume 20 - Issue 17, August 16 - 29, 2003.
<http://www.flonnet.com/fl2017/stories/20030829000107200.htm>
[C.ELDOC6008198]

Globalisation and Labour: The New 'Great Transformation' by
Ronaldo Munck, Madhyam Books (by arrangement with Zed Books),

2003. [B.U00.M63]

Workers and Globalisation

C. T. Kurien



**Globalisation and Labour:
The New Great
Transformation** by Ronaldo
Munck; Madhyam Books,
Delhi, 2003; pages xiii + 216,
Rs.250. [B.U00.M63]

Global workers' movements ... must give up their past preoccupation with workers in the organised sectors and become adequately inclusive of workers of all categories. Incorporating workers of the informal sector will call for major changes in the organisational patterns and strategies of workers' movements.

Secondly, the concerns of workers' movements will also have to change. From treating workers as a homogeneous category, the intrinsic differences that arise from the human attributes of workers (culture, gender, etc.) must be recognised and respected.

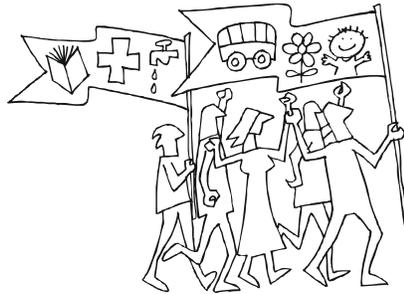
The Worker in Community

This is no easy task, though, for it is a paradigm shift from worker as worker, to worker in the household, worker at workplace and worker in community. It is a move away from an earlier singularity to an emerging complexity.

On many critical issues workers' movements will have to work closely with other agencies - feminists, environmentalists, human rights activists, consumer protection groups. Not that the right thing is to go along with any or all of such agencies uncritically. Many environmentalists are just conservationists; human rights are often championed by die-hard individualists who refuse to recognise the societal dimension of human beings. But environmental problems are

global today and human rights must become global. As those interacting with nature and other human beings in the process of production, workers are in a position to know what is genuine and what is not in these issues. They must, therefore, enter into the agenda of workers' movements.

The author posits a '**social movement trade unionism**' that will not only champion the cause of workers as workers but also incorporate common social issues such as health, education, transport and



environment.

There is a greater understanding that social identity is both complex and fluid. Workers are also citizens and consumers; they are also divided by gender and ethnicity, for example. Fluidity is also a natural condition and we should not expect consciousness to be fixed. This thumbnail sketch necessarily points towards a possible new mode of internationalism in keeping with the 'postmodern' globalised era in which we live.

Beyond a Nationalistic Ethos

That new mode of internationalism will have to be consciously striven for because it is easy for workers' movements to slide back into the illusory security of a nationalistic ethos.

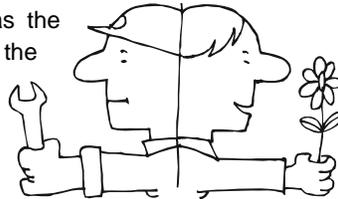
The workers of the North have become attached to the variety of social security measures offered by their governments. Workers of the South

have, in the past half century, become equally attached to the protective security that their governments provided through their nationalistic development programmes. A world without borders, advantageous to workers everywhere, can come only by abandoning the temporary securities of the past.

The workers of the North, for instance, must join hands with their comrades in the South in fighting for greater international mobility of workers. Workers in the South must accept the necessity of **'social clauses'** globally, including in their own countries.

The second of these statements in the abstract may appear to be threatening from the point of view of the South. It must be conceded that in international negotiations the representatives of the North can use the "social clauses" to protect their interest and this must be guarded against.

But, consider a concrete case such as the use of child labour. Should workers in the South oppose eradication of child labour on the ground that it is simply a pressure tactic from the North, or actively strive for it because the tender age of children should be protected everywhere, including in poor countries?



Decisions on matters like this are not going to be easy, but a welcome aspect of contemporary globalisation is that such issues will have to be faced everywhere in the world.

In sum, the role of workers in the context of contemporary globalisation is not to declare to be totally against it. Rather, they must make use of the opportunity of the growing awareness of the need for and possibilities of a world without boundaries to bring about an alternative global social system of production based on the political economy of labour and the moral imperatives of

**universal human rights and welfare.
That, indeed, will be a great transformation.**

Excerpts



Globalisation and Labour: The New 'Great Transformation' by Ronaldo Munck; Madhyam Books (by arrangement with Zed Books), 2003; pp xiii+216, Rs 250.

[B.U00.M63]

Globalisation appears to be the new "**Great Transformation**" of our time. The Great Transformation, which Polanyi wrote about in 1957, was the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth century, which saw 'an almost miraculous improvement of the tools of production, (but) which was accompanied by a catastrophic dislocation of the lives of common people'.

The current Globalisation Revolution is also characterised by a seemingly miraculous development of capitalism, but also by an equally profound dislocation of lives of ordinary people across the globe.

Transformations

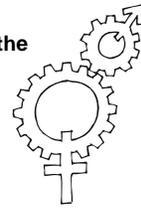
Globalisation, in the shape of its prime economic agent, the Great Corporation, cuts across political frontiers in a way that leads to **de-territorialisation** (the decline of the nation state). While corporations have headquarters in particular nation states, they are effectively disembedded from these societies by their economic logic.

Another widespread tendency is '**brazilianisation**', which is the spread of production patterns and social relations typical of the South to the advanced industrial societies of the North. Thus, a preponderance of

'*informal*' and precarious forms of work has become generalised.

For perhaps a decade, until Seattle 1999, it seemed that capitalist globalisation was indeed the '*only game in town*', hegemonic in all respects. But what if, as Marx predicted in his own era, this dynamic capitalism on a global scale was producing its own gravedigger?

Feminisation: the introduction of more women into the labour force. In the EU, for example, 20 million out of 29 million new workers joining the labour force between 1960 and 1990, were women with unregulated, insecure employment conditions.



The enlightened globalising elite is acutely aware of the problem of ***adjusting the still nationally based political governance of world politics and society to a rapidly growing globalising economy*** (group of Lisbon 1995). They understand the need for global governance, which is in direct contradiction to fundamentalist free market ideologies. This brings to the fore the working of a '***double movement***' whereby society seeks to protect itself from the dislocations created by the market.

“Globalisation from below”

“Just as the corporate and political elites are reaching across national borders to further their agendas, people at the grassroots are connecting their struggles around the world to impose their need and interests on the global economy” (Jeremy Brecher, 2000).

Thus globalisation from below is seen as a counter movement beginning in diverse parts around different issues. It could be global warming, the debt crisis, genetically modified food, consumer movements or identity politics which brought people into action against globalisation or, at least, its effects.

The **new** social movements are seen to represent a qualitatively different form of transformative politics and in embryo, a new societal paradigm. They stress their autonomy from party politics and prioritise civil society over the state.

The Cycle from One Great Transformation to the New

Economy	Labour
Industrial Revolution	Internationalisation of labour (1st half of 19th century) Closer relationship with Nation States (2nd half of 19th century)
Post WWII: National Capitalism, Golden Era 60s, 70s : Profit rates in advanced capitalist countries fall by a third	Labour movement drifts into a nation-statist perspective
Neo-liberalism of 90s: De-territorialisation, Brazilianisation, Feminisation	Call for International Union action, as a countervailing power to MNCs. (Charles Levinson, former head of International Confederation of Chemical & General Worker's Union)

Towards a New Movement

"I believe labour and other social movements should be neither for nor against globalisation but, rather, see the issue as one of understanding the complexity of globalisation as a process of social transformation".

At a regional level, trade unions are increasingly beginning to develop a coherent joint strategy. National Union centres are also changing under the impact of globalisation. The limitations of nationalist, economic and corporatist strategies are plain to see. In Denmark, for example, the General Workers' Union called for a bold new global agenda which argues that: we must use our global strength to force TNCs to have

much more moral and ethical standards, to respect workers' rights, to have codes of conduct and to accept the establishment of international workers' councils. The Danish Union does not think purely in trade unionist ways and recognises, for example, that **“NGOs are an important voice in civil society. As trade unions we must be more open to enter into strategic alliances not only with our political allies but with NGOs, such as women’s and youth organisations, social welfare, development and human rights, and environment and consumers’ organisations who share our general objectives.”** (SID, 1997)

A new more internationalist, as well as objectively “globalised”, labour movement is emerging with a strong social movement or community orientation.

Has the process of trade union renewal/reinvention created a new global labour movement capable of confronting the effects of globalisation? I would say that the international trade union movement is, at one and the same time, a new transnational social movement and a representative organisation that is more than the transnational advocacy groups, promoting gender, environment and human rights issues. By necessity, the ICFTU (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions) has had to reconsider its Cold War past and, however unevenly or hesitantly, move towards a united and democratic approach to globalisation. In doing so it has to learn much from the *new social movements, and from the NGO way of working*.

However, Trade Unions, as always, advocate on behalf of their members, and, whatever the problems of ‘representativity’ they are more democratic than, say, Greenpeace. The international trade union movement certainly has the motivation to ‘go global’ (if it has to survive) and it has the technology (internet, cheaper travel) to do so. It will play a central and increasing role in achieving a degree of social regulation over the worldwide expansion of capitalism in the decades to come.

For Polanyi, workers, representing as they did a large section of society,



were the “only available class for the protection of the interests of the consumers, of the citizens, of human beings as such...” Socialism is essentially the tendency inherent in an industrial civilisation to transcend the self-regulating market by consciously subordinating it to a democratic society (Polanyi, 1957).