Chapter II

A Theory of (for) New Social Movements in the Third World

This chapter offers a subversion to the theoretical trends highlighted in the first chapter of the thesis. A perusal of the recent trends in New Social Movement Theory indicates that the new movements are treated as mere mechanisms of cultural defence or reduced them to the politics of the middle class by abandoning the tenets of political economy in their analysis. They have a limited recognition that new social movements practice in various spheres of the life goes beyond the conservation of culture and involves the active construction and innovation of new social relations. They failed to take into account the movements' ongoing struggles with the state and contemporary forms of capital. The New Social Movement Theory underestimates the enduring effects of advanced capitalism in shaping the trajectory of the new social movements. They also fail to understand much about the concrete struggles of new social movement organizations.

Though not centrally economic movements, the new social movements do address political economy. The state is a primary and unavoidable agent in the reproduction of relations of domination in race, gender, sexuality, and environment and the new social movements struggle actively to block and re-make these mechanisms of subordination.¹ One cannot simply view new social movements as a reflection of post-industrial and postmodern societies, their active presence and

political significance in the Third World need to be recognized. In the Third World, they constitute a new state phenomenon.

The end of World War II witnessed the emergence of a number of new states in the Third World. It is possible to discern the roots of the genesis of the new movements in the failure of the new states to meet the participatory and distributive demands of the various sections of the population. The practice of the new social movements in the Third World reflects an acute awareness and engagement with the state and capital as hegemonic forces. This context necessitates a rethinking on the political economy of these social movements. But the contemporary social movements theory continues to impede a realistic assessment of the new social movements by separating them from questions of political economy. This chapter is intended to fill this vacuum and forms the theoretical framework of the present work.

Political economy is a recognition of the need to properly study the interaction of politics and economy for the better understanding of society. It is concerned with the role of government in all the implications of state intervention in the economy. As an approach, political economy provides a method of analyzing society or specific aspects of it, in which primacy is assigned to material conditions. Here, a brief sketch of the political economy of the Third World, in general, is presented but for the sake of convenience of study and for further analysis the Indian situation is more or less taken as representing the Third World.

The less affluent countries of the world, most of which in the past were colonies of various European powers, have been variously called ‘Third World’,
'backward', 'underdeveloped', 'undeveloped' or 'developing'. Largely bypassed by the benefits of prosperity and progress, they exist on the periphery of the developed countries of the North. While most of the people of the North are affluent, most of the people of the South are poor; while the economies of the North are generally strong and resilient, those of the South are mostly weak and defenceless; while the countries in the North are, by and large, in control of their destinies, those of the South are very vulnerable to external factors and lacking in functional sovereignty.²

Social deprivation remains widespread in the developing countries in spite of substantial improvements during the post-war period of health care, literacy and education. Almost half of the developing world's children are still not protected by immunization against communicable diseases. In the rural areas of the developing world, nearly two-thirds of families are still without safe drinking water and an even higher proportion is without adequate sanitation.³

Corruption has been on the increase in many countries. Over-centralization, limited administrative capabilities, laxity of tax administration and authoritarian tendencies has combined to provide fertile conditions for corruption in many countries.⁴

Underdevelopment of the Third World may have been partially due to its exploitation by the rich North, yet in its attempts to development, the Third World

⁴ UNDP, n.2, p.51.
has been heavily dependent on concepts, methods and technologies largely formulated in the developed countries to meet their needs, aspirations and endowments. Such borrowing may not necessarily be the most appropriate for the Third World countries to secure development in the best interests of their populations as a whole. There is a greater need to develop more appropriate, replicable and indigenous development techniques.⁵

These societies are called underdeveloped, not only because their actual development fall far short of their potential, but also because their capacity for exerting themselves to realize this potential is impaired by their internal social and political structure, and by the dominating effect of the advanced capitalist countries which limit their choices all the time.⁶

Szentes observes:

The socio-economic state of the developing countries is not merely ‘economic underdevelopment’, not just a sign of not having participated in development, of their having fallen behind in progress, but it is the product of a specific development, which is most closely connected with, moreover derived from, the development of capitalist world economy.⁷

The condition of dependency encompasses all or most of the following features:⁸ Firstly from their common historical background of colonialism LDCs (Less Developed Countries) have inherited particular structure of production and trade, in particular in the production of primary commodities, raw materials and

⁵ Ibid.
foodstuffs for export to the capitalist countries. Secondly, they were initially dependent on imports for their manufactured goods requirements, with the gradual establishment of import substituting consumer goods, industries they have become dependent on imports of intermediate and capital goods. Thirdly, partly as a result of industrial development, they are heavily dependent on imports of foreign technology, although this form of dependency covers many other spheres of activity - agriculture, communications, education, medicine and so on. Fourthly, LDCs are in general deeply penetrated by foreign capital, largely in the guise of transnational corporations (TNCs) with its associated pattern of production consumption, marketing expertise.  

It is of fundamental importance that most parts of the Third World have, at one time or another, experienced external political, usually colonial and essentially exploitative control and thus the impact of materially advanced cultures. The achievement of national independence has not usually resulted in any significant reduction of the external involvement. A developed state or group of states nevertheless continues to exert its influence and power through, for instance, aid and trade.

The Third World countries did not often keep the people at the centre of its planning and development efforts, attention was concentrated on increasing physical investment and production. The broader conception of development as a process of enhancing human capabilities was missing. There is need to re-orient

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9 Ibid.
11 UNDP, n.2, p.45.
development strategies. Priority must be given to meeting basic needs of the people.

Emergence of New Social Movements in the Third World

The historical conjuncture at which many of the new social movements emerged in the Third World was characterized by, on the one hand, an ongoing crisis in post-war ideologies and institutions, such as development, the nation-state and democracy, and, on the other, an inability or failure of existing counter systemic movements and institutions to address themselves issues raised by this crisis. The mid 1960s was the time when sociological studies concluded beyond any doubt that the development programmes launched by the governments of the Third World countries had benefited largely those who were already better off, leaving the poor largely unaffected. It is this failure of the development strategy that led to the rise of small groups as agencies of people’s initiative in favour of the alienated and the oppressed.

To Samir Amin, the forms through which social movements express themselves have entered a new phase. In the past, in the developed capitalist societies, this organization was articulated around two main themes - the theme of class struggle and the theme of political ideology. In Asia and Africa the history of the past century had been that of the polarization of the social movements around the struggle for national independence. Today in the three parts of the world - West,

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East and South - the models of managing social life embedded in these organizational forms seem to have exhausted their historical effectiveness. As Amin puts it:

In Asia and Africa, the national liberation movement that had seized political independence also had its battery of prescriptions, which in a mix of capitalist and socialist recipes, in doses that varied from case to case, would enable it to overcome 'underdevelopment' in 'interdependence' with the rest of the world economy.... What was actually achieved was more modest than is often believed. In the Third World the social effects that accompanied development were often negative.

The cracks in the notion of development had begun to surface: the perpetuation and exacerbation of unequal power relations, the reckless exploitation of natural resources and the consequent ecological crises and the destruction of Third World cultural and social forms. The Third World state, far from living up to its promises as a guarantor of welfare and democracy in the name of development, undermined the survival base of large sections of its citizens and curtailed their democratic rights. With liberalization and predominance of corporate capitalism and the market, even its limited welfare function has been eroded.

The new movements have come to prominence in the Third World at a time of overall crisis of political economic systems and ideologies. The collapse of the state socialist societies and the crisis of Marxism mean the failure of the hegemonic

15 Ibid., p.77.
16 Monterio and Lingam, n.12, p.8.
ideology of liberation. At the same time the obvious crises in capitalism in some of
the central countries destroyed the credibility of neo-liberal ideologies.

In the economic sphere, there exists large-scale unemployment, growing
inflation and acute shortage of food grains. The policies created by the bureaucratic
and technocratic ruling elite created a gap between the established middle class and
the masses. The poor and the deprived and the minorities started to feel that the
programme of poverty alleviation, national self-reliance, planned development,
higher technology etc. had made them more marginalized.17

The gradual destruction of natural resources threatened the survival of the
poor and the destitute. Due to increased exploitation of forest, forest communities
have experienced a progressive loss of control over their habitat. The people
responded to this threat by launching ecological movements in various parts of the
Third World state and made demands for the conservation of these vital natural
resources to ensure their use on a sustainable basis.18

The political parties are viewed as generally unscrupulous, unprincipled,
corrupt and bureaucratic. The left parties are criticized because they are no longer
the major repositories of experimental knowledge and no longer interested in
strengthening the roots from which they have sprung and for having lost direct
contact with the people. The new movements are seen as revolts against all these
and are viewed as potentially capable of renewing contacts with masses and getting

17 Abhash C. Panda and Arun K. Sharma, “Reconstructing Theory of Social Movements in India”,
18 Ibid., p. 115.
constant feedback from them. Unlike the traditional left, which believes in violent revolution as midwife of change, new social movements are held to believe in non-violent struggles at grass roots level. They favour a steady upliftment and empowerment of the weak and the vulnerable for a smooth transition to an egalitarian social order.

Sheth observes, "Unlike the established left parties, the new movements work more directly with the people, take up concrete issues of oppression and exploitation and in the process develop their consciousness of the structures that exploit and oppress". They have been able to organize oppressed groups in the rural and urban areas which were considered unorganisable by the left parties. At the level of the people, they are generating an ability to move beyond the conventional politics of transformations. The parties are viewed as groups which have lost contact with those who are at the very bottom of social hierarchy.

The power of the state is becoming more and more evident to the common people. The complex functions performed by the military, para-military and administrative machinery serve the purpose of surveillance and control of the life of the society and maintaining an order which is inegalitarian and repressive.

One of the important appeals of a Third World state to its people after independence was that it undertook to undo injustice and deprivations that had

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20 Sharma, n.13, p.2558.
22 A.R.Desai, State and Society in India (Bombay, 1975), pp.74-85.
made their way into the social structure and to build a unity that was liberating for the people at large but particularly for poor, the underprivileged, the various peripheries and the minorities. The deprived and the exploited sections placed full faith in such a state and patiently waited for it to carry out measures that would bridge gaps and remove inequalities. But the state is receding from its promise.23

Explaining how the role of the state accounted for the emergence of non-party formations, Kothari writes:

The state is now perceived as an agent of technological modernization with a view more to catch up with the developed world and regional maps as a strong state than to cope with pressing often desperate needs and demands of poor.... In respect of the relationship between the state and civil society one finds that in a period of economic stagnation and political instability the coercive nature of the state increases ... the bearers of state power, viz, those in control of government including the presumed supremos of power by virtue of their charisma and wide popular appeal, seems to be losing out, ... increasingly becoming pawns in the hands of forces beyond their control.24

These developments receive sustenance and support from and are indeed encouraged by the international system. All the pathologies touched upon are spurred by a new breed of entrepreneurs in service of the global status quo which is undermining the role of the state even as it was earlier conceived by the national bourgeoisie. There is a reverse transfer of natural resources and raw materials, of food stuffs and feed, as well as of manufactured consumer goods that rely on

labour-intensive and polluting technologies, all at continually depressed prices, as well as willingness to order and discipline the working classes in the Third World so that both the quantum and the structure of production are regulated to suit the requirements of world capitalism. Kothari continues:

It is a context where the engine of growth are in decline, the organized working class is not growing, the process of marginalization is spreading, technology is turning anti-people, development has become an instrument of the privileged class, and the state has lost its role as an agent of transformation or even as a mediator in the affairs of civil society. It is a context of massive centralization of power and resources, centralization that does not stop at the national centre either and makes the nation state itself an abject onlooker and a client of a global world order. It is the context in which the party system are in a state of decline and are replaced by a new set of actors and a new order of professional managers and experts in the art of corruption. It is a context in which the party system are in deep crisis, in which there is growing hiatus between the left parties and lower classes. Frank and Fuentes point out:

the more serious the economic crisis, and political crisis of state and part to manage it, and greater the deception of previous aspirations and expectations, the more serious and collective are the popular movements to grow in many parts of the Third World. The movements mobilize and organize their members in pursuit of material and non-material ends which they often regard unjustly device to them by the state and its institutions including political parties. The importance of these movements is the void they fill where the state and other social institutions are unable or unwilling to act in the interest of its members. Social movements step in

25 Ibid., p.218.  
26 Ibid., p.219.
where institutions do not exist or where they fail to serve or violate and contradict people's interests.

Many social movements also respond to people's frustration with a sense of injustice towards, political-economic forces beyond their control. Many of these economic forces emanate from the world-economy in crisis. Significantly people increasingly regard the state and its institutions, particularly political parties as ineffective in face of these powerful forces. In many cases people's grievances are against the state and its institutions.

Kothari observes:

And all this in the context of growing international pressures and 'conditionalities' that herald an end of self-reliance and seek on the one hand to integrate the organized economy into the world market and on the other hand remove millions of people from the economy by throwing them in the dustbins of history - impoverished, destitute, drained their own resources and deprived of minimum requirements of health and nutrition, denied entitlement to food and water and shelter, in short an unwanted and dispensable lot whose fate seems to be doomed.

It is with the plight of these rejects of society and of organized politics that the new movements are concerned with. The new movements have to be seen as part of the democratic struggle at various levels. They are to be seen as attempts to open alternative political spaces outside the usual arenas of party and government. They are based on deep stirrings of consciousness, of an awareness of crisis that could conceivably be turned into a catalyst of new opportunities. It is to be seen as

27 Andre Gunder Frank and Martha Fuentes. “Nine Theses on Social Movements”, Economic and Political Weekly (29 August 1987), p.1506
28 Ibid., p.1507.
29 Kothari, n.24, p.219.
a response to the incapacity of the state to hold its various constituents in a framework of positive action, its growing refusal to deliver goods and its increasingly repressive character.

Kothari further observes, “It is the drying up of the normal constitutional process alongside erosion of the main institutions of democracy, federalism and civil administration that has accounted for the emergence of new movements.”

These movements are taking up cudgels against the government on behalf of the deprived and dispossessed, on behalf of the landless and dalits, the bonded labourers and the fisher folk deprived of their traditional livelihood. On behalf of the large numbers that are continuously displaced and dispossessed on their land due to construction of large dams and power projects. On behalf of the victims of both human-made and natural disasters.

These movements do represent part of a major crystallisation of dissent and opposition. And that too not just to specific state policies but also in different ways to the whole ruling model of development, of civil society and state as well as to basic ideological moorings of class, ethnicity, patrimony, technology and ecology. To the extent they raise these issues and in the process redirect public discourse and redefine the agenda of politics they are taking steps towards a more comprehensive effort at creating an alternative to the present system.

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30 Ibid.
31 Kothari, n.23, p.234.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., p.236.
It is increasingly becoming clear that when it comes to the condition of poor and the down-trodden, the institutions of state are conspicuous in their absence, the parties are absconding and the regular media are either wholly ignorant or are deliberately turning a deaf ear. It is only the voluntary activists and the various movements that rise to the occasion. They plead for a sustained struggle for an alternative model of polity, economy and society.34

**New Social Movements in the Third World and Globalization**

Globalization promotes an agenda of economic liberalization in trade, investment and finance. It makes states increasingly powerless to control their own economies, and that states adopt rhetoric of powerlessness to divest themselves of broader social responsibilities.35

The new social movements in the Third world view globalization as representing forces that disrupt communities, cultures and livelihood patterns of the poor without offering any viable and dignified alternative. But activists of the new social movements in the West offer a different perspective on globalization. They seem to homogenize the terms of discourse and the political culture of protest movements all over the world.36 The everyday struggles for livelihood and dignity waged by action movement groups and peoples’ own organizations in the poorer countries of the world have ceased to attract attention of global activists of the new social movements in the West. The global alternativist discourse is increasingly

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34 Ibid.
becoming less relevant to the movements engaged in day-to-day political struggles in their respective national contexts. Their view of development is of a non-hegemonic, pluralistic process, in articulation of which they use inductively arrived insights and criteria evolved by them through their own struggles. In this process they increasingly relate globally debated issues such as feminism, ecology and human rights to the economic social and cultural realities. Their politics is increasingly about making development a bottom-up process, directly relevant to and an edifying experience for the poor and the oppressed. Rather than opting out of development, they now seek to change the power relations on which the development paradigm is premised. They see the old idea of development as encoded in the emergent global power structure. They see it as an exclusionary device and an instrument of political, economic and cultural hegemony of metropolitan elites within the nation as well as globally. The new political agenda of the forces of globalization is the disperse of state control over the economies of the Third World on the one hand, and the centralization of global political and military power in the hands of the already rich and powerful countries on the other. This forms the basis of their global hegemony. The new global arrangement is seen as ensuring international economic and political stability under the continuing conditions of inequality among and within nations.\footnote{Ibid., p.79.}

When the governments of Third World themselves become willing instruments of powerful global forces, such campaigns render them more vulnerable to these forces in international politics. In this changed context the
movement groups find it difficult to participate in the political culture of protests spawned by the global movements. They now find the global alternativist discourse more globalist and less alternativist.

For example, the thinking on human rights has been disassociated from the issues of removing poverty, fulfilling basic human needs and social justice. In the global feminist discourse, sensitivity to the social structural, economic and cultural complexities faced by women in poor countries in securing their rights has vastly receded; in its place metropolitan concerns about women's rights in a consumerist society have acquired prominence.

The grassroots movements in the Third World are articulating the idea of alternative development through concrete political struggles. This is reflected in the growing convergence that different movements have acquired on the issue of globalization i.e., in their assessment of the shift from the state-led model to the market-led model of development.

The new social movements' mobilizational strategies focus on the new social political formations of the poor and the deprived which conflate the category of class with those of caste, ethnicity and gender. Their general approach is to work for and with specific vulnerable groups, assault on whom has increased under globalization. They reject the 'inputs' view of rural development and focus on creating capabilities of self-development among the rural poor and also on evolving mechanisms of protection for them against various forms of social terror to which they are often subjected in this process.

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38 Ibid., p.80.
Newness of New Social Movements in the Third World

Without entering into a detailed examination, one may identify the following characteristics or newness of these new social movements in the Third World.

Newness of Politics

Gail Omvedt says:

The new movements are such because they mobilize sections/groups that are oppressed/exploited in "new" or different ways by the process of modern capitalism; they bring forward new issues; and they carry ideologies that represent a theoretical as well as practical challenge to traditional theories of capitalism and exploitation.³⁹

New social movements emerge around new scopes and range of politics. The environment, the rights, and role of women, health, food and nutrition, education, shelter and housing, the dispensation of justice, communications and the dissemination of information, culture and lifestyle, the achievement of peace and disarmament none of which were considered to be subject matter for politics in which ordinary people were involved, are major concerns for the new movements.⁴⁰

They have brought to the fore conflicts over productive resources that were hitherto neglected or were peripheral to the concerns of political organizations. If the scene of the 'traditional' class struggle was the field and the factory, the ecology

movements represent a new kind of class struggle, one over natural resources like forests and water. Likewise, the women's movement has insistently questioned the downgrading of certain forms of work on sexual grounds, both in the workplace and within the household, and the barriers to the entry of women in many professions.\textsuperscript{41}

Rajni Kothari observes:

They are performing new roles that have emerged in the new context of the human condition: a condition of profound marginalization of millions of people and the moral and social vacuum created by the indifference of the system to it. They are providing linkages with segments of people's lives that had hitherto remained isolated and specialised - culture, gender and age, technology, ecology, health and nutrition, education and pedagogy - thus bringing into the political process issues that were hitherto left out.\textsuperscript{42}

To Kothari, these movements represent three major points of departure.

They are an effort to scale the grass roots, the national dimension and global dimension in as much as issues like health, ecology, gender and human rights all cut across national boundaries and are a response to certain global tendencies. Their second major characteristic is their avowed - an in some ways truly attempted - solidarity with the victims of the present system, beyond the traditional categories of left and right, liberal and Marxist, which seem to have failed to comprehend the massive erosion of the democratic ethos that has taken place all over the world. And, thirdly, they are voluntaristic, seeking to find roots in indigenous conditions of diverse peoples and cultures.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{42} Kothari, n.24, p.220.
\textsuperscript{43} Kothari, n.23, p.236.
Newness of Class Composition and Support Base

New social movements are distinctive in so far as they work outside the traditional party system. Much of their membership and force is the reflection of people's disappointment and frustration with - and their search for alternatives to - the political process, political parties and the state.44

The new social movements in the West are predominantly middle-class based. This class composition of the social movements reflects the changing stratification of Western society from more to less bipolar forms.45 In the third world, social movements are predominantly popular / working class. This class stratum has more bases in the Third World and its members are much more absolutely and relatively subject to deprivation and injustice which mobilizes them in and through social movements. Moreover, the international and national burden of the economic crisis falls so heavily on the already low-income people as to pose serious threats to their physical and economic survival and cultural identity. Therefore, they must mobilize to defend themselves - through social movements - in the absence of the availability or possibility of existing social and political institutions to defend them. In other words, the class struggle in much of the Third World continues and even intensifies; but it takes - or expresses itself through - many social movement forms. These popular social movements and organizations are instruments and expressions of people's struggle against exploitation and oppression and for survival and identity in a complex dependent society, in which

44 Guha, n.41, p.13.
45 Frank and Fuentes, n.27, pp.1505-506.
these movements are attempts at and instruments of democratic self-empowerment of the people.46

These popular movements have some middle-class leadership of middle-class intelligentsia, professionals, teachers, priests, etc. who offer their services as leaders, organizers or advisers to these community and other Third World social movements. In the process of initiating, organizing and directing the people’s movements, these outside intellectuals become an organic part of the oppressed and exploited masses and do not exist outside the common people. They are called ‘organic intellectuals’ only because, they get organically allied with the common people in their ideological leanings and practical action.47

Newness of Ideology

In a country like India, the ideological inspiration for these movements comes chiefly from two social philosophies which have been historically at odds: Marxism and Gandhism. Marxism plays the part of a critical theory from within modern civilization. It provides a perspective on the sources of inequality and on the ways of eliminating them through directed social change that has a compelling appeal in an ex-colonial and desperately poor country trying to combine economic growth with social justice. On the other hand, Gandhism represents a critical theory emanating outside of modern western civilization. The varieties of Marxism practised within these movements are unorthodox and undoctrinaire. They are less

46 Ibid., p. 1506.
obsessed with the capture of the state power, less hierarchical in their functioning and more open to other influences.48

Likewise, many of the neo-Gandhians are eager to breakaway from the identification of Gandhism with the state and more comfortable with the idiom of struggle and less moralistic and self righteous. In fact within these movements there are both Gandhism and Marxist tendencies. By highlighting the questions of ecology, health, gender etc. the new movements have a valuable role to play in enlarging the scope of lower class movements.

The ideological affinity of many of the people's movements with the Left is evident in several ways. Many of the activists are known for their leftist inclination, though not formal affiliation. This is particularly true of those who are involved in struggle-oriented social action groups. They owe much of their radicalism to their exposure to leftist influences. More than anything else, the Left has had a tradition of working among the tribals, dalits, marginalized and weaker sections.49 The emergence of struggle-oriented social movements may be viewed, as a contextualized version of the same tradition with the only difference that these groups follow a non-violent strategy. Scholars like Sethi have noted that these groups are not viable formations that they cannot stand on their own; they cannot survive the onslaughts of the vested interests and repression from the forces of state without the active support of the left.50

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48 Guha, n.41, p.15.  
49 Sharma, n.13, p.2558.  
On the other hand, the Gandhian principles of action provides an alternative framework vis-à-vis the Marxist theory by emphasizing social harmony, non-violence, moral and ethical values of action, and rejecting the eurocentric view of development and, more specifically, western science technology. It is possible to differentiate two distinct theoretical premises of the Gandhian approach to social action - constructivist and sarvodayite. While the constructivist have inspired development oriented social action groups, the sarvodayite have promoted struggle-oriented ones. The constructivists believe in the self-sufficiency of villages that can be attained through greater prosperity and which in turn can be achieved through adopting various developmental programmes. They view the state as their ally in this effort and believe that the state can play a beneficial role in the upliftment of the poorest. A collaborative effort is hence always desirable.

They are to be seen as attempts to open alternative political spaces outside the usual arenas of party and government though not outside the state. Rather, these new forms of organization and struggle are meant to rejuvenate the state and to make it once again an instrument of liberation from exploitative structure, in which the underprivileged and poor are trapped.

Newness of Methodology of Working

The new movements have evolved an effective methodology of working with the disadvantaged sections of society which in turn has helped them to grow.

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52 Kothari, n. 24, p. 217.
as an alternative agency of social change.53 “This is a methodology of critical intervention, creative action and participatory mobilization”, observes Sharma.54 These groups make a critical intervention in the sense that they offer a critique of the micro mechanisms of domination and exploitation in which their clients, i.e., the underdogs in a locality, are involved. To achieve this end these groups have devised a strategy of creative action, which comprises of theatre workshops and street plays among other things. Theatre workshop and street plays serve as an important medium not only for conscientising clients but also for sensitizing the participants to the problems at hand. All this leads to participatory mobilization in which these groups organize their clients to defy unjust norms, to resist exploitation and oppression and to fight a militant though non-violent battle for their rights.55

Another aspect of the methodology of these action groups is the measure of openness, innovative spirit and experimental strategies that these groups employ. Parva Rai observes, “they function as laboratories which allow experimentation and alternative styles of doing things and with different organizational models and processes”.56 Another component of their methodology is participatory research. The experiences and experiments undertaken by the social activists who at once combine both the roles of catalyst and analyst are producing a new social science.

54 Sharma, n.13, p.2559.
55 Ibid.
The alternative methodology of participatory research seems to revolutionize our social science consciousness as well as social science constructs.\(^5\)

These movements do not believe in a rigid hierarchy. Their organizational structure is horizontal in nature. As these organizations do not have a rigid hierarchy, the concept of the leader and the led does not exist. The prominent members of these organizations prefer to call themselves organizers and not leaders.\(^5\)

They represent a rejection of the unified, disciplined and militarized party machine, oriented toward seizure of the state and enforcement of a single ideological line. Their newness is in their insurrection of subjugated knowledges, subjectivity and detotalised nature.\(^5\)

**Newness of Role**

These movements and experiments manifest the true nature of contemporary world crisis and prepare for a future desirable society. The role of these people’s movements and experiments transcends not only state power, but also the new existing civil societies with their built-in inequality and unauthenticity hidden behind the window-dressing of democracy and development.\(^6\) Rather than projecting them as a substitute for the state, Kothari views them as working to transform the state itself to become more humane and responsive to the sufferings

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\(^{5}\) Sharma, n.13, p.2559.
\(^{58}\) Panda and Sharma, n 17, p.120.
\(^{59}\) Adam, n.1, p.328.
\(^{60}\) Wignaraja, n 14, p.XIII.
of the oppressed. To Guha, "perhaps a more appropriate role would be one complimentary to the more powerful class-based movements". The moral vision of the new movements may be compelling, yet they are by no means a substitute for the existing organizations of peasants and workers. For India, struggles within the factory and over land and its produce are as important today as any time in the past. The continuing importance of such struggles suggests a more modest role for the new social movements than that assigned to them by the theorists of alternative politics. By highlighting the question of ecology, health, gender etc., which were earlier considered as peripheral, the new movements have a valuable role to play in enlarging the scope of lower class movements. To Sharma, they serve as a new source of social change, besides the state and the organized left.

The new social movements in the Third World show a rare sensitivity to the heterogeneity of the sources and structures of exploitation and oppression. This involved an awareness of class, caste, tribe and gender as interconnected but independent generations of power asymmetries which could not be mechanically reduced or to a single causative factor. Hence their pre-occupation with social strata such as small and marginal farmers, agricultural labourers, traditional artisans, dalits and tribals. It also explains their openness to concerns like environmentalism and empowerment of women which played negligible role in mainstream political discourse. They obliterated the customary distinction between constructive work

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62 Guha. 41, p.15.
63 Ibid.
64 Sharma. n.13, p.2560.
and agitational activity as both were woven into a wider programme of education, empowerment and development. Unlike the discourse of the mainstream left, they rejected vanguardism and emphasized the importance of participatory forms of organization.  

The functioning of the movements revealed a commitment to conscientisation, grassroots mobilization and struggles on specific issues as essential prerequisites of any long-term strategy of emancipation. As the socio-economic system and the state are viewed as repressive mechanisms which generated multiple forms of exploitation and marginalization, the movements showed to the victims of this system both the possibilities of resistance and emancipation.  

New Vehicles of Cumulative Change  

The new social movements can be seen as vehicles of cumulative change in the social, economic and political fields. They are able to generate a new kind of consciousness among the socially deprived about the unjust arrangements in which they are placed and new social sensitivity to dismantle such arrangements. In the economic field these movements initiate alternative development strategies and are able to involve the poor and the dispossessed in self-reliant development projects. Bhatt observes, “these small organizations seem to be successful and effective in income generation and agricultural development activities”. In the political field,  

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66 Ibid.  
67 Sharma, n.13, p.2559.  
these groups work to redefine the politics of transformation by widening its concerns to include within it the issues of environment, participatory development and development of appropriate technology.

**Alternative Path of Development**

The movements which arose as single issue or one-point programme movements have been increasingly expanding, overlapping engaging in mutual dialogue and moving towards more encompassing ideologies and campaigns. In opposing developmental projects the environmental movement is now not only talking of compensation for the victimized but of the necessity for a sustainable, alternative development path for the entire society. The women's movement evolved from an emphasis on fighting atrocities and violence against women to take up issues of property rights, political power and development alternatives.  

The 'old' or 'classic' social movements, both by the working class movement and the national movements took as their model of development the industrial society of the West. European and American capitalist industrial society had not only drawn resources through extracting the surplus of Third World labourers, it had also extracted them from nature. This reliance on extraction of resources and high-energy development has now reached the point where it is destroying the conditions of production themselves, that is to say, it is producing an ecological crisis. Third World countries cannot possibly attain the per capita fossil fuel energy which was available to Europe and North America at the time of their industrial "take off" at the end of the 19th century. However, they can attain this

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69 Omvedt, n.39, p.38.
much and more energy in biomass production with a scientifically and technologically upgraded development of traditional, holistic methods of production. This is the direction coming out of the new social movements.70

New Efforts to Strengthen Civil Society

The assertion of new social movements in the contemporary world is inextricably linked with the concept of civil society. Theories of civil 'society versus the state' appear to be important in many analyses; the take off from the evident fact that very many of the new movements have their major thrust against the state rather than private property-based capitalism or the market. The theories stress the efforts of groups and sections in highly state-dominated societies to fight for space for democratic control and autonomy.71 The popular movements work simultaneously at two levels. At one level, they are defensive, seeking to protect civil society from the tentacles of the centralizing state; at another, they are assertive, seeking to change civil society from within.72 Yet it cannot be ignored that civil society depends on the state for its functioning and autonomy and for enforcement of rules which limit the exercise of power in society to regulate access to resources for different groups.73

The concept of civil society embraces an entire range of assumptions, values and institutions such as political, social and civil rights, the rule of law, plurality of associations, representative institutions and a public sphere which are

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70 Ibid., pp.46-47
71 Omvedt, n. 39, p.30.
72 Guha, n. 41, p.12.
indispensable preconditions for democracy. The value of civil society is those of political participation, state accountability, and publicity of politics. The institutions of civil society are associational and representative forums, a free press and social associations. The inhabitant of this sphere is the rights bearing and juridically defined individual, i.e., the citizen.  

Gellner observes that the ideas associated with this expression are indeed intimately connected with the establishment of a democratic or liberal social and political order. The concept historically came into existence when classical political economists grappled with the question of controlling the power of the mercantilist state. The freedom of civil society formed the central plank of democratic movements against absolutist states in the eighteenth century Western Europe. In liberal theory, civil society came to embody a whole range of emancipatory aspirations which focused on the defence of human liberties against state oppression and which marked out an autonomous sphere of social practices, rights and dignity for the individual. The assertion of civil society in the West is thus based upon a shared collective memory of how absolutist states were limited and constrained by the activities of the self-conscious, rights bearing individual in association with others. The term civil society is often used to represent this space that is not dominated by the state.  

74 Neera Chandhoke, State and Civil Society Explorations in Political Theory (New Delhi, 1995), pp.228-29.  
76 Chandhoke, n.74, p.30.  
77 Wignaraja, n.14, p.XIII.
For the people of the post-colonial world, the context is different. It is not the remembrance of but the creation of, civil society as the sphere where democratic politics can be constructed. Civil society has become the leitmotif of societies struggling to establish democracy. Post-colonial societies gave to their states enormous power in every domain. This power was made possible because it was couched in the language of development. Since the former colonies had to develop in order to overturn their legacies of underdevelopment, every other process was sacrificed to the idea of development. The ideal state becomes the developmentalist state. A central role for the state was accepted by both Marxist and liberal theorists. Development empowered the state in a way that other ideologies could not; indeed development itself became an ideology. States were allotted a new criterion of evaluation and were not to be judged on the principle of democracy or that of respect for human rights, but on whether they could achieve and deliver development.

Consequently in many states, political activity, trade unions, autonomy of local spaces, regional aspirations and accountability were put aside in favour of development. The development model that empowered the post-colonial state was derived from the conjuncture of two trends—the practices of Soviet Union, and the academic and policy establishment of the West. Both were based on the notion of control and were economist in as much as they assumed that economic growth creates the pre-conditions of political life, whether democracy or socialism. As post-colonial states moved to consolidate their power using the ideology of

78 Chandhoke. n. 74, p. 30
development, the people were stripped of their potential to engage with state power or with the norms laid down by the state. This led to authoritarian and coercive regimes and the depoliticisation of an entire people.79

The civil society constructed by the post-colonial state is an arena, marked by the marginalization of large sections of the people. Chandhoke observes

the problem with the civil society is that it has to occur in a society which ensures to its people access to life itself. Political rights, as Marx pointed out, have no meaning in a society which allows economic and social inequality. Where equality is not granted, civil society becomes a sham.80

Civil society has to be the sphere where the rights-bearing individual can chalk out norms of political life in association with others. The agenda is that the state must listen to the voice of civil society. Rights are significant in political life because they address the fundamental question of how human beings should be treated. They lay down categorical statements of what human beings are entitled to.81

The distinction between social and political movements which confines social movements to civil society and others to political society is arbitrary. It is arbitrary because, it divides and fragments the field of struggle and imposes a division between the social and the political and sees them as discrete entities with their own dynamics and ways of functioning. The women's movement for instance, arose as a challenge to the cultural codes which allotted women a subordinate status

79 Ibid., pp. 30-36.
80 Ibid., p. 40.
in the household and elsewhere, but it is also a struggle to give women a rightful place in the political and public domain. Similarly, the ecological movement is about harmony and the relationship of the individual with nature, but it is also a powerful critique of the model of development which has been imposed by the state.82

Social movements make demands upon the state and the resources it has to offer; they are about rights and access to the benefits which are available to other people and against which the marginalization of specific groups can be evaluated. They are organized around the demands of those groups who have been excluded from the advantages of membership of the wider political community. The definition of movements as either cultural or social is a form of reductionism which deflects from the many different aspects of the struggle itself.83

Civil society should be aware that struggles are over many things, but it is the state, above all, that is to be the target of the social struggles in civil society. As Walzer warns:

I want to warn against the anti-political tendencies that commonly accompany the celebration of civil society.... It is indeed true that the new social movements... concerned with ecology, feminism, the rights of immigrants and national minorities, workplace and product safety, and so on - do not aim at taking power.... But there can be no victory at all that does not involve some control over, or use of, the state apparatus.84

82 Chandhoke, n. 74, pp. 225-26.
83 Ibid.
A democratic civil society is possible and sustainable when the state is democratic, that is, when it is responsive to the voices in civil society. Only a democratic state can create a democratic civil society, only a democratic civil society can sustain in a democratic state. Struggles in civil society have to be necessarily political, because in order to attain freedom and equality they have to address codified structures of power.

Since social phenomena are constantly forming and reforming within the limits laid by the economic structures of society, we cannot disregard the extent to which these structures shape all other social relations. Democratic politics is based on the realization that control over economic resources is crucial for control over the basic features that regulate people's life chances. Practices have to be oriented accordingly towards the modification of these structures. Social movements can give focus to various issues and privilege various identities. But these movements should remember that victories in the political and economical domain are an absolute prerequisite for all victories.

Theorists of new social movements informed by post-modern sensibilities argue that structures are not fixed but are in a constant process of formulation and reformulation. But there are certain structures which have persisted over time - for instance, the institution of private property and that of market. And these structures have revealed an awesome tendency to inhibit practices of emancipation. The

82 Ibid.
83 Chandhoke, n. 74, pp. 228-29
84 Ibid., p. 230.
literature on social movements is completely indifferent to the impact of these struggles on the environment. How are these struggles received? In what ways do they mitigate existing power relations? How do they start off chains of events that earlier neutralize or further the gains of these struggles? These are questions that are just not asked by these theorists. If the conditions which facilitate or impede a social movement are not focused upon, there are no means by which we can contextualize or evaluate them. Environment need to be not only interrogated but changed because they impede the goals of freedom and equality which a social movement encapsules. 89

To sum up the discussion, it is significant to argue that:

1. The dominant trend of new social movement theory is to abandon the question of political economy and to treat the new movements as mechanisms of cultural defence or reduce them as politics of the middle class. Though not centrally economic movements, the new social movements of the Third World do address political economy and their trajectory is profoundly shaped by the actions of state and capital.

2. The theory and practice of new social movements in the Third World constitute a new state phenomenon. The Third World state, far from living up to its promise as a guarantor of welfare and democracy in the name of development, undermined the survival base of large sections of the citizens.

3. The movements mobilize and organize their members in pursuit of mostly material ends which they often regard unjustly deviced to them by the state and its institutions including political parties. It is with the plight of the rejects of the society that the new movements are concerned.

89 Chandhoke, n.74. p.232.
4. The new movements mobilize sections exploited by the process of modern capitalism. They bring forward new issues and carry ideologies that represent a theoretical and practical challenge to traditional theories of capitalism and exploitation. They emerge around new scope and range of politics like, environment, women, health, education, energy, housing, dissemination of information, popularization of science etc.

5. Much of the membership and force of the movements reflect the people's disappointment and frustration with the state, political parties and the political process. Unlike in the West, in the Third World, new social movements are predominantly popular/working class oriented. This class stratum has more bases in the Third World and its members are much more absolutely subject to deprivation and injustice.

6. In a Third World state like India, The ideological inspirations for these movements comes chiefly from two social philosophies: Marxism and Gandhism.

7. The movements have developed an effective methodology of working with the disadvantaged sections of society that involves critical intervention, creative action and participatory mobilization. The measure of openness, innovative spirit and experimental strategies that they employ are commendable. Another component of their methodology is participatory research. They obliterated the customary distinction between constructive work and agitational activity as both were woven into a widen programme of education, empowerment and development. They have developed low-cost relatively effective, decentralized methods to outflank a centralized, high-tech adversary. Their dispersion and de-centralized style of operating within everyday life world networks is the mode of politics they employ. Their organizational structure is loose and anti-hierarchical.
8. The movements which arose as single issue or one-point programme movements have been expanding their scope and moving towards more encompassing ideologies and campaigns. These movements have a major role in enlarging the scope of class movements. They serve as a new source of social change besides the state and organized left.

9. The new social movements are defensive and offensive at the same time. They are defensive by seeking to protect civil society from the tentacles of the centralizing state and they are assertive by seeking to change civil society from within. The civil society constructed by the post-colonial state is an exclusive arena, marked by the marginalization of large sections of people. The problem with civil society is that it has to occur in a society which ensures to its people access to life itself. Political rights have no meaning in a society which allows economic and social inequality. The definition of movements as either cultural or social is form of reductionism which detracts them from the many different aspects of the struggle itself.

10. Civil society should be aware that struggles are over many things, but it is the state above all, that is to be the target of the social struggles in civil society. Struggles in civil society have to be necessarily political because in order to attain freedom and equality they have to address codified structures of power. A democratic civil society is possible and sustainable only when the state is democratic, when it is responsive to the voices in civil society. Only a democratic state can create a democratic civil society, only a democratic civil society can sustain in a democratic state.

11. The new social movements in the Third World view globalization as representing forces that disrupt communities, cultures and livelihood patterns of the
poor without offering any dignified alternative. Their general approach is to work for and with specific vulnerable groups, assault on whom has increased under globalization. They focus on creating capabilities of self-development among the rural poor. Their view of development is of a non-hegemonic pluralistic process, in articulation of which they use inductively arrived insights and criteria evolved by them through their own struggles. In this process they increasingly relate globally debated issues such as feminism, ecology and human rights to the economic, social and cultural realities.

12. The new movements in the Third World are articulating the idea of alternative development through concrete political struggles. They reject the 'inputs' view of development. It is only through the politicization of the poor that the idea of alternative development can become a part of their existence and aspirations.

13. The new social movements represent varying degrees of mobilization, conscientization and organization for development and democracy.

14. Successful development is viewed as a process of human development, a process of social transformation in which people is both the subject and the object. In such a process the people participate at all levels of decision-making in matters affecting the totality of their lives and through this process of empowerment a more democratic process is initiated. The issues of people’s participation, conscientisation, development of appropriate technology, protection of environment etc are part of an ongoing social process, a long revolution towards social and structural change. The emerging global order brings with it a plethora of social and economic issues for the movements to confront and to generate a viable space for these movements to survive, struggle and develop.