

## Democracy and Capitalist Development: Reflections from the Indian Experience

Author : **Aditya NIGAM**

Recent years in India have seen heightened conflicts over 'Development'. The story actually goes back to at least the late 1970s when the debate over the project to dam the Silent Valley in the southern state of Kerala burst forth. In the name of generating electricity and facilitating industrialization of the state, the project would have inundated one of the important rainforests in India. Silent Valley, of course, was a purely ecological issue and involved no mass displacement of the population. However, it was soon followed by other controversies mostly around issues of mass displacement through development projects. Within a matter of a decade, almost all other dam projects in the country were facing resistances. These included the Tehri and Pong dams in the north, the Kosi, Gandhak, Bodhghat and Koel Karo in the east, Narmada in central India, Bedthi, Bhopalpatnam and Ichampalli in the west and the Tungabhadra, Malaprabha and Ghataprabha in the south (Sethi 1993: 132). This already marked a sea change from the early days of the Indian nation-state when the then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru could flamboyantly advise the peasants and tribals at the point of displacement, to suffer for the sake of the nation. For decades after that, one development project after another would displace millions of people, often the same group of people many times over. The second half of the 1980s, however, saw the rise of powerful emblematic movements like the Narmada Bachao Movement (NBA - Save Narmada Movement), which along with the other lesser known struggles raised important questions about the very logic of development.

One analyst, Ponna Wignaraja, saw the emergence of such new peoples' movements in the global South as 'manifestations of a new pluralistic paradigm of development and democracy' (Wignaraja 1993: 5). Though this seems to be an overstatement insofar as none of these movements really had any alternative paradigm to begin with, they did embody dissatisfaction with, if not outright rejection of, the dominant model of top-down development. Rajni Kothari noted while surveying these movements in the first half of the 1980s, that they were parts of a democratic struggle at various levels, 'at a point in history when existing institutions and the theoretical models on which they are based have run their course, when there is a search for new instruments of political action (existing ones being in a state either of complacency or of weariness and exhaustion' (Kothari 1984: 219). It is significant that this reaction to the complacency/ exhaustion of existing institutions and theories should have taken the form of a *rejection of all existing blueprints* and a move towards the grassroots. If they explicitly rejected the model of capitalist development, which they directly encountered, the so-called alternative of 'actually existing socialism' did not also inspire much confidence either, largely because of its highly authoritarian and centralized structure. Most such movements recognized explicitly or implicitly that no model of development that did not place the people at the center of their vision could be democratic. 'Participatory development' and 'participatory

democracy' began to be seen as intrinsically linked.

In the beginning of the 1990s, DL Sheth and Harsh Sethi noted that it was the period between the late 1960s and early 1980s, marked by famines, inflation, devaluation, unemployment and the breakdown of Congress domination, that led to the emergence of militant movements and 'impelled fresh thinking and action on the *twin grids of development and politics*' (Sheth and Sethi 1991: 53). Rajni Kothari saw in these developments an attempt to redefine the very content of politics: 'Issues and arenas of human activity that were not so far seen as amenable of political action – peoples' health, rights over forests and community resources, even deeply personal and primordial issues as are involved in the struggles for women's rights – get defined as political...' (Kothari 1984: 219-20). These movements were not only redefining the meaning of politics; they were also redefining development itself. According to Sheth, 'the organizational form they evolved for themselves was not of a political party or a pressure group', it was rather that of 'a civil-associational group, leading political struggles on issues articulated to them by people themselves.' 'The key concept they worked with was *democratizing development through empowerment of the people*' (Sheth 2004: 46). In the context of globalization in the 1990s, Sheth in fact, sees the movements grappling with the twin imperatives of 're-politicizing development' and 're-inventing participatory democracy' (Ibid: 49). 'Re-politicizing development' should be seen here as also redefining it in fundamental ways, such that it would not remain 'Development' (with a capital D) in the conventional sense. This redefinition of development was to eventually lead to a more fundamental and radical critique of Development itself.<sup>1</sup>

Eventually, what began with the dissatisfaction with formal institutionalized politics and the consequent search for more 'people-oriented' kinds of political structures and institutions, eventually moved towards a realization that it was not simply the authoritarian-bureaucratic nature of development that was problematic; that the very ideology of Development that was so centrally linked to the idea of a centralized power structure and the idea of the nation-state's sovereignty over its domain (the doctrine of 'eminent domain', for instance), had to be interrogated. The question of democratic and decentralized development necessarily raised questions about access to and ownership of natural resources by communities that had traditionally had easy access to them. So, as an important activist of the non-party movements, the late Sanjay Sangvai put it, 'confronting the state also takes the form of challenging the "eminent domain" of the state' (Sangvai 2003: 8).

In the last few years, however, the conflict over Development has assumed entirely different proportions. As the 2000s rolled on, the desperation of the ruling elites to rapidly industrialize began acquiring a frantic, impatient quality. New laws, providing for Special Economic Zones (SEZs) where corporations would have immunity from a whole range of laws that industry is normally subject to, were enacted. Acquisition of land in large-scales, from the peasantry, often with minimal 'compensation', began taking place in order to be handed over to private, corporate capital, unleashing a new wave of struggles. From Dadri in Western Uttar Pradesh, to Kashipur, Kalinganagar and Jagatsinghpur in Orissa, Raigad in Maharashtra and more recently in Singur and Nandigram in West Bengal, among many other such areas elsewhere (e.g. Goa, Haryana) in the country, struggles have erupted against these proposed 'development'/'

industrialization projects. Large sectors of the adivasi/tribal populations as well as the non-tribal peasants in these regions have moved into action.<sup>2</sup> Unlike some of the earlier struggles, these more recent ones have been more spontaneous and possibly more widespread – enough to have an impact on electoral politics itself. Partly this is because this time round, land is being acquired for handing over to private corporations, as opposed to dams which were state-run and where the case of some kind of ‘public interest’ was easier to make. It is striking therefore that the NBA, despite its tremendous moral force, could never move the political class in the way that some of the more recent struggles seem to have. Singur and Nandigram in particular, forced some kind of rethinking about the modalities and the processes of land acquisition itself. In some cases, state governments have announced that they will not acquire land on behalf of the corporations and that corporations would be better advised to purchase the land from the peasant themselves, at market prices. One of the other important differences between these struggles and those of the previous round, we might note, is that their form is more direct: They are driven by more immediate threats to life and livelihoods and therefore have tended to adopt methods of direct action for preventing land take-over. In that sense, they are very unlike the ones mentioned by Sheth earlier, those of ‘civil-associational groups leading political struggles’ with a view to ‘democratize development’.

There is no doubt that the violence of the process of land acquisitions is quite unprecedented. Nonetheless, this ‘unprecedentedness’ must also be understood relatively, for despite everything, it is still almost benign when compared to the process of forcible expropriation of agricultural communities in England or some other parts of Europe. There was nothing to stop that process in those early centuries of capitalist development in England in particular. There is something about postcolonial capitalism that we therefore need to understand more clearly.

### **Development: Postcolonial Capitalism**

In a series of articles published over a decade ago, Sudipta Kaviraj (1995, 1996) began an important argument theorizing the ‘dilemmas of democratic development’ in postcolonial societies. Spelt out more recently as a ‘revisionist theory of modernity’, Kaviraj underlined once again his idea of ‘sequentiality’ that is central to his argument. Put briefly, Kaviraj argued that modernity should be seen as a constellation of a number of different processes – individuation, industrialization, capitalism (and the disciplining of the new, uprooted communities to provide for industrial labour) and democracy. He argued that the precise sequence in which these processes took shape would vary in different societies and historical contexts and would lead, in the event, not to one single thing called ‘modernity’ – invariable across time and space – but to a range of different constellations. The very fact that there are different historical sequences would inevitably affect the ways in which ‘modernity’ would take shape in these different contexts and different societies. So, for example, he suggested that unlike in the West, democracy in postcolonial societies preceded rather than followed the processes of both individuation and industrial capitalism, producing thus, an entirely different constellation of modernity.<sup>3</sup> It could not but affect the character of both democracy and capitalism in these societies. If we wish to undertake the task of mapping the genealogy of postcolonial modernities, then, we could say, extending Kaviraj’s argument, we need to

take a closer look at the specificities of these different constellations. This argument then, gives a more concrete meaning to the idea of 'alternative modernities' that would seem to embody different ways in which democracy and development, for instance would be related to each other.

Crucial to Kaviraj's argument outlined above is the fact that precisely because Western modernity followed the sequence it did, it could produce both a 'disciplined' labour force (steeped in a new, productive, capitalist work-ethic) as well as a body of autonomous, self-determining individuals so crucial to the production of the 'citizen', *before* the onset of democracy. In an important sense, the shape that Western democracies eventually took could be attributed at least partially to this fact. In fact, Kaviraj goes on to suggest that it was possible to argue that it was the demand for democracy, created by the struggles of the working classes and women - for universal suffrage - that went a long way in shaping the contours of Western democracies in the twentieth century. The fact that both democracy and a liberal discourse of rights appear in the postcolony, *prior* to capitalist industrialization and 'individuation' but *alongside* an emergent anticolonial nationalism, has far-reaching consequences for both, the nature of its democracy and its capitalist development. In India, at least, it is a matter of some significance that electoral-democratic institutions and the democratic ideal, if not democracy as such, became available during colonial rule itself. As such, we have the existence of trade unions and a labour movement from the very early years of capitalism in India. The capacity of Indian capitalism to produce a disciplined working class was therefore extremely limited from the start. Equally importantly, as the instances of recent struggles show, its capacity to ruthlessly tear apart the traditional agricultural communities from their land and throw them into an urban labour market are, likewise, very limited. Despite two centuries of colonial rule and over a century of laws like the Land Acquisition Act (1894), India at the beginning of the twenty-first century remains largely an agricultural country. In other words, if we were to follow Kaviraj, this different sequence also had an impact on the very nature of India's (and much of the postcolonial world's) capitalism.

The nature of capitalist development in the postcolony (or postcolonial capitalism) has been recently explored by Kalyan Sanyal (2007). Sanyal deploys the idea of 'governmentality' as his key term and develops his argument in a critical conversation with Partha Chatterjee's work. A whole range of theorists of the 1970s and 1980s including Kaviraj and Chatterjee, had argued, taking the cue from Antonio Gramsci, that the 'passive revolution is...the general framework of capitalist transition in societies where bourgeois hegemony has not been established in the classical way' (Chatterjee 1993: 212). They had acknowledged that the trajectory of postcolonial capitalist development would be vastly different from that of capitalism in the 'advanced' industrial societies but this would be largely because capitalism was relatively weak in these parts of the world. The historicist narrative of transition undergirded the understanding of these theorists who nevertheless understood capitalism to be the eventual destiny of the whole world. One day capitalism would finally supersede pre-capitalist forms and proper development would begin.

Sanyal challenges this understanding by insisting on a framework that 'rules out the possibility of capital superseding pre-capital' (Sanyal 2007: 39). He accepts Marx's understanding of 'primitive accumulation' as the inevitable precondition for capitalist development but suggests that the specificity of postcolonial capitalism lies in the role

played by governmental interventions in 'reversing the effects of primitive accumulation' (Ibid: 60). At one level, Sanyal's argument is in fact more radical. He claims that the very logic of postcolonial capitalism is such that it continuously reproduces 'non-capital', a reverse process (to primitive accumulation) that he calls 'de-capitalization'. His argument is that while primitive accumulation necessarily leads to the dispossession of the vast mass of the population from their means of labour, the context of postcolonial capitalism is such that this uprooted population cannot be absorbed within the domain of capitalist production. Their lives as producers have been destroyed by the expansion of capitalism but 'the doors of the world of capital remain forever closed' for them (Ibid: 53). It is this section of the population – the wasteland of capitalism's rejects as he puts it – that for sheer survival must be 'reunited with the means of production to engage in *non-capitalist production*' (Ibid: 59).

It is here, Sanyal argues, that the '*discourse of development*' steps in: 'The result is a need-based economy in which the dispossessed are rehabilitated in non-capitalist production activities...made possible by interventions brought about by the discourse of development' (Ibid: 59). This discourse, combined with the logic of governmentality, continuously reverses the effects of primitive accumulation. Despite its fascinating conceptual innovations, there is one problem with Sanyal's understanding of 'postcolonial capitalism': In his rendering both, *the logic of governmentality* and *the discourse of development*, are in some sense *internal* to capitalism itself. Even if they are not seen as an essential, constitutive part of it, they certainly appear as functionally internal to it. Such an understanding would reduce all the different kinds of micro-political interventions discussed by DL Sheth (referred to earlier) as simply so many manifestations of 'governmentality' which might itself seem like an extension of the logic of postcolonial capital.<sup>4</sup> In a recent essay, Partha Chatterjee (Chatterjee 2008), draws on Sanyal's work in order to move away from the pervasive 'transition narrative' that sees peasant societies under capitalism as always in the process of moving from feudalism to capitalism and paraphrases him approvingly on this point: The transition narrative does not work because of certain 'transformations in the last two decades in the globally dispersed understanding about the minimum functions as well as available technologies of government' (Chatterjee 2008: 55). Further: 'There is a growing sense now that certain basic conditions of life must be provided to people everywhere and that if national or local governments do not provide them, *someone else must*, whether it is other states or international agencies or non-governmental organizations' (Ibid: 55). Thus, even though Chatterjee steers clear of any attempt to establish any structural or necessary connection between primitive accumulation and the reversal of its effects, he too finds the 'globally dispersed understandings' about the 'functions and technologies of government' as the key factors in the reversal. As with Chatterjee's more recent elaborations of 'political society', his resort to 'governmentality' too appears almost too benign (being concerned primarily with welfare, well-being etc). More importantly, there is no possibility, in this rendering, of understanding any kind of political, movement-intervention as anything but an effect of governmentality (defined in this broad sense). Thus, efforts by the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha to combine 'struggle' and 'constructive activity' or attempts by a range of groups to form cooperatives, or for that matter, struggles to ensure 'rehabilitation' for those dispossessed of their land would all appear here under one rubric: NGO activity, themselves part of the 'globally circulating

technologies of poverty management' (Ibid: 55). In fact, one might wager that to Chatterjee and Sanyal, no politics is possible that does not concern itself directly with state and state power. Every other initiative then can only be seen as an instance of such 'globally circulating technologies of poverty management.'

Here again, the sequentiality argument in the essays by Kaviraj (1995, 1996) can provide another view. Capitalism appears hamstrung on this view, neither by its own essential logic nor by the global development discourse but by virtue of the fact that it appears when democracy and democratic practices are simultaneously becoming pervasive. Capitalism in the 'peripheries' *is confronted by democracy* and the avenues of protest and struggle that it has made available. It no longer has the means available to 'discipline' and 'normalize' the working class into the new work ethic through brutal laws on 'vagrancy' and 'vagabondage', as it did in, say England. It has had to face an organized working class movement almost from the very early stages of capitalist development in India, for instance. Equally importantly, in the last decades of the twentieth century capitalism - metropolitan as well as postcolonial - has also had to face growing opposition from ecological movements that make the wholesale uprooting of agricultural populations far more difficult than was possible in say seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe.

Thus there is something more that the Sanyal-Chatterjee view does not account for: the widespread *continuation* of supposedly pre-capitalist forms of production both in agriculture and in non-agricultural sectors. It is their struggle that gets inscribed on the banner of the democracy that confronts capital's onward march. To be more accurate, these are actually 'non-capitalist' rather than 'pre-capitalist' forms as both Sanyal and Chatterjee recognize but they are *not a consequence of the reversal* of a process of dispossession that has ostensibly already taken place. They in fact, represent the recalcitrant other of capital and capitalism - that which capitalism must attempt to seize, discipline, control and subsume within its own domain but which constantly escape its logic. The preponderance of these forms across large parts of the world can be grasped by looking more closely at the heightened twenty-first century anxieties around the figure of 'piracy'. As much of the recent work of colleagues in the Sarai programme at CSDS goes to show, 'piracy' most often is nothing but the name given to ordinary ways of non-capitalist living, governed by the logic of sharing and the pleasures of consumption (Menon and Nigam 2007). There is in fact, no such thing as 'the pirate' prior to this discourse that produces it: a peasant in a remote third world country can be transformed overnight, unbeknownst to herself, into a pirate, just as the discourse of the 'enclosures' produced, in another time and place, the figure of the 'encroacher' or the 'trespasser'.

I will not labour the point any further here but note that the reason why both Sanyal and Chatterjee are forced to take recourse to the 'governmentality' and 'development-discourse' route, it seems to me, is that they have already conferred the status of historical necessity to so-called 'primitive accumulation' and a totalizing power to capitalism. Once that is done, it is difficult to escape the need to find an adequate explanation for the continued large-scale existence of both agricultural and non-agricultural (artisanal, small commodity) production in most of the world. It is true that agriculture and artisanal production do not exist in the old form any more; that they are thoroughly reconstituted by market relations. This however, does not warrant the fairy

tale of primitive accumulation. These forms continue to exist and the fiction of the 'separation of the labourer from the means of labour' seems to have worked only when it was executed with the armed power of the state. It was nothing but a state-sponsored theft of common property, long before any bourgeoisie was anywhere in the picture; it remains so if and when it occurs today, as in contemporary India. The story of two or three centuries of capitalism and colonialism itself shows the utter failure in establishing the industrial-capitalist form or mode of production in most parts of the world. One only has to look at the continued widespread agrarian and small commodity character of the economy in most of the world to be able to recognize that the story of the historical necessity of primitive accumulation (separation of the producer and means of production) is little more than a fairy tale. I have argued this point at length elsewhere and shall not go into it any further here (Nigam 2010).

### **Democracy: The Postcolonial moment**

In concluding our discussion, we need to return to the specific relationship between development and democracy that was referred to earlier in this essay. We have seen how the logic of different sequentiality has impacted upon the character of capitalism and development in the postcolonial world. The scenario produced by such a radically different sequentiality is, likewise, witnessed in the way in which 'democracy' itself becomes something other than what 'democratic theory' might teach us. It becomes a matter of communities, community rights and so on, rather than a matter of 'individual autonomy' and individual rights. Kaviraj therefore argues that liberalism and liberal ideas, in this context, ended up strengthening national (and we might add, community) claims/ rights, rather than establish the language of individual rights.

It is instructive, in this context, to see the way parties like important backward caste parties like the Bahujan Samaj Party, the Samajwadi Party or the Rashtriya Janata Dal in their various incarnations, articulate their claims in terms of caste or community interests. And this mode of articulating interests in the language or community is not the preserve of these parties alone; virtually all regional parties articulate their claims in the language of community (regional, linguistics, caste-group etc) - from the Shiv Sena, Telugu Desam, the various Dravida parties, the Akalis and so on. Even the supposedly nationally oriented parties like the Left parties have strong undercurrents of Bengali or Malayali subnationalism. The main party of the Hindu Right, the BJP, for all its nationalist rhetoric, directs its appeal only towards the Hindus. One could make a similar point about the Congress. Even though its appeal is directed at no particular group, it can be seen to do so with different communities at different levels.

What we have thus is a profoundly different 'democracy' - and often, this democracy is in tension with 'modernity' - or the postcolonial search for modernity. The normative ideals identified with Western modernity actually continuously run up against democracy. For if by 'Development', we mean a certain norm by reference to which the postcolonial world has been routinely described as 'less developed' or 'developing', then clearly, that norm is the norm of Western modernity. 'Development' is the pursuit of modernity.

It is from this tension between 'modernity' and 'democracy' then, that we arrive at the most crucial distinction between 'civil' and 'political' society that Partha Chatterjee (1997, 1998, 2002) has been arguing about for some time. There can be reasonable

quarrels with Chatterjee's more recent elaborations of the concept of 'political society' (2004, 2008), as a somewhat benign space of 'negotiation' and 'resolution' of conflicts that are not amenable to being addressed in the language of rights and citizenship. However, notwithstanding some of these more recent elaborations, the significance of making this distinction is critical. We cannot go into a detailed exploration of this aspect here but it should be underlined that when Kaviraj claims that the peculiar way in which the liberal language of rights gets blended with notions of community and community rights, giving rise to a pervasive populism in politics, he is also in a sense, pointing towards what goes on in this domain of political society.

'Populism' as a special feature of postcolonial democracies, in my reading, is inextricably linked to the workings of political society: political society understood not merely as a ground of negotiation and resolution (however, temporary) but as the 'underground' of civil society, where a whole range of discourses banished from 'civil society' circulate (Nigam 2005). It is instructive to recall here that Chatterjee's initial elaboration of the idea of political society underlined the way in which life in political society was governed by 'the imaginative power of the traditional structure of community', wedded to 'a modern emancipatory rhetoric of autonomy and equal rights' (Chatterjee 1998: 282). If this be the case, 'governmentality' and the state's dispensation of 'welfare' need not be central to the workings of political society. What remains critical is the fact that it is a domain of postcolonial societies, embodying a different discursive universe, where populations live in different degrees of illegality and semi-legality; where the very insistence on enforcing the 'rule of law' can lead to unprecedented degrees of violence, especially against populations uprooted in the recent past and thrown into cities. It is probably this that produces, at least in postcolonial democracies, a *political discourse of 'populism'* – if by that term we broadly understand a prioritization of the 'popular interest' over the formal aspects of 'rule of law' and institutional norms. This takes us far beyond the idea of 'governmentality' that Chatterjee takes from Foucault in order to suggest that governments must by virtue of the pastoral nature of their power, take charge of populations, even if these populations do not inhabit the domain of rights and citizenship (civil society). In Chatterjee's argument, even if the claims of the population cannot be addressed as rights, modern governments are duty bound to provide for their well-being through appropriate policies.

In the scenario that I am outlining however, this logic of populism does not take the orderly form of resolution (at least not always) through forming of associations and negotiations. Postcolonial democracies produce, rather, a whole different set of political sensibilities and priorities that work counter to the sanitized sphere of the rule of law. The deployment of the rhetoric and the trope of the 'popular' need not always lead to an improvement of the material conditions of life of those in whose name such politics is played out. In fact, most often, it does not – as many of the more recent varieties of popular politics in India demonstrate. This is also to say that such politics need not have any relationship to 'development' of any sort. In fact, one of the puzzling questions of recent Indian experience is precisely that there have been such populist governments – Bihar under Laloo Prasad Yadav is a case in point – which survived for many terms with undiminished popular support, without actually delivering anything on the 'development' front. Such populism actually sustains itself on an altogether different logic of politics based on community identity and may only very occasionally raise a 'developmental'

demand – like setting up of a university or providing housing for people from poorer sections. More often, it might simply raise issues of self respect or dignity (as in the case of BSP in Uttar Pradesh, Laloo Yadav in Bihar) or, more negatively, of ‘foreigners’ (as in Assam) or ‘sons of the soil’(as in Maharashtra and parts of the north-east, targeting north Indians).

It is also worth underlining that populism’s gestures to ‘the people’ notwithstanding, in the domain of postcolonial political societies, the ‘people’ as such does not exist; it is almost always the community (the Hindus, Muslims, Dalits, Assamese, Tamil, Bengalis etc) that stands in as a synecdochic representation of the putative ‘people’.

In his discussion of populism, Ernesto Laclau (2005) refers to the political mobilizations of Adhemar de Barros in Brazil, whose campaigns in the 1950s had as their motto ‘*Rouba mais faz*’(‘He steals but keeps things going’). Laclau describes the politics of de Barros as ‘essentially clientilistic’, one that involved an exchange of votes for political favours (Laclau 2005: 122). The element of populism is given to this politics, says Laclau, ‘by the presence of an anti-institutional dimension, of a certain challenge to political normalization’ and ‘an appeal to the underdog’ (Ibid: 123). It is the striking parallel to predominant modes of politics in India in this description that is interesting here. But what is also significant is the point that Laclau makes, recalling Walter Benjamin’s observations regarding ‘the popular attraction to the high criminal’ or the bandit, whose appeal is precisely that it challenges the legal system: Any institutional system is at least partially limiting and frustrating, says Laclau, and this accounts for the presence of ‘a reservoir of raw anti-status quo feelings’ in any society which can find political articulation in populist mobilizations. I am not interested here in following Laclau’s investigations of populism any further; my point in citing this discussion rather, is to draw attention to the ubiquitous presence of the anti-institutional and non- or anti-legal dimension of politics, especially in postcolonial societies. All such forms of political mobilization, I wish to suggest, are defining features of the domain of political society, as much as those forms of subjectivity which never seek to represent themselves but rather, prefer to go under the radar – away from the watchful eye of the state. It is misleading to reduce the wide range of politics embodied here to mere effects of governmentality. There is an implicit negative charge to Laclau’s idea of ‘populism’ but what I want to draw attention to is the idea that such mobilizations that form the stuff of political society have a much wider basis in societies like ours. I do not wish to use ‘populism’ as a pejorative term but do want to retain Laclau’s sense of it as an anti-institutional stance that speaks in the name of the underdog, the oppressed or the ‘people’. Such populism is structurally embedded in the postcolonial social world. This is a condition that defines, in a sense, the logic of political society – the real and probably the only domain of political contestations – in this world. In an important sense, such populist politics often poses a continued challenge to capitalism and modern development and may account for the failure of capitalism in large parts of the world in great measure.

I would like to conclude this discussion by underlining that while many of the observations in this essay would hold true for most of the postcolonial world, the exact sequentiality I have discussed here describes mainly an Indian trajectory. Many other colonized societies may have had other sequences in which the different processes of modernity appeared, giving them yet other kinds of character. Each case requires

separate study and exploration but it does seem to be the case that in most of them the relationship between democracy, modernity, capitalism and development would be starkly different from what the dominant narratives, based on European experience, would have us believe.

If the be the case, and if my argument is correct that neither capitalism nor primitive accumulation are the expression of any historical necessity, then we might be able to imagine different futures based on the continuity of various kinds of non-capitalist forms of life and production rather than on their violent decimation.

## REFERENCES

- Chatterjee, Partha (1993), *The Nation and Its Fragments*, Oxford University Press, Delhi
- (1997), 'Beyond the Nation or Within?', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 4-11 January 1997
- (1998), 'Community in the East', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 7 February 1998
- (2002), 'On Civil and Political Society in Postcolonial Democracies' in Kaviraj, Sudipta and Sunil Khilnani (eds 2002), *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi
- (2004), *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*, Permanent Black, Delhi
- (2008), 'Democracy and Economic Transformation in India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 19 April 2008
- Kaviraj, Sudipta (1995), 'Democracy and Development in India', in Amiya Bagchi (ed 1995), *Democracy and Development*, London, St Martin Press
- (1996), 'Dilemmas of Democratic Development in India', in Adrian Leftwich (ed 1996), *Democracy and Development: Theory and Practice*, Cambridge, Polity Press
- Kothari, Rajni (1984), "The Non-Party Political Process", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 4 February, 19 (5), pp. 216-224
- (1986), "On the Non-Party Political Process: The NGOs, The State and World Capitalism", *Lokayan Bulletin*, Vo. 4, No. 5, pp. 6-26
- Laclau, Ernesto (2005), *On Populist Reason*, Verso, London and New York
- Menon, Nivedita and Aditya Nigam (2007), *Power and Contestation: India After 1989*, Zed Books, London
- Nigam, Aditya (2001) 'Beyond the Nationalist Imaginary: Dalit Politics in a Global Era', *Indian Journal of Political Science*. Vol. 62, No. 3, Sept. 2001
- (2005), 'Civil Society and Its "Underground": Explorations in the Notion of "Political Society"', in Rajeev Bhargava and Helmut Reifeld (eds 2005), *Civil Society, Public Sphere, Citizenship: Dialogues and Perceptions*, Sage Publications, New Delhi and London
- (2010), *After Utopia: Modernity, Socialism and the Postcolony*, Viva Books, Delhi
- Sanyal, Kalyan (2007), *Rethinking Capitalist Development: Primitive Accumulation, Governmentality and Post-Colonial Capitalism*, Routledge, London, New York, Delhi

Sangvai, Sanjay (2003?), "Emerging Politics of Just and Sustainable Development", <http://www.aidindia.org/desh/ep.html>, downloaded on 15 June 2004

Sethi, Harsh (1993), 'Survival and Democracy: Ecological Struggles in India' in Ponna Wignaraja (ed 1993) *New Social Movements in the South: Empowering the People*, Vistaar Publications New Delhi

Sheth, DL and Sethi, Harsh (1991), "The NGO Sector in India: Historical Context and Current Discourse", *Voluntas*, No. 2, 1991

Sheth, DL (1982), "Movements", *Seminar*, 278, October 1982.

----- (1983), "Grassroots Stirrings and the Future of Politics", *Alternatives*, IX, pp. 1-24

----- (2004), "Globalization and New Politics of Micro-Movements", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 3 January, 2004, 39(1), pp. 45-58

Wignaraja, Ponna (ed 1993) *New Social Movements in the South: Empowering the People*, Vistaar Publications New Delhi

---

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup>I will use the term 'development' (with a small 'd') to refer to this discourse that speaks of interventions for 'empowerment' or democratization of development. I will however, use 'Development' with a capital 'D' in order to refer to the abstract idea of Development (e.g. 'national development') that has been critiqued by ecological movements as well as movements against mass displacement of populations over the past few decades.

<sup>2</sup>There has also been widespread opposition from fruit and vegetable sellers to the entry of large corporate chains in the retail market for fruit and vegetables in different parts of the country but these represent a different kind of conflict - not exactly or necessarily around 'development'.

<sup>3</sup>To be sure, the processes of both individuation and industrialization had begun but they still constituted an almost insignificant part of the experience of modernity in colonial times.

<sup>4</sup>At some points in the text, Sanyal actually suggests a much stronger, constitutive connection: 'In short pre-capital's [i.e. de-capitalized forms] conditions of existence *flow from the internal logic of the expanded reproduction of capital*' (Sanyal 2007: 39). Or: 'I attempt to rethink the Marxian concept of primitive accumulation of capital by explicitly considering exclusion and marginalization of surplus labour power as an inescapable moment of capital's arising, and then conceptualize the post-colonial economic formation as a *structural unity of capital and a sub-economy of the marginalized*' (Ibid: 47). Laudable though the attempt to think non-capital as structurally tied to capital may be, this rendering certainly creates more theoretical difficulties than it resolves. For, it also raises the question of the place of 'development discourse' and 'governmental rationality' in this 'structural unity'. Chatterjee's position, it seems to me, avoids this pitfall by seeing these as separate and discrete processes. At the very least, one might say, Chatterjee is not interested in establishing 'structural unities'.