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**Centre for Culture and Development, Vadodara**

**First Foundation Day Lecture**

**Dissent and  
Contestation as a Social  
Process in India**

By

**Professor Walter Fernandes**

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Centre for Culture and Development

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## Preface

Centre for culture and Development (CCD) is a Jesuit inspired social research centre established in 2001 with the aim of harnessing the knowledge of social sciences to the service of Gujarat society, more especially its disadvantaged sections - the minorities, tribals, *dalits* and women.

Over 16 years CCD has worked on research projects and held seminars which have been published in the form of books by national and international publishers. In 2017 CCD began a training programme, 'Critical Thinking on Contemporary India' and it plans to continue it during the coming years. In 2018, CCD has ventured into beginning the "Foundation Day" lecture series, by eminent scholars.

We are indeed extremely happy to have had professor Walter Fernandes, an eminent Jesuit scholar and activist who accepted our invitation to deliver the first lecture, "Dissent and Contestation as a Social Process". He was at Indian Social Institute for 23 years, founded North Eastern Social Research Centre 18 years ago and has worked on tribal, land (displacement), gender and peace issues. He has written or edited over 40 books, and around 200 professional and 140 newspaper articles on these issues.

Professor Fernandes has been a pioneer in the studies on land acquisition, displacement and resettlement in India. He has covered state after state in conducting these studies. CCD has carried out such a study on Gujarat from 1947-2004 under Walter's guidance and care. This study was published by Sage Publication, Delhi and has become a source book for legal entities as well as for non-governmental organisations. We owe an immense debt to Professor Fernandes.

We also thank one of the world's topmost political philosophers, Lord Bhikhu Parekh for having presided over the Foundation Day Lecture as chief guest, and archbishop Stanny Fernandes for being the guest of honour.

Vadodara  
February 27, 2018

Lancy Lobo  
Director

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“Research is the highest form of adoration”

-Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

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## Dissent and Contestation as a Social Process in India

Walter Fernandes

During the last few years India has witnessed cases of intolerance of dissent, pluralism and contestation of the fundamentalist view of the country as *Hindu Rashtra*. The remaining South Asian countries too witness similar situations. It may be religion-based in Bangladesh and Pakistan, a combination of religion and ethnicity in Sri Lanka and predominantly ethnic Nepali versus Madhesi in Nepal. The commonality amid such differences is the domination-dependency syndrome based on search for a national identity with religious and social majority-minority relations linked to it. While the fundamentalists try to dominate, various categories like intellectuals, civil society, political elements and militant groups have contested their role. Both the dominants and subalterns have reacted at different stages but the stands of the “centre” and “periphery” are different. This resurgence has to be situated within a socio-historical context. The focus of this short presentation is dissent and contestation in India with the dominant view as the backdrop. After some references to the past and the colonial age, it focuses on post-1947 India alone though its neighbouring countries too have had similar experiences.

### 1. Controlling Contestation

An effort is being made in India today to suppress dissent or pluralism. It has happened in the past too, particularly during the Emergency through press censorship. It is being repeated today in a different form, through pressure brought on the media houses rather than direct censorship.

#### Suppressing Dissent

Some control of the media existed all through the last century. What is new today is suppression rather than control of dissent and contestation. In the colonial age control was through direct or indirect censorship. Despite the minuscule reach of the media, there were measures like the *Obscene Publication Act (1857)* to regulate the material the papers published. After 1947 some limited control was exerted on the press through advertisements and rationing of paper that was in short supply. The media enjoyed much freedom amid these constraints (Fernandes and Borgahain, 2017: 13-15). During the State of Emergency (1975-77) control of the media was through censorship. Greater pressure exerted on the media today can be seen, among others, in its near failure to report atrocities like those committed under the *Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act* or in the Naxalite affected areas. Questioning of such acts has come mainly from alternative

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sources like Bela Bhatia, Nandini Sundar and Teesta Setalvad (Soondas 2014). Its main reason seems to be what will later be called, fear of flak from a nationalist perspective.

The media houses are controlled in some other countries too not by the State but by the corporate sector that owns them and sets the terms on which they are run. In the USA, for example, the corporate sector controls what is called free press through the five filters of ownership, advertisements, choice of source, flak and opposition to stories that are far outside the general consensus. An example of ownership is the bias in reporting what can go against the corporate sector, for instance its near refusal to discuss the role of the armament industry in beginning and continuing wars the world over for its own profit (Roy 2012). Secondly, most media remain profitable through the commercials so very few of them comment on issues such as sweat shops that can go against their sponsors (Nall 2012). Because of such interests most media houses use only the "mainstream" sources and ignore others. For example, when in 2014 the US government declared Syria guilty of killing 60 people by using chemical weapons, hardly anyone referred to other sources that attributed the atrocity to the pro-US opposition (Glyn 2017). Similarly, while giving prominence to this news item, they relegated to an inside page the news of 200 civilian deaths from US bombing of ISIS bases in the same week. A case of flak is the failure to question why President Obama had not closed the Guantanamo prison after making it his election plank. The media would have faced flak from a nationalist perspective if they had done it (Maniar 2017). Anti-Communism, the fifth filter was modified after the end of the cold war to "Clash of Civilisations" (Huntington 1993: 25).

### **Intensifying Control**

What is said of the media is equally true of areas like education and research. Funds and administration put some limits on them but they enjoyed much freedom. It disappeared during the Emergency and is experiencing threats under the present dispensation. Financial pressure can be exerted also on universities through funds for research that come mainly from the corporate sector in the West and from State-funded autonomous bodies in India. It limits the area in the choice of themes for research. Political dissent too may be limited through what is called consensus or "manufacture of consent".

The special importance of propaganda in what Walter Lippmann referred to as the "manufacture of consent" has long been recognized by writers on public opinion, propaganda, and the political requirements of social order. Lippmann himself, writing in the early 1920s, claimed that propaganda had already become "a regular organ of popular government," and was steadily increasing in sophistication and importance (Herman and Chomsky 1988: 48).

What changed during the Emergency and is happening today is its intensification through official or semi-official backing. Censorship was the mode during the Emergency. Use of the corporate sector and of lumpen elements seems to be the method in

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use at present. Constitutional values of freedom of expression and pluralism are ignored. In reaction to such developments former President Shri Pranab Mukerjee said in the Sixth K. S. Rajamony Memorial Lecture in Kerala.

There should be no room in India for the intolerant Indian. India has been since ancient times a bastion of free thought, speech and expression. Our society has always been characterised by the open contestation of diverse schools of thought and debate as well as discussion. Freedom of speech and expression is one of the most important fundamental rights guaranteed by our Constitution. There must be space for legitimate criticism and dissent ..... Our leaders and political activists must listen to the people, engage with them, learn from them and respond to their needs and concerns. Our law makers must never take the people for granted. They must focus on the fundamental task of law making and raising of issues of concern to the people as well as finding solutions to their problems (Mukerjee 2017).

In reality these norms continue to be flouted. It shows the need for intellectuals to search together for a solution to the problems of fundamentalism, thought control and the destruction of constitutional values.

## **2. Contestation in Ancient India**

An important step in this search is to go back to the past and look at the history of thought control, contestation and dissent. One can begin with the ancient times and middle ages.

### **Dissent in Ancient India**

It has become fashionable today to present Ancient India as having a single philosophy. This claim is unacceptable because history shows that there was difference between many schools of thought. In other words, dissent, though not common, was not unknown in the Vedic times and later. One sign of it is the number of schools of thought as well as of “heretical denominations” like Buddhism and Jainism. As Romila Thapar says, though it has become fashionable to speak of Ancient India as Orthodox and holding a single world view,

Yet the history of groups identified as having a community of religious beliefs, rituals and behaviour among Buddhists, Jains, Vaisnavas, Shaivas and Tantrics is strewn with sectarian dogmatism which found expression not only in inter-religious but also in inter-sectarian rivalries, sometimes of a violent kind ... Within the Buddhist and Jaina universe, heresy and false doctrines were major concerns. Even the otherwise tolerant Mauryan emperor Ashoka takes a highly intolerant position when he endorses the expulsion of dissident monks and nuns believed to be the propagators of heretical ideas (Thapar 1979: 1).

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In other words, dissent existed in Ancient India, so did its suppression, not merely by the orthodox traditions but, as the case of Ashoka expelling “heretical” monks and nuns shows, even in those like Buddhism that were born out of dissent but themselves became doctrine-based denominations. The manner in which Buddhism challenged the caste system at first and was suppressed later, is one more of dissent and suppression living side by side. Over and above the social arena, dissent seems to have existed also in the contents of the basic thought. For example, many associate ancient Hindu philosophy with renunciation, negation of worldly pleasure and political passivity. However, worldly pleasure and social equality were propagated by some schools of thought. For example, Tantra had a political component of emancipation from the caste hierarchy and could eventually be used by the *Bhakti* movement. Today it can be used by the feminist movement for gender equality (Godrej 2016).

### **Contestation, Suppression and Co-optation in the Middle Ages**

This social foundation with a religious basis would later interact with Islam and take a subaltern “untouchable” religious form of their conversion to Islam. The Brahminic order that conferred a high status on them was weakened when political power passed to Muslim hands. Simultaneously the egalitarian spirit of Buddhism was alive to some extent in a few regions. These two processes combined to give birth to the *Bhakti* movement among Hindus and Sufism among Muslims. *Bhakti* was initially against the caste system. Its adherents asserted that work is devotion (*bhakti*) to God. Every occupation is divine, as such equal so none can be ascribed a higher or lower social status because of their occupation (Harrison 1960: 51-53). Dalit search for equality resulted from the processes that led to *Bhakti* but the Muslim rulers of Turkish origin adhered to a strict hierarchy and refused to treat the converts as equal. However, the contestation of the existing order continued because of the complex process of inter-religious interaction on which egalitarian teachings depended. It explains why the next set of conversions to Islam, particularly in western Punjab and East Bengal was through Sufism (Massoud 1997:15-17).

Some of these movements would be suppressed and others would be co-opted. The dominant section of Muslims treating later converts as inferior is a case of egalitarian Islam accepting the caste hierarchy. In South Indian Hinduism where the *Bhakti* movement continued to grow in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the dominant sections tried to co-opt and integrate it with the “mainstream”. As a result “every major symbolic complex within the tradition i.e. every important expression is riddled with paradox and ambivalence” (Shulman 2012: 12) which comes from “necessary but threatening disorder (ibid: 17).



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### 3. The Colonial Context

A major game changer from the 18<sup>th</sup> century was the colonial ruler, and the divide and rule policy that was integral to colonialism. Because of it some analysts, particularly those with a fundamentalist bent of mind, attribute all evils exclusively to colonial intervention. One cannot deny that its divide and rule and the reaction in the colonised countries did play a role but it cannot be considered the only cause.

#### **Marginalisation and Protests**

Socio-religious protest is one of the forms that subaltern dissent took in the colonial age but it was co-opted by their new religions. One has to analyse the colonial inputs in order to understand it. Though colonialism was legitimised in the name of Europe's mission of civilising education its objective was to change the economy of the colony to suit the needs of the European Industrial Revolution (Rothermund 1992: 3). Its first step was to de-industrialise the colony and turn it into a captive market for the finished products of the industrial revolution. The second step was legal measures such as land and forest laws in order to facilitate capital formation for the industrial revolution through high taxes, and transfer of land to British owned plantations, mines, raw material producers and transporters (Rothermund 1981: 83-84). The legal changes that culminated in the *Land Acquisition Act 1894* began with the feudal *zamindari* system meant to enhance tax collection for capital formation. This change and other legal measures that followed are based on the principle of the State's eminent domain that recognises only individual ownership and treats land without an individual title as State property (Ramanathan 2008: 28-29). It was meant to facilitate transfer of much land to the rulers without a high cost.

Such colonial interventions dispossessed communities sustained themselves on common land or as service providers on land belonging to other owners. Thus the new laws resulted in direct or indirect dispossession of millions of people. One does not know their exact number but scholars have identified most of their impacts. For example the individual ownership based colonial land laws turned a large number of dalit (Scheduled Caste-SC) landless labourers, other service providers into cheap labour. With the individual laws and the *zamindari* system meant to enhance tax collection, the community property resource (CPR) dependent tribes lost most of their land. The forest laws and mining added to their dispossession and impoverished them further (Areeparampil 1996: 12-14). There was less attack on their material resources in the Northeast except in Assam. Attack in this region was mainly on their culture and identity because the colonial rulers did not need their land as much as in Eastern India. As a result also the reaction in this region would be different (Fernandes and Borgohain 2017: 62-64).

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Dalits had till then lived in a *jajmani* system of exchange of services. In this system land was owned by a caste, not by individuals but in reality it was divided among its members. Also the service castes that performed duties such as worship and agricultural labour were to serve the land owning castes. In reality their families too were assigned to specific land owning families. After the harvest the land owning family would distribute grains to the service providers, the quantity allotted to each depending not on the amount of work it put in but on its social status (Anant 12972: 16). To the *dalits* this unjust social stratification provided some material security particularly in years of famine but socially they remained subordinate. The colonial laws broke or weakened this system, thus freeing them from the semi-bondage to it. Simultaneously it deprived them of the little security they enjoyed in it with no addition to their social status. *Dalits* had now to look after themselves as individual labourers (Fernandes 1996: 153).

Impoverished by the changes, many subalterns surrendered and were transported as indentured labour in slave-like conditions to mines and plantations in India and to British colonies in Africa, the West Indies, the Pacific and Southeast Asia (Sen 1979: 8-12). Some of them resisted their marginalisation, so history records many tribal and some *dalit* struggles (Mac Kenzie 1995). In Jharkhand and the remaining tribal areas of Middle India one hears of revolts against their dispossession already from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, for example the Santhal uprisings in 1833 and 1853. In fact their rebellion began already in 1874 and continued with varied intensity till 1860. Also the Kol Rebellion of 1822-1833 is well known so are the Birsa Revolt in Jharkhand and others elsewhere in Orissa and Andhra (Minz 1992: 355-357). In the Northeast the reaction was mainly for the protection of their identity at first. Much later it became a mode of protecting their resources. Many revolts are reported, particularly from the Nagas (Aosenba 2002: 12-20). Among *dalit* movements one can include those of the Izhavas in Kerala (Jones 2010: 68-70).

### **Conversion as Socio-Religious Protest**

While most *dalits* and tribals surrendered and a small group struggled against their dispossession and marginalisation, a third opted for the path of religious conversion as protest. A fairly big number of Shudras were converted to Christianity by the 17<sup>th</sup> century Roberto de Nobili Mission in Tamil Nadu, Andhra and parts of Karnataka at a time when *Bhakti* was strong in the South. To the Shudra converts this step of religious conversion was also a social move of search for equality. After their Christianisation they used the church structures to move upwards and occupy “backward” or “upper caste” slots within the caste hierarchy among Christians (Grafe 1990: 82-83). After thus ensuring their place in the caste hierarchy in the church structure they refused to yield a slot to others. They turned Christianity into a “means to create and defend boundaries and to mark out

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mutually exclusive affiliations and identities” (Bailey 1989: 402). For example, the “untouchable” toddy tapper Nadars joined the Lutheran Church in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Being the only Christians in their district they were able to use the Church structures to move upwards and become “backwards” (Hardgrave 1969: 59).

The situation deteriorated with the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century conversion of “untouchables” in Tamil Nadu and Andhra. Marginal in the caste society they were further marginalised by British colonial policies. So their conversion was also a search for caste equality. It was made possible because while they lost the security they had in the *jajmani* system, they were further marginalised. Moreover, the colonial ruler chose Brahmins, princes and other persons from the dominant castes as their administrators and collaborators. It was the death knell of *Bhakti* whose spirit was alive to some extent particularly in the South. The struggle for social equality had some hope of success even at this stage. However, by co-opting them into their colonial system for their own purpose, the colonial ruler strengthened the dominant castes. That, combined with the land laws, deprived Dalits, lost all hope of attaining social equality within the Hindu fold. They were now free to search for equality or liberation elsewhere if they found such an external agency. Christianity functioned as one such agency in the South (Forrester 1980: 74). However, the earlier Christians who had co-opted caste among Christians neither treated them as equals nor yielded them a slot in the caste hierarchy. Caste separation continued even within church buildings. It has not disappeared fully even today (Fernandes 1996: 162). The caste structures thus co-opted the process of their search for liberation. Even the formerly “untouchable” Nadars were not treated as equals by the earlier Christians though they are among the very few dalits to have moved upwards and attained some equality within the caste hierarchy (Grafe 1990: 83).

Thus, religious conversions were also social protest against the caste hierarchy and inequality. Most such protests resulted from an interaction between religious beliefs, political power and social systems, initially with the Muslim rulers, and in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries with the British colonial policies. That had an impact also on the conversion of the tribal communities in the East in late 19<sup>th</sup> century (De Sa 1975: 74-76) and Northeast (Ruivah 2002: 130-131). The dalits of West Punjab converted to Islam and those of Eastern Punjab converted to Sikhism not under the Muslim rulers but in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Jones 2010: 66-67). Also the dominant classes revolted against the foreign ruler but their struggle was mainly for transfer of power from the colonial ruler to themselves. However, they are accorded prominence in the history of the freedom struggle. The tribal and dalit struggles are all but ignored in its history since they were revolts for sustenance both against the British colonial regime and the dominant Indian social system (Fernandes and Roy Choudhury 1993: 16-17).

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#### 4. Post-1947 Dissent and Contestation

Nation-building was the immediate post-1947 concern. India had to deal on one side with the outcome of divide and rule and on the other with lack of development. Secularism and a centralised administration were the response to the religious divide. Planned development dealt with the impoverishment caused by the coloniser in order to develop his own country. These steps met with resistance both from the dominants and subalterns but with a difference in their reaction.

##### **Resistance to Centralisation**

The freedom fighters who became post-1947 rulers reacted to colonial actions firstly through a Constitution that mandated that India be a secular State. But its nature was not defined for the Indian situation. In the post-Partition age because of the “divide and rule” policy a strong tendency grew during the freedom struggle to build a single unified nation bringing its diverse populations under a single system. The rulers were wary of any talk of decentralisation and autonomy that some regions wanted. As a result, they introduced a “Union of States” that was a compromise between total centralisation and a federal structure but it tilted towards the former. There would be reaction against it both from the dominant classes and subalterns but with difference in approach. A section of the dominant classes viewed the Partition only as a religious issue and wanted cultural and religious centralisation that went far beyond the administration. They tried to assert themselves through aspirations of a single religion, single language and a single culture with the Gangetic Valley as its centre. (Masselos 1991: 68-73).

The tendency of a centralised administration as well as the trend of cultural and religious over-centralisation that identified unity with uniformity, were contested at different levels particularly by the South and the Northeast. The former was symbolised by the “Backward Castes” Periyar Movement of Tamil Nadu. Beginning from the 1940s it developed the ideology of the Dravidians being different from the Brahmins of North India. After 1947 it took the form of sovereignty and was expressed strongly in the Anti-Hindi agitation of the 1960s (Ziegfeld 2013, 282-284). To some extent it was dominant reaction. Subaltern reaction came mainly from the Northeast. Although British India stretched from Afghanistan to the Arakkan State of Burma, the India of the nationalists stopped at Bengal. The national anthem mentions Sindh, two mountain ranges, two rivers of “mainland” India, and the Aryans and Dravidians but is silent on the mighty Brahmaputra that is bigger than the Ganga and confers an identity on the Northeast. The Mongoloid people of the Northeast do not exist in it. Thus, the Northeast becomes only a vague territory somewhere between East Pakistan and Burma. Moreover, both in the pre-colonial and colonial age the main tribes of the region had managed their affairs

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autonomously because the colonial rulers did not need land in the region except in Assam. So they tolerated their autonomy as long as they paid taxes to the administration. Before 1947 the tribes of the region, the Naga in particular, tried to negotiate autonomy within the Indian Union. But the national leaders whose dream of India stopped at Calcutta had no understanding of the Northeast so they imposed a single centralised administration on the region that had developed pride in its identity and history. The revolt against it began with the Naga Nationalist struggle of 1947 and spread to some others like the Assamese, Bodo and Meitei (Fernandes and Borgohain 2017: 68-69). The issue is yet to be settled but the trend today is towards centralisation.

### **Dissent on the Development Paradigm**

The second area of dissent was the development paradigm. Planned development was centralised no doubt but dissent was more around its approach than centralisation. Though its conscious ideology was mixed economy emanating from the Bombay Plan 1945, in practice consciously or unconsciously the planners accorded priority to economic growth over human development. Independent India declared itself a welfare State but based its development on sophisticated technology and on a resource intensive pattern. The leaders knew only the western model and assumed that technology would solve the social problems of illiteracy and unemployment (Vyasulu 1998). Some like Jawaharlal Nehru were aware that for the progress of the West the exploitation of the colonies abroad and of the working class at home was basic. But both he and P. C. Mahalanobis the brain behind the mixed economy, considered technology the main solution to India's problems. They certainly had a social vision but they were convinced that India could achieve in a short time what it took the West a century to do, within a democratic framework without the capitalist exploitation of workers and socialist dictatorship (Nehru 1946: 64-65).

The planners added that to achieve it India had to modernise herself and free herself from her superstitions and traditions. Based on this vision Nehru declared that schemes like the Hirakud dam were the temples of Modern India. The talk in the first decade after independence was of nation-building by which they meant that the benefits of development would eventually reach every Indian though initially they would encounter some problems. The mixed economy that was accepted as the norm was based on the Bombay Plan 1945 that gave an idealistic vision but did not specify the means (Joseph 2014). The data indicate that this trickle down effect has not been realised. The Plan, based on the view of development only as infrastructure building and economic growth, failed to deal with the social issue of who pays the price and for whose benefit from a purely economic perspective. While introducing modernisation and a sophisticated technology based model the planners paid inadequate attention to social components aimed at changing the unequal society, and almost ignored the Indian caste

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and gender based unequal society in which the benefits of development reach the already powerful unless steps are taken to move towards an equitable society (Kurien 1997). As Dr. B. R. Ambedkar said while presenting the Constitution to the Constituent Assembly, the document he presented ensured political democracy but economic and social democracy required the type of development whose benefits can reach every citizen. He supported fast industrialisation with the hope that industries would produce revenue that could be used for the education and health care of the poor and the jobs they created would take the poor, dalits in particular, away from bondage and exploitation to alternative employment (Ramaiah 2013: 139-140).

Based on their option of an infrastructure and economic growth based development paradigm that required capital accumulation, India borrowed money and sophisticated technology from the West as “foreign aid” to build capital intensive projects like major dams, steel, heavy machine tool plants and other schemes. Access to the benefits of such inputs requires cultural, psychological and social preparation in the form of formal education and technical training, and the subaltern classes are not equipped to deal with the technology and other inputs that such modern processes require. At independence literacy was low in India as a whole and much lower in the tribal and *dalit* communities, especially women among them. Most of those who had access to education belonged to the dominant castes and classes. There are indications that in the absence of social change, the benefits of the inputs have reached the middle and upper classes but poverty has increased and is growing among the powerless. With greater profit orientation of globalisation the social arena is being further neglected. No question is asked about who pays its price and who gets the benefits (Kurien 1997: 134-135).

### **Disillusionment and Contestation**

As stated above, there was consensus in the 1950s on the development paradigm, under the belief that the benefits would reach all categories. Moreover, there were relatively few civil society groups in that decade, an estimated 80 per cent of them Gandhian and Christian involved mainly in welfare. Disillusionment with the development paradigm began in the 1960s when the products of mass education did not have jobs. The situation would reach a boiling point in the mid-1960s with the massive Bihar famine and the economic crisis that accompanied it. Dependence on imports grew and the Green Revolution came to be accepted as the panacea for all ills. A section of the middle and big farmers prospered but it impoverished most small and marginal farmers and landless labourers (Kulkarni 1993). In the late 1960s many young people abandoned their studies to go to the rural areas to organise the poor to resist their marginalisation. Specific to the radicalised youth was the questioning of the pattern of development. On one side, social action groups emerged as a result of their radicalisation. On a second front was the emergence of Naxalism beginning from the mid-1960s. The former realised that poverty

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could not be eliminated through economic inputs alone, since it is the result of oppressive social structures. They felt that they had to encourage a new type of education geared to making the oppressed aware of their situation and turn them into agents of their own development and of social transformation (Kothari 1993). This approach was often referred to as mass action for development.

From the notion of mass action for development it is but a short step logically to mass action against those who have so far been monopolising the fruits of development (Roy 1983: 61-62).

The radicalised youth were disillusioned both with the development paradigm and with the political parties, and wanted alternatives to both. The crisis of the 1960s would eventually lead to the "Total Revolution" of 1974 and the State of Emergency 1975-1977 that radicalised another section of the youth including some Gandhians. By the early 1980s many technical and medical professionals were radicalised. From it were born groups like Alternative Law Forum, People's Science and Medico-Friends Circle. It was a different form of dissent. By this time some civil society groups were even speaking in terms of becoming a political alternative or a non-party political force (NPPF). All of them were a threat to the established order which co-opted some of them and suppressed others as Naxalites (Kothari 1984: 50-51).

As a result most of them have disappeared in that form but others have taken new forms of a search for alternatives. Common to them was the need to move towards people's action away from a purely technology-based development paradigm. The feminist movement that began in the urban middle class went towards the rural areas particularly in the 1990s. The environmental movement that was polarised between those who thought of nature mainly as flora and fauna and those who started with people's communities, began to come together to understand the environment as an ecosystem with people's communities at its centre. Youth radicalisation in the 1960s and the 1970s was mainly class based and was influenced either by Karl Marx or Paulo Freire. In the 1980s many of them began to recognise caste as an integral part of the Indian social structures. They felt that they could not ignore it. That is when caste based as well as tribal movements were born. This development had both the positive effect of providing a new identity to these hitherto oppressed communities, and the negative component of making it possible for the dominant groups to co-opt them by dividing them on the basis of their caste or tribe.

### **Professional Contestation**

Radicalisation of the professional category belonged to another type of search. Scholars were searching for an alternative to the type of research they were involved in. Some of them felt a need during these years to combine the intellectual with the activist dimension. It was dissent both of those who were unhappy with what is called purely objective

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research and those who felt that activism was becoming anti-intellectual. This search had started already in the 1940s and was led mainly by the dominant sections who questioned the methodology that they had got from the colonising countries. Some spoke of “Third World Research Methodology” (Hirsch-Cesar and Roy 1971) or “Third World Sociology (Prabhakar 2001). Others like I. P. Desai (1981) considered this stand futile because Indian scholars had internalised the colonial ideology and respected scholarship only when it came from the West, linked the scholar’s status to studies done abroad, number of invitations for conferences from Western Europe and the US and papers published in foreign journals. The same work done in Indian universities was respected less than that done abroad. Those who took this stand did not reject western scholarship but felt that it was time for Indian scholars to free themselves from their internalisation of colonial thinking and accord equal respect to Indian scholarship.

Some other radicalised thinkers felt that thinking such as Third World Methodology or Sociology stopped at an anti-colonial stand and belonged to the dominant class in the sense that the only threat binding the “Third World” was the fact that they were colonies of European countries. It meant that this class was focusing only on political power. While agreeing with Desai that Indian scholars should move away from the priority accorded to western scholarship they felt that even the Third World researchers continued the colonial approach of studying the tribes or the poor as objects and appropriating their knowledge without giving them credit for the knowledge the poor had shared with them. In that sense they were not different from the capitalist entrepreneur who got the workers to produce the goods and appropriated them for his own profit (Dooley 2001: 47-48). In other words, they felt that the “nationalist” debate was class specific as long as it was restricted to methodology. They felt that knowledge should be respected and accepted whether it came from India or abroad but the focus of research in India has to be the people. As long as even the scholars who spoke of tools like methodology restricted themselves to academic research as the end and did not question the ideology behind it they continued to be colonial because they appropriated knowledge belonging to the people and claimed sole ownership over it just as the colonialist appropriated raw material from the colonies for producing goods of the industrial revolution and claimed its sole ownership (Singh 2001: 16-20).

Thus, in the context of the economic and political crisis of the 1960s and 1970s, researchers went far beyond the “Third World” approach to the issue of ownership of knowledge and the nature of the social sciences themselves. Other disciplines followed a similar trajectory of a domination-dependency syndrome and class bias. New forms of knowledge sharing were born out of the debate initially from the biological and technical scientists in their “barefoot” approach to doctors, lawyers and technicians. Persons who had access to formal technical and scientific education tried to bring their knowledge within the reach of the common persons by training some of them in the simple techniques



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of their profession and thus bring their benefits to those who were till then excluded from them. However, some thinkers felt that in spite of being good progress, knowledge continued to be controlled by the dominant class professionals. Ordinary people got its benefits but continued to depend on its professional practitioners who had access to technical and other education from which the poor were excluded. Such thinkers shifted focus from benefits to ownership of knowledge. That questioning elicited responses that became new steps such as people's science, community health and alternative law. The professional researchers and practitioners went to the grassroots level, studied local knowledge and helped the communities to update it instead of imposing their own discipline on them (Cresswell 2009: 23-24).

That turned the professional practitioner into a support mechanism that could help in the transformation of both people's knowledge and formal science. They began with the assumption that to arrive at it, instead of devaluing or rejecting local knowledge one has to begin with it and upgrade it through its interface with formal science. The formal discipline too should change through this interface, in favour of people's needs by absorbing elements of their knowledge. From this interaction were born efforts such as community health, study of the tribal customary law or new forms given to traditional agricultural and botanical techniques by injecting elements of the formal sciences in them. Instead of imposing "advanced" techniques on the people, formal medical, legal and other disciplines were used to update people's knowledge. Their ideological stand was that neither the traditional nor "modern" systems can be accepted as absolute. Both had to change in favour of the excluded (Gudavarty 2013: 192-194).

That thinking brought to the fore on one side, the challenge of ownership of knowledge. On the other, efforts in the form of participatory engagement began with the assumption that knowledge belongs to the people. The researcher's work is to assist them to come together in order to share that knowledge with one another, reflect on it and use it as a tool of strengthening themselves. The researcher had also to assist them in the process of networking. For example, at a time when tribal, dalit and women's movements were functioning autonomously the researcher had to help them to reflect on the need to share their knowledge with one another and combine their efforts for better understanding of themselves and for more effective action. Many researchers facilitated reflection by *dalit* and tribal groups about the possibility of making the gender issue an integral part of their movement and for feminists to move away from their exclusive focus on women and integrate dalit and tribal issues in their movement. The researchers would play a professional role of writing good academic reports that did not look different from the traditional ones. But because of the process through which they were produced they would be part of a new vision of looking at them as people's voice translated into the language which alone the decision-makers claim to understand (Stake 2010).

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Many questions remain unanswered around these issues. There is, for example, the fact that real participatory research is effective at the local level which can and is being suppressed by powerful forces working at the national level. How does one deal with them? What role does the researcher play in the networking required for this purpose? There have also been efforts at co-opting this thinking by giving a new form to participant observation as action research which in reality retains the "objective" character of an outsider studying people's action as objects of research instead of facilitating a study by the people themselves. Repression by calling such researchers Naxalites has continued. On another level academic researchers refer to such scholarship as populism, thus questioning the credibility of the scholars.

### **Conclusion**

An effort has been made in this paper to look at dissent and contestation within a historical perspective. Dissent begins with a small minority but it reaches a bigger number. For example, the conversion and freedom movements that began with a small minority slowly became mass movements. In the process, there is both continuity and change in the growth of the thought of the dissenters who contest the "mainstream" stand. When they become a threat, some of them are co-opted and others are suppressed as threats to their society. That is to be expected. What this history shows is that contestation is born when efforts are made to impose uniformity on the whole society. Because of their contestation some progress is made in the direction of a democratic process. Thus though a small number initiates dissent and contestation, they help their society to make some progress at the risk of being co-opted or suppressed.

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## Aims and Objectives

Social science research is necessary to deal with the numerous complex problems of society, as not all problems can be solved by the natural sciences and technology. The state, an instrument of society, needs to consider social science research as a vehicle in bringing about a desired type of society. Social sciences are meant to enlighten society. While they may not solve all problems, they help in understanding the nature of problems and in dealing with them. They try to objectively analyse and comprehend social realities. Social scientists, through their works, hold a mirror to society.

Gujarat was carved out of the erstwhile Bombay state in 1960. The complexities and paradoxes of the society, culture, politics, identity and modernity of Gujarat have always had important ramifications far beyond its borders. What are the key ideas that have shaped this society over the decades? What have been the dominant modes of its political mobilisation? What have been the dominant models of its development? What do these models mean for the politics, economy, environment and culture of the state and for the rest of India? Despite being one of the most economically developed states of India, Gujarat ranks low in the Human Development Index. Through its research network, CCD as an intellectual and activist entity endeavours to emphasise equality and to push for a desirable society inclusive of all its segments.

As concerned public intellectuals our concerns are for the “objective, fearless, constructive voice that asks the awkward questions when government, industry, religious leaders and other bulwarks of society stray from their roles of ensuring the proper functioning of a country whose hallmarks are (or should be) social and economic equality, justice for all, and the liberty to say, think and profess the fundamental requirements of good citizenship” (Romila Thapar, *The Public Intellectual in India*, 2015). We seek to question the existing reality with the intention of arriving at improving the human conditions in wider society.

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### **Vision**

CCD is an academic organization meant to harness the knowledge of social sciences to the service of Gujarat society, specifically its disadvantaged sections the minorities, tribals, dalits and women.

### **Mission**

CCD endeavours to provide a range of relevant and reliable researched data, primarily on religion, society, culture and development in Gujarat towards building a humane and just society.

### **Core Value Statement**

A commitment to excellence in knowledge generation to achieve sustainability.