

This is Google's cache of <http://infochangeindia.org/governance/analysis/indian-spring.html>. It is a snapshot of the page as it appeared on 6 May 2012 18:06:03 GMT. The [current page](#) could have changed in the meantime. [Learn more](#)

These search terms are highlighted: **keya acharya 2012**

[Text-only version](#)

6 MAY 2012

Governance

HOME

ANALYSIS

FEATURES

BOOKS & REPORTS

CHANGEMAKERS

AGENDA

CONTACT US

You are here: [Home](#) ▶ [Governance](#) ▶ [Analysis](#) ▶ Indian spring?

Indian spring?

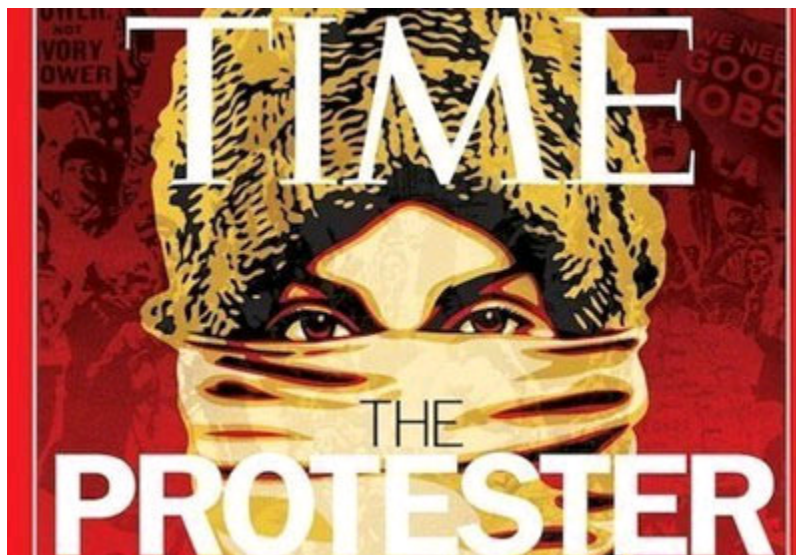
Like

f Share



SHARE COMMENTS

India will not see the transition that mass protests can impel as long as urban India refuses to see the close connect between rural and urban, and continues to dismiss people's movements in rural areas with a 'who cares?', writes **Keya Acharya**



At a discussion in Cuneo, Italy, late last year, (1) two population experts from North America, William Rees, professor from British Columbia with a PhD in population ecology, and Robert Engelman, president of the Worldwatch Institute in Washington DC and former journalist who writes about environment and populations, put forward suggestive arguments on the power of mass protests.

Rees, inventor of the concept of the 'ecological footprint' (or the total amount of resources an individual consumes, including carbon emitted through consumption patterns), thinks change of an existing system, whether national, regional or global, will come about only with the help of 'millions of people on the streets'.

Engelman put forward a slant to that concept: he called them 'shadow regimes', wherein transition could be, and

RELATED

The feel-g
governme
venture

Environme
new gover
more resp

'The chall
make pan
institutions
both gove
delivery'

Putting a p
diversity

Opening th
Commissi
people: S:
Hameed

Banning th
from votin

Economic:
Progress \

What is gc
governanc

Citizens w
redress

Power to t

Letting do
with negliq

Preconditi
empower

Towards c
governanc

Two-child
panchaya
pressure

was being in some cases, brought about through journalists, NGOs and civil society acting together as catalysts of change.

Worldwide, mass socio-political movements like the 2010-11 Arab Spring and that against corporate monopolistic power, as in Occupy Wall Street which has continued this year into London's Occupy Movement, are not new phenomena. In the 1990s, several Amazon indigenous regional movements that started mainly in Brazil, fighting for economic and social rights, coalesced into the first World Social Forum (WSF) in 2001 at Porto Alegre in Brazil. The movement, a loose organisation of diverse groups countering anything from the excesses of globalisation to fighting for economic rights, has now spilled into similar regional social movements in Europe, Asia, southern Africa, the Mediterranean and elsewhere. (2)

But it's not as if all such social movements have had their own 'Arab Springs' of success. One of the WSF's biggest criticisms has been of its preponderance of donor-funded NGOs following their own agendas and leaving out grassroots movements of the poor, especially from Africa.

The WSF's ancestors though, have brought about solid change. Andre Junqueira Ayres Villas-Boas, leader of an Amazon forest indigenous movement in the 2-million sq km Xingu river basin with 300 tribes and a population of 33 million, says their concerted movement helped change Brazil's constitution in the 1990s to include indigenous peoples' rights. (3)

But the Amazonas' subsequent 'schizophrenic' development, as Villas-Boas puts it, with large-scale cattle and soyabean farming by settlers, has hardly helped the tribes, even while spawning huge deforestation and related environmental problems. So the indigenous movement continues, with the struggle culminating in a current Bill in Brazil's parliament to review forest rights. "The Amazonas is constantly a political debate," says Villas-Boas. "A civil society movement against this is very important."

In India too, the most prominent and recent civil society movement to shake things up has been Anna Hazare's anti-corruption campaign that has led to the ombudsman body, the Lokpal Bill, still hanging fire. Hazare's team catapulted the 45-year-old matter front-stage, helped by swelling throngs of mainly urban populations from various metros and towns countrywide, affected relatively more by corruption than their rural fellow-countrymen.

But protests such as Villas-Boas's or even those of the WSF, where, at their 2011 meeting in Senegal, Bolivian president Evo Morales declared he would go to the UN to have water declared a fundamental right (4) not under private control, have not commanded the kind of 'shadow regime' stirs that Rees and Engelman describe, certainly not in India.

Not since the '70s and '80s anyway, with Sunderlal Bahugana and the Chipko movement that started in UP in 1973 and spawned similar action with Pandurang Hegde and the Appiko movement from Karnataka in 1983. Both were conservation campaigns for tree cover that became a decentralised, but organised movement for change. Appiko was responsible for laws against tree-felling in reserve forests in Karnataka; Chipko spawned a revolution in environmental conservation in India that pulled an entire gamut of social, economic and gender rights along with it.

Unfortunately, Chipko and Appiko were essentially rural movements, even though they were linked to urban economic environments. And as urban India expands continuously, rural interests seem to be a 'who-cares' phenomenon to the urban consumer in India. Local protests against the usurpation of lands for industry, most often without concomitant rehabilitation measures, or the use of groundwater by corporate market interests, are seen as 'anti-development', a sort of 'lunatic fringe' of individuals trying to attach themselves to a cause.

But the point is that rural and urban are intricately linked: certainly, market forces are at play in the use, or misuse, of resources such as groundwater. If water-tables dry up due to over-use, the consumer will definitely need to pay increasingly steeply for a scarce commodity, while the corporate marketing interest cashes in. How is a protest against overuse of ground and surface water, a resource mostly free for a corporate interest, then, an anti-development, lunatic protest ?

Man does
bread alor
Towards a
democrac
The limits
activism
The delus
Beauty an
Civil socie
watchdog
The princ
and the m



467 people



Rakshanda



Meenal

Facebook

Or take the case of agricultural productivity and the small farmer's general distress, constrained in the cultivating of his crops by failing soils and costly inputs, and choked in the selling of his produce by extortionist middlemen, legally allowed through the APMC (Agricultural Produce and Marketing Act). Civil society has been irresponsible about its link with farmers and this situation.

"We have absolutely no idea where our food is coming from and the plight the growers are facing," says Satish Natarajan, director of Sahaja Organics, a Karnataka-based farmer-producer company. " We need to build community support in ensuring a regular income for our farmers who supply us our food; they don't have a salary", he says.(5)

We need our own shadow regimes for this.

Endnotes

(1) Meeting of European, Latin American, American and Indian environmental journalists in Cuneo, Italy, November 2011. Convened by Greenaccord, Italy's most influential environmental organization.

(2) Literature on social movements.

(3) I met Villas-Boas at the Greenaccord meeting in Cuneo, late-2011.

(4) From literature on the WSF, on the Net.

(5) I met Satish Natarajan, an ex-Wipro director and now full-time farmer cum shareholder of Sahaja Organics, while following organic agriculture in February **2012**.

(Keya Acharya is an investigative reporter who writes on women, environment and other development issues)

Infochange News & Features, March 2012

undefined



INFOCHANGE INDIA

| [About Us](#) | [Useful Links](#) | [Disclaimer](#) | [Support Us](#) | [Announcement](#) | [Columns](#) | [Navigatio](#)

© **2012** InfoChange India News & Features development news India
Developed By Tekdi Web Solutions.