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**ANTINOMIES OF POLITICAL SOCIETY:  
IMPLICATIONS OF UNCIVIL  
DEVELOPMENT<sup>1</sup>**

THE INTER-RELATION BETWEEN THE STATE, civil society and more recently political society, notwithstanding the differences over what constitutes each of these domains, has emerged as the single most significant area of study for understanding the process of democratization. Civil society has long been projected and trusted, post-East European debacle, as an all-encompassing panacea for most of the problems plaguing developing societies. It is a political imaginary that is carved out to stand for various values, actively pursued through varied institutions. Civil society has become a kind of 'aspirational shorthand' for ideas and values of equity, increasing participation, public fairness, individual rights, tolerance, trust, legality, cooperation and informed citizenry (C.M.Elliot, 2003). These ideals are fostered and protected by voluntary associative activity independent or "outside" of the state. These include wide ranging associations or institutions such as clubs, religious bodies, *sabhas* (councils or assemblies) and *samajs* (societies), unio-

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1 Reprinted with permission from 'Economic and Political Weekly' (July, 17, 2007) India.

ns, professional associations, community action groups, NGOs, media, research institutes and youth organisations, to name a few (Ibid). Civil society has therefore been considered as a radical alternative in state regulated societies. However, after the initial euphoria died out, scholars began to raise serious doubts about the scope and nature of civil society's autonomy and its implications for the process of democratization. For instance, emphasis on trust -- one of the most significant markers of a civil society -- in situations of marked inequality not only offers a false promise to the poor but robs them of their right to struggle and protest (Michael Edwards, 2002). Where associations are hierarchical and based on ascriptive ties, moving to an associative concept of democracy only leaves intact and reinforces the iniquitous social structures (Gurpreet Mahajan, 1999). A society with unequal access to law which emphasizes legality as a baseline criterion of civil society only allows the government to forcibly clear the slums, sidewalks and tribals in the name of development (C.M.Elliot, 2003; Nivedita Menon, 2004). Such grave but perhaps obvious limitations of the civil societal domain are completely overlooked in the euphoric versions, as they are abstracted from any concrete reference to existing civil societies or the way it is transformed under the influence of other domains. It continues to be thought of as neither related to the state nor the market, due to the conflicting power relations (Neera Chandoke, 2003). How do we move beyond such dehistorical, depolitical and flat notions of the civil society and re-locate it in the process of democratization?

There have been three broad alternatives suggested. First, instead of uncoupling, civil society has to work, or in fact, be made sense of as complimentary to the state. "State alone can create conditions that are necessary to protect the institutions of civil society" (Gurpreet Mahajan, 1999). In other words, civil societies are constituted by a community of citizens and therefore we need to continue to recognize the state as the critical 'mobilizing agency', instead of 'letting it off the hook'. Therefore "if the project of civil society is to be saved and along with it the freedom accorded to citizenship, it can only be done through the constitutional democratic state" (Dipankar Gupta, 1999). A second alternative, along the Tocquivellian line, emphasizes the autonomy of the intermediate institutions against, on the one hand, a demagogic state, and on the other hand, and the sectarian and communitarian political forces. Assumed in such a model is an independent legal-rational framework which, being rule-bound and norm-based, would eventually democratize the society (Andre Beteille, 1995). A third alternative emphasizes the significance of grassroots initiatives (Rajini Kothari, 1988). This has been developed further, and more recently, conceptualized as an alternative site of "political society" that makes up, along

with political parties and organized social movements, non-partisan political formations for “strategic” and “contextual” mediations by the subalterns (Partha Chatterjee, 1997). According to Partha Chatterjee: “by political society I mean a domain of institutions and activities where several mediations are carried out” (Ibid). Thus, “the politics of democratization must therefore be carried out not in the classical transactions between state and civil society but in the much less well-defined, legally ambiguous, contextually and strategically demarcated terrain of political society” (Partha Chatterjee, 1998). The idea of “political society” is potentially radical in identifying that the “populations” that make up this alternative site are neither agents of the state nor civil society. They are often excluded in the process of political participation. “For the sake of survival and livelihood, they have to negotiate with both state and civil society or public sphere, domains often led and occupied by the middle-class bourgeois subjects and social elites” (Kuan-Hsing Chen, 2003). This means that not only the state but also civil society, using well-recognized “civil” norms, could potentially become part of the power block and mercilessly attack the subaltern classes, to preserve its own dominant interests. Therefore, if the modes of protest of “political society” are not consistent with the principle of associations in civil society, they violate institutional norms of liberal civil society. “Of course the problem with “political society” understood in this way is that the activities here would not necessarily conform to our understanding of what is “progressive” or “emancipatory”. They could be struggles of squatters on government land to claim residence rights (which would include illegally tapping electricity lines, for example), but they could as easily be the effort of a religious sect to preserve the corpse of their leader in the belief of its resurrection or the decision of a village Panchayat to kill a woman accused of adultery” (Nivedita Menon, 2004). These struggles, more often than not, fail ‘the tests of legality and constitutionality set by civil society’ (Ibid).

The idea of “political society”, though constituted “outside” and opposed to civil society, does not clearly define what forms of protest are part of it. More importantly, it combines a whole range of “strategic” actions adopted by the subalterns as part of this ‘much less well defined’ domain of political activity. It is less ideological in differentiating between organized political movements around alternative (to both state and civil society) democratic and radical “principles”, and the “strategic” and “contextually” defined “politics of the possible”. In fact, it combines them together to include a seamless domain of ‘strategies’ of negotiation and survival. The point is that for any project attempting radical democratic transformation, ideas, beliefs and practices do not hang independent of each other. In fact, if we are not

prepared to make a more nuanced distinction between “strategies” born out of the imperatives of survival and those that propel collectives to forge informed protest beyond their immediate interests, the project of democratization will enter a perilously self-defeating logic. We will have come full circle in putting in place an equally depoliticised, dehistoricised and flattened notion of alternative radical political sites, which is where we began our critique of civil society. It would become ambiguous to mark the “governing principles of political society” and the alternative “forms of institutionalization” it would attempt. While undoubtedly it needs to be acknowledged that uncivil development is making it increasingly difficult for the subalterns to wage organized protest and pushing them towards more spontaneous survival strategies, wouldn’t it be imperative, for this very reason, to search for the signposts of alternative modes of protest that could actually bring them out of what now seems to be an never-ending struggle for survival? “Political society” in its bid to contrast itself with civil society ends up as a seamless domain of qualitatively distinct political actions – of radical social movements, political parties and non-partisan political formations for strategic and contextual negotiations – that in practice cannot actually co-exist and are bound to enter into a conflict to mutually dislocate each other.

This paper is an attempt to delve into the consequences of the antinomies of flattened notions of subaltern politics on the basis of a field study in Kazipally, a pollution affected village, and to demonstrate how sustained demands for the closure of the polluting industries, based on collective mobilization and action, is met with uncivil state repression in nexus with mafia and the economic elites (industrialists) in the market. In turn, this pushes collectives to break up and be replaced by interest-based demands either at the level of smaller groups -- formed around available social stratifications -- or even individuals. This makes it increasingly difficult over time to sustain collective political action that could demand and gain long-term structural changes, in this case the closure of industries and the revival of agriculture. *Therefore, the assumption that a “political society” can unproblematically refer to or subsume both organized political movements as well as contextually marked “strategic politics” actually becomes highly indefensible.* In other words, while it is democratic to recognize the strategies for survival, it is struggles that lie beyond survival strategies that are imperative for any meaningful idea of democratization.

### **UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT**

Kazipally is a village situated 35 kilometers towards the north-east of Hyderabad in the Ginnaram mandal of Medak district. Medak is one

of the most backward<sup>2</sup> districts of Andhra Pradesh. The village has 506 households with a total population of 3000 people. In what follows, we present the socio-economic background of the village:

**Table 1.1**  
Occupational Statistics

S. N <sup>o</sup>	Category	N <sup>o</sup> of Households
1	Small Cultivators	354
2	Medium Cultivator	50
3	Big Cultivator	10
4	Rich Cultivator	6
5	Landless Labourers	76
6	Industrial Labourers	3
7	Others	7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>506</b>

Source: Field Study.

**Table 1.2**  
Caste Statistics

S. N <sup>o</sup>	Caste	N <sup>o</sup> of Households
1	Yadava	40
2	Muthrasi	141
3	Muslims	101
4	Mangali	12
5	Chakali	25
6	Goud	10
7	M.Kapu	5
8	Madiga	172
	<b>Total</b>	<b>506</b>

Source: Fieldwork

2 Note from the editors: While some might have objections to using the word “backwards” in this context, in India the term is commonly employed to refer to the unequal results of international, national and regional development. The Government of India, for example, operates the Backward Regions Grant Fund.

From the above data, it is evident that the amount of resources available to people who are victims of industrial pollution are very limited. Firstly, around 82 percent of the total households are dependent on farming. In addition, another 15 percent of households are engaged in agricultural labour for livelihoods. In total therefore, around 97 percent of households are dependent on agriculture. The Green Peace report suggests that industrial pollution in this area has affected 2000 acres of farmland as well as contaminated well water to the level of 140 feet<sup>3</sup>. Pollution has displaced households from their traditional livelihoods and stripped people of their assets. These villagers do not have alternative skills to choose other employment avenues. The industries, as seen from the evidence, do not employ villagers. Thus, although the industries take subsidies from the government stating they will contribute towards the development of backward areas, they do not provide any employment opportunities or avenues for social mobility, for instance skill development, to the local population. Some of the marginal and small-scale farmers are also engaged in other activities as their major economic activity. However, there is an availability of additional incomes for those engaged as washer-men, or in occupations such as fisheries, selling fruits grown on common lands, or dependent on livestock.

### **NATURE OF INDUSTRIALISATION AND CAPITAL**

The industrialization in Kazipally started in the post-Emergency period, when Indira Gandhi contested Medak and won. This area was adopted as an Industrial Development Area (IDA). However, rapid growth of industrialization was witnessed only from 1989 onwards. Most of these industries, started after 1989, operated on loan licensing and outsourcing by multi-national and other big national corporations.

There are now, in total, about 50 industries in Kazipally and Gaddapothram. It was recently discovered that of the 50 units, 35 units have been operating without Central Pollution Control Board clearance certificates. The Commissionerate of Industries does not have records about some of these industries.

Multi-national corporations, especially from the United States, outsource their products because, as it is estimated by Baumol and Oates, if the United States has to achieve zero discharge standards, it will cost the US economy \$2 billion. It was in 1989 that the United States' Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was formed. The

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3 'State of Community Health at Medak District', Green Peace India, Bangalore, 2004. Also refer Deccan Chronicle 'Dirty Nakkavagu Destroying Farmlands, Causing illness', 19<sup>th</sup> August, 1996.

EPA classified products, especially chemicals and metallic products, as Bio-Accumulant Toxins. These were the kind of chemicals that will not decompose and, therefore, their discharge accumulates toxins in the environment. The term 'dirty goods' is also associated with this type of production. A 'dirty good' is defined as a good in which the effluent treatment costs exceed the value of the final product itself. Therefore, the production of 'dirty goods', if abiding by the water, soil and air quality standards set by law, implicitly works out to be uneconomical. It is because of this that multi-national corporations have chosen to produce these 'dirty goods' by loan licensing their products to third world producers. The national corporations, on the other hand, are outsourcing production of 'dirty goods' with the objective of securing ISO 2001 and other such quality certificates which are a precondition to exporting their products to foreign markets. Such outsourced production is also undertaken by units in Kazipally and Gaddapotharam industrial areas. Shawalace, the anti-AIDS vaccine being produced by Bill Gates Foundation, and Reddy labs, have been identified in our research as two of the multi-national companies that have ties with polluting industrial units. There could be many more big actors who claim clean production for public consumption.

Interestingly, the MODVAT introduced in 1991 has been a boost to small-scale industries. Since MODVAT is a direct tax, the small scale industries are being given several subsidies on raw materials, an excise tax, and so on. Furthermore, small scale companies also recruit cheap labour. Therefore the MODVAT works out lower. This, in turn, implies that big corporations will obtain intermediaries, or their outsourced products, manufactured at lower prices than if these products were manufactured by the big corporations themselves. Given Medak is a backward area, the incentive packages for industries are very attractive. Although technically the region falls in Medak, it is only 35 kilometers from the city and this implies access to infrastructure. This model of industrialization referred to as 'new industrialization' has been identified as generating high social costs both in terms of blatant violations of labour standards and environmental pollution (G.Vijay 1999; G.Vijay, 2003). While the product market of the industries is foreign, the lack of civility in the sense of the violation of norms laid down by law in the interests of the community is built into this model of industrialization. The intrinsic need for uncivil manufacturing practices propels a chain of lack of civility seen in the unethical lobbying with political circles, bribing of bureaucracy, nexus with mafia and other such uncivil practices. A lack of civility thus becomes inevitable and systemic.

### PROBLEM OF POLLUTION AND SOCIAL COST

The pollution levels in the Kazipally tank are an outcome of industrial toxic effluents dumping for the past 16 years. Several reports -- a technical report about the Kazi cheruvu and the ground water done by the environmental department of Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University (JNTU) in 1998, the monthly updates of water quality in the tanks by the Andhra Pradesh Pollution Control Board (APPCB), and the more recent Committee constituted by Andhra Pradesh High Court, Chaired by Justice Gopal Rao, which submitted a Fact Finding Report (2004) -- have all established irrefutable evidence about the alarming levels of damage done to these water sources. As part of our research, we have obtained water samples tested independently by Yagna Labs during 1997 and collected in similar locations for comparison again in 2003 by the Environmental Protection Training and Research Institute (EPTRI). The results of some of these findings are outlined below:

**Table 1.3**  
Comparative Figures for 1997-2003 -Water Sample Test Results\*

Parameter normal			Sample 1		Sample 2		Sample 3		Sample 4	
S N°		Ranges	1997	2003	1997	2003	1997	2003	1997	2003
1	pH	7-8.5	4.2	7.2	7.8	7.2	7.6	7.2	8.1	7.3
2	Dissolved solid	500 mg/ltr**	3900	2860	7600	2900	970	2865	7960	1860
3	Chloride	200 mg/ltr**	340	930	520	855	550	855	250	445
4	Sulphates	200 mg/ltr**	260	509	320	488	340	495	140	545
5	Flouride	1.0 mg/ltr**	1.8	.752	2.5	.759	2.3	.600	1.0	.666
6	Magnesium	30 mg/ltr**	300	347	300	346	300	272	180	347
	Calcium	75 mg/ltr**	700	594	500	644	600	594	200	495

Source: Field Work - 1997, Results based on tests conducted by Yagna Labs, Amberpet.

\* Though Kazipally village is situated right below the Kazi talab, there is about 250 meters distance from the actual location of the tank. This in a way dilutes the pollution by the time water reaches the village. We therefore collected different samples to show this variance as well. In Table-1.3 sample-1 has been collected directly from the tank. Sample-2 and 3 are from the canal. While sample-2 is from a location of the canal closer to the tank, Sample-3 is from a point closer to the village. Sample-4 is the bore water which was used for drinking purposes until recently. This primary data can be supplemented by other secondary data sources including data from Commissionarate of Industries, Green Peace, EPTRI and other reports.

\*\* Less than or equal to.

From the above figures, we know that not only are different chemicals present in the water of the Kazipally tank way above the normal ranges, but for several indicators the figures for 2003 show increases in



pollution levels. Although it is true that pollution has been controlled due to a long drawn out battle by the people, this is no compliment to regulating authorities as the standards are blatantly violated to date. This violation of standards is illegal, whether the violation is by a margin or an enormity, since the standards imply that the presence of chemicals beyond these limits can harm the life, property or health of the inhabitants and other natural life forms on which the community is dependent. This needs to be the framework for reading the above figures.

As a result of pollution, nearly 7000 acres of land in 32 villages have been partially and completely destroyed (JNTU Report, 1998). There have been several reports of loss of fish and cattle, on which several rural communities depend for their livelihoods (Field Data, 1997-98, 2003-05). The recent health report by Green Peace has made startling revelations about the health status in the affected villages.

Thus we find enormous damage has been done to the natural environment and huge social costs have been generated for the local communities due to industrial pollution.

**Table 1.4**  
Disease Incidence in Affected Villages

Nervous System	3 times higher than the controlled group
Circulatory system	2 times higher than the controlled group
Respiratory System	3.81 times higher than the controlled group. 1 in 20 are Affected
Digestive System	1.98 times higher than the controlled group
Blood and Blood forming Organs	2.914 times higher than the controlled group. 1 in 35 persons are affected
Endocrine, Nutritional and Metabolic Systems	1.84 times higher than the controlled group. 1 in 35 people are affected
Neoplasms	11 times higher than the controlled groups
Skin and subcutaneous Tissues	2.67 times higher than the controlled group
Congenital Malformations, deformations and Chromosomal abnormalities	3.93 times higher than the controlled group
Cancer	11 times higher than the controlled group

Source: Green Peace, 2004

### **METHODOLOGY OF THE PRESENT STUDY**

The present study focuses on collective action against pollution in an effort to see how the idea of “political society”, understood as including both organized collective action or movements for structural demands, and various “strategies” or “negotiations” with immediate interests for survival, becomes unsustainable in practical terms. For this purpose, the study has analyzed three social groups that are organized and ideally posed for mobilization against polluting industries. The farming community, youth, and women have been chosen as relevant social groups for this study. This is because all three social groups have organized associations and, with the exception of the farmers’ association, these associations themselves are meant to serve other objectives. The research was interested in finding out what these associations were doing about the problem of pollution which was a problem of the general village community. The Kalushya Vyatireka Raitu Committee (KVRC) with a total membership of 40 farmers, the Shivaji Youth Association with a total membership of 50 members, and the DWCRA micro-credit groups which together have about 100 women, are the associations which have been taken up for the study. The study has been done in two phases. An earlier study done in 2003 includes responses from all the 40 farmers. A recent survey done in 2005 is based on a sample of 30 respondents from all three groups. Thus, this study is based on a total of 70 respondents. A structured questionnaire and informal interviews were used to collect primary data. In the collection of primary data, we find that since the experience is a shared one, we often came across repetitions in the narratives and therefore we are able to argue that the responses of this sample speak for the social groups these associations represent.

### **POLITICAL SOCIETY - COLLECTIVE OR INTEREST-BASED?**

In dealing with the problem of pollution, we find that whenever people have raised structural questions through their collective political activity, they have faced uncivil means of repression both from the coercive state apparatus, like the police, and from organized mafia. This lack of civility has weakened political activity. In what follows, we narrate the experience of Kazipally victims of industrial pollution in instances where they raised such structural questions.

The conflict around the pollution of the village tank by industries took a political form that raised structural demands. There are several reasons why shutting down these polluting industries can be interpreted as a structural demand. Firstly, villagers of Kazipally, as already pointed out, were predominantly dependent on agriculture and other traditional activities before their tank was polluted. The conflict thus

became articulated as a conflict between farmers and industry. Secondly, as already seen in the narrative on the nature of industrialization, these industrialists are outsiders in the regional sense of the term. The industrialists are predominantly from the Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema regions of Andhra Pradesh. This regional dimension assumes special significance in the wake of rising aspirations for a separate Telangana statehood. Furthermore, the regional dimension is of relevance in two other senses. Although the industrial policy outlines development of backward regions as the objective of rural industrialization in the form of industrial development areas, and although it justifies giving these industries subsidies and other such benefits, we find that the contribution of these industries to the development of these backward regions is very limited. The local people are not given employment opportunities in these industries. As well, the products produced by these industries are not meant for the local market.

We also find that the victims of pollution include several groups of impoverished people. The landless, those with livestock, the artisans and those in traditional service sectors have also been victims, losing income sources, livelihoods, assets, health etc. Vis-à-vis the industries which make huge profits, enjoy links with individuals in power, and hold the capacity to manipulate the system, this problem is posed as a conflict between the poor and the vulnerable and the rich and the powerful.

The demand for permanently shutting down polluting industries is, therefore, a demand of the farming community against the irresponsible industries, it's a demand of the local community against the industrialists who are the outsiders, and it's a demand of the poor and vulnerable people against the rich and the powerful lobbies. For these reasons, the demand for the permanent shut down of the polluting industrial units becomes a structural demand.

Such a demand was raised on several occasions. The first time was back in 1989. The villagers of Kazipally and several other affected villages, led by different civil society based organizations including the Forum Against Pollution, Jana Vigyana Vedika etc., and the political representatives of these villages, conducted rallies and *Dharnas*<sup>4</sup>. As a consequence, people of these villages were lathi-charged and the representatives were arrested. Again in 1994, villagers fighting the industrialists were attacked by the mafia and although the villagers put up some resistance, they had to leave the villages fearing for their lives. Villagers who fled were charged with attempted murder. In another instance in 1995, the villagers, led by some of

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4 The most significant form being blockade of the national highway

the political representatives, attacked industries and ransacked and assaulted the industrialists. As a consequence of this, villagers demanding closure of industries were charged with attempted murder, and framed for extortion.

In 2005, based on an affidavit lodged by the Goa Foundation with the Supreme Court, stating that several of these industries had been functioning without the clearance certificates from the Central Pollution Control Board since 1994, the Supreme Court ordered a public hearing. Objections were raised to the way the public hearing was being conducted. The Pollution Impact Assessment Reports had not reached several villages. The dates of the hearing were not clear. Some villagers were complaining of threatening calls dissuading them from attending the public hearing.

Despite all this, villagers mobilized themselves in huge numbers and gave evidence against the industry on the day of the hearing. After the lunch break, perceiving that the public hearing was going against them, the representatives of the industries disturbed the public hearing by beating up the Green Peace activist. Following the assault on the Green Peace activist, there were angry protests by the villagers. Consequently, in this protest, the assistant Sub-Inspector of Police was hurt. Later when the Green Peace activist, along with another researcher, both who were mobilizing people, went to register an FIR in the Police station, the District Inspector assaulted them again. After realizing that those assaulted were activists who had nothing to do with the protests of the villagers, the Additional Superintendent of Police arrived and tendered an apology to the activists. He assured that action would be initiated against the District Inspector. Although complaints against the industrial representatives and the District Inspector were registered, no action was initiated in both these cases. Moreover, 62 villagers, including both the Green Peace activist and the researcher, were charged under 8 sections of Indian Penal Code including section 307, which is attempted murder. Of the 62 names, 12 names were mentioned while the other 50 names were put under the category of others. Constables were going around villages blackmailing the villagers that their names would be included in this 'others' category and were extorting money. The Sarpanch of Kazipally<sup>5</sup>, who was siding with the industrialists, went to the village and told the villagers who were mobilizing against the industrialists that if the Green Peace activist and the researcher, who were mobilizing people, could be beaten up by police, what could ordinary villagers do? From the point of view of the villagers, the Green Peace activist and the researcher

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5 President of the village Panchayat

were amongst those that enjoyed a network with the urban elite and had access to bureaucracy, and even ministers in the cabinet. If such people could be assaulted in the custody of the police, what protection would ordinary villagers have? This scared the villagers, who then stayed away from the public hearing on the second day.

On the second day of the public hearing, 12 DCM mini-buses were hired by the industries in order to bring people for the specific purpose of giving statements in favor of the industrialists. Several villagers reported that the village heads of some villages, and some villagers, had received bribes to speak in favor of industrialists. Thus, what was supposed to be a democratic process of letting the villagers vent their opinions freely, was subverted by the industrial representatives who resorted to uncivil acts, followed by the police who repeated the uncivil acts. Both of these were at intimidating the villagers who, out of fear, stayed away on the second and third days of public hearing.

From the above narrative of events that took place over the years, it's quite evident that whenever structural demands and organized collective action strengthened, the market, civil society and state have shown a lack of civility aimed at suppressing the political activity of the people. As a consequence of such a lack of civility by institutions, the state loses its legitimacy and is seen as unjustly siding with the dominant interests. The state apparatus which, in this case, is represented by the Pollution Control Board (PCB) and the police, who fail to implement law or take recourse to extra-judicial methods, creates a general perspective that not only can the state be manipulated, but it is also arbitrary and inconsistent in its behavior. Thereby the state loses its objective image. In addition to this, by not initiating action against the mafia like elements because of their links with mainstream political parties, and by not acting upon the acts of violence perpetrated by the industrialists, the state allows very little space for organized political protest.

There is yet another direction that political activity can take in the wake of an increasing lack of civility. As a result of this, we find that what what begins as political activity for long-term demands - - in this case the closure of industries -- takes the shape of interest-based politics. The problem with interest-based politics, as already suggested, is that collective interests are often compromised by the interests of immediacy and survival. The "political society" refrains from raising structural questions and even questions of collective interest and relapses into pursuing opportunities that satisfy immediate needs, especially around problems of survival. Alternative interest-based politics begin to look far more feasible. Interest-based "strategies" or "negotiations" grow. We find, however, that whenever people have

resorted to interest-based politics, political activity has become unsustainable and, in the long run, this has proven counterproductive for the community, making it weaker and more vulnerable. The unsustainability of political activity due to interest-based “negotiations” of the “political society” is due to the impact it has on the solidarity of the collective.

In reality, we find that since society is stratified based on several structures, interests are stratified as well. In political activity initiated by such a stratified society, commonality of interest holds only a symbolic significance providing a ground for an artificial unity of the collective. While collective political activity mounts pressure on the system and creates conditions where the system is forced to accommodate the demands of the collective, the individual or small groups’ (within this collective) interest-based acts within a ‘political society’ take advantage of such pressure and they through their own demands. As a consequence of the benefits accrued by the interest-based ‘political society’, such beneficiary groups distance themselves from the collective political activity. In doing so, they weaken the collective political activity. In what follows, we show how these trends in interest-based politics have manifested in Kazipally.

In 1989, soon after the dharnas raised structural demands which saw lathi-charge and arrests, these demands took on the shape of interest-based politics. Instead of asking for the closure of the polluting units, the villagers demanded that they be given some livelihoods and income-earning opportunities. The manufacturing process in these predominantly bulky drug and chemical industries produced as dry ash as residue. This ash was being used for brick making in brick kilns located in the vicinity of the village. There were other jobs that the villagers offered to do, including running water tankers, taking up construction contracts, activities of transportation, etc. The villagers, however, were not offered employment in the industry as workers. Some youth were employed by industries not directly responsible for polluting Kazi talab. These industries are located elsewhere at a much further distance from the village. However, the only opportunities that the youth secured were as daily contract workers.

In 1995, when the villagers ransacked the industries, although the industries did not close down their operations, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Model Industrial Association, representing the industries, and the village, represented its leaders, including the Sarpanch and the Zilla Parishad Chairman<sup>6</sup>. A sum of Rs.4 lakhs was paid to the village. A community hall, the

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6 Chairman of the District Council

laying village roads and other such activities that were considered to be village developmental activities, were undertaken with this money. In return, the villagers were asked to withdraw all the cases filed by them against the polluting industries. However, some dissenting groups persisted with their court cases. In 1998, based on the Andhra Pradesh High Court directive, all the polluting industries were closed. The industries, however, approached the Supreme Court and got a stay ordered on the closure order of the Supreme Court. In 1999, the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh made a statement on the issue of pollution in which he said that these industries were earning foreign currency for the country and that the pollution control authorities should go slow on the issue of pollution. If industries are harassed then it may impinge their growth.

In 2001, based on the cases filed with the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court ordered the closure of 18 industries until they abided by the prescribed standards of water quality and the hydrolic reduction. The PCB, however, after a brief period of closure, reopened the industries. During the same year, the Supreme Court ruled, stating that the industrialists had to pay compensation to the farmers whose lands were damaged on account of pollution. However, the amount of compensation paid was the paltry sum of Rs.1700/per acre per annum. This amount was not even equivalent to the costs incurred for seeds. Furthermore, those who were landless did not receive any compensation. As part of the same judgment, safe drinking water from the Manjira river, water supply to Hyderabad city, was also to supply water to the village.

In 2002, the village was able to get written approval for one of its demands. The district collector ordered repairs on the Kazipally tank. The collector ordered that a sum of Rs.9 lakhs (Rs..9 million) be collected from the industries for this purpose. The villagers were disappointed, however, after a brief period of excitement, when Grasshoppers<sup>7</sup> were sent to the village to begin the work. The day the work was to begin saw a festive environment with a pooja being performed at the work site and a coconut offering to the gods. After a few heaps of mud were removed from the tank, the grasshoppers, however, never returned again. On contacting the Medak collector about the work, the collector told the village representatives that the industrialists were not willing to give the amount and that the government was negotiating with them.

In 2003, the issue of pollution got considerable and favourable media attention. The regional press and the regional electronic me-

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7 Heavy engineering equipment used to dig mud out, popularly called a proclainer.

dia gave coverage to this issue. Several representations were made by Mr.K.G.Kannabiran (National President, PUCL) to the PCB, on behalf of the people of Kazipally. Following this new attention the problem received, a commission of inquiry, under the chairmanship of justice Gopal Rao, a retired Chief Justice of Andhra Pradesh High Court, was set up. The commission was taken aback by the condition of the tank when they paid a visit to the village. Following this visit, villagers were asked to provide evidence of violations. Villagers began to act as vigilance teams and by doing so, caught several industries letting out effluents into a stream carrying water to the tank, and burning solid toxic wastes outside the premises of the industry. As a consequence of these instances of law violation, a bond of Rs.25 lakhs (Rs.2.5 million) was taken from the industries for surety, and in the case of further violations industries would lose this amount.

In 2004, Green Peace released its health report. The report compared the disease patterns in pollution affected villages with other villages which were not affected by pollution. The health report revealed several disturbing trends. It suggested that in several types of diseases including congenital diseases and cancer, the pollution affected villages showed far higher rates of occurrence than the other non-polluted villages. Some diseases showed 200-300 times higher occurrence. After these discoveries, the need was felt for at least one primary health center with referral authority. Patients could then get free treatment at government hospitals in the city. Until now nothing has materialized.

Overall, we find that the achievements of the Kazipally victims have been quite limited. Although there have been several demands reflecting collective interests -- which are not structural as we define it -- including proving employment opportunities in the industries, repairing tanks, abiding by quality standards, refraining from dumping untreated effluents into the village tank, and setting up a health center with referral authority, none of these demands have been achieved. The reasons for the failure of these collective demands quite clearly lie in the 'strategic' and 'contextually' defined 'politics of the possible' of 'political society'.

### **“POLITICAL SOCIETY” AND THE DECAYING COMMUNITY**

In 1989, when villagers had secured the opportunities to sell dry ash, or take up transport and construction contracts, a large number of villagers were willing to do this work. These opportunities looked small in number in relation to the number of villagers willing to take up these opportunities. As a result, this led to internal feuding over who should get these opportunities. The industrialists “strategically” gave the authority to decide on who could take up these opportunities to



the Sarpanch. It was “strategic” in the sense that the Sarpanchs could easily be lured to take the side of the industries, as they received bribes from time to time. Given the frequent tendencies by Sarpanchs to take the side of the industries, this system of allocating opportunities led to a situation where villagers who assured they would not speak out about the problem of pollution were given these opportunities. A section of those fighting against pollution, therefore, withdrew from the struggle against pollution. This resulted from their dependence on the industry for their livelihoods. So much so that the president of the Kalushya Vyatireka Raitu Committee (KVRC) (Farmers committee against pollution), the main organization led by farmers to fight against pollution, started to work on a construction contract for one of the most serious polluting industrial units. Those farmers who were relatively better-off or had some assets like vehicles (tractors, etc.) necessary to transport material for the construction, or who could mobilize labour, were the beneficiaries.

Since the Sarpanchs were hand-in-hand with the industrialists, they used several other methods to prevent villagers from participating in the protest against pollution. Some of these means of control are worth discussing at this point. Against the backdrop of the displacement from traditional occupations, especially agriculture, those farmers who were actively involved in the protest against pollution obviously could not secure opportunities within the industry. One of the active functionaries of the KVRC was earning his livelihood by engaging in unlicensed stone quarrying. This was possible for him because he owned a tractor which was used to transport the granite stones and concrete to construction companies. The farmer had acquired a loan of one lakh rupees to engage labour to work for him. After the work was completed, the farmer paid the labour their wages and when he was about to transport the material to the construction company, the Sarpanch called the farmer and threatened to arrest the farmer for having engaged in illegal stone quarrying. The farmer not only felt threatened by the possibility of arrest, but felt frightened that he may not be able to repay the loan he borrowed. The Sarpanch then convinced the farmer that he should withdraw from the protest against the industries. Under duress the farmer kept away from the KVRS.

Again in 1995 when the MoU was signed between the village heads and the Model Industrial Association, a substantial number of farmers did not approach the court with complaints about pollution. This was because out of the amount of Rs.4 lakhs which was paid, these farmers received part of this amount in the name of compensation. The decision about compensation was arbitrary since not all farmers received the amount. It was again biased towards those who promised

to keep away from the political activity against pollution. The ZPTC chairman himself, one of the signatories of the MoU, owned about 40 acres of land in the village. He was the victim who had suffered the greatest loss in terms of number of acres of land affected. He was active in the mobilization of the farmers from 1989 onwards. After this episode, although he registered his presence in activities by villagers protesting against pollution now and then, he kept away from any further mobilization activity linked to protesting against pollution.

Another instance where the subversion of activity against industrial pollution is evident was the way industries were dealing with the farmers whose cattle were dying after drinking polluted water. Earlier on, the farmers took their cattle to the government veterinary-hospital and, after examination by doctors, took a certificate from them stating that the death of the cattle might be due to the consumption of toxic water. This certificate was necessary in order to carryout further forensic investigations on the dead cattle by the city-based government veterinary hospital. Following that, an FIR could be lodged with the police, based on which a legal notice could be served which is then used as the basis for demanding compensation for the cattle. All such complaints and cases meant mounting evidence against the industries. Fearing this, the industrialists dissuaded villagers from going to government veterinary hospitals or registering complaints with the police. Instead, they said that those who had cattle die on account of consuming toxic water could approach the industries through their Sarpanch. Over the years, several villagers received compensation whenever they lost cattle. However, there is no evidence suggesting loss of cattle due to pollution.

In the 2004 Panchayat elections for the post of Sarpanch, a new candidate stood with a single point agenda that he would ensure the problem of pollution would be solved in Kazipally village. This candidate was elected by the village. Soon after getting elected, the new Sarpanch served notices to fifty industries accused of pollution. The industrialists were called to negotiate with the village. Thirty industrialists attended the negotiation meeting which was addressed by Mr.K.G.Kannabiran (PUCL) and G.Haragopal (APCLC), who were playing the role of mediators for the negotiations. In this negotiation, the Sarpanch made a categorical statement that no compensation would be accepted by the village unless the industries stopped completely the pollution of village tank and repaired the tank. A second round of talks was scheduled for a few weeks later. Meanwhile, the Sarpanch struck a private deal, accepted a compensation package for the village and distributed some money amongst the villagers. Neither tank repairs nor the reduction of pollution were achieved. To top it all off, during

the public hearing held in 2005, this same Sarpanch made a statement that the development of the village was contingent upon industrialization. He strongly argued that industries should not be closed.

Thus, overall, we find from these different instances stated above, that what are described as “strategic politics” or “negotiations” within the “political society” only ensure a very fragmented social mobility. In these cases, for instance, villagers received money from time to time due to the protest. Farmer activists of the KQRS who ‘strategically’ reduced the intensity of the struggle or stayed away from any further activity, either because they had opportunities given to them by the industries or because they were dependent on the local administration to carry out their illegal income-earning activities, achieved some level of comfort through this system. These small group “strategies” and individual-centred negotiations for incentives have effectively displaced the overall community interest and collective action within the “political society”, both in terms of giving up community demands -- getting the tank repaired, preventing dumping of toxic effluents into village tank, getting a health center etc., -- and in terms of the cost the community bears through the general health disorders they suffers on account of unabated pollution. Apart from these direct costs to the community, “strategic politics” have a long-term impact on community life -- on trust, social fabric, social relations, and solidarity amongst the people. Far from the community “struggling collectively as a single family” all these factors lead to a decaying community, making sustained political activity very difficult. In the following passages we enumerate the dimensions of the problem.

Because of the inequality between the victims of pollution and the polluter, the vulnerable villagers are usually dependent on the institutions such as the Panchayat. Lack of access to information is yet another factor that leads to the dependence of people on formal institutions such as the Panchayat. However, when the representatives of people themselves defect to the side of the polluters, those representing the people against pollution through political activism find themselves more vulnerable. These village activists are usually dependent on outside social activists or depend on other networks for protection against an uncivil state and uncivil mafia elements. However, if these social forces are weakened, then the political activism derived from the common people of the village fails to sustain their resistance. In such circumstances, political activism is given up for “strategic politics”, aspiring to individual benefits represented by the growing culture of compensation or simply meeting the immediate needs of the community, neither of which address the problem of pollution as such.

A Narasanna farmer says:

“the Panchayat is corrupt and some leaders are even criminalized. There is no one to whom these leaders are accountable. Once the PCB closed down all the polluting industries. The Sarpanch went and gave no objection certificates and got these industries reopened. And we farmers are dependent on these industries for our livelihoods –some supply water, some trade ash, some supply construction material and so on. If we participate in the protests we lose our livelihood...”

The fact that farmers have associated themselves with different activities linked to the industries is an outcome of the severe pressures they suffer. Costs related to curing health disorders, the marriage of daughters, and the education of children have been frequently mentioned by people. All these demands on income earners compel them to make compromises and withdraw from the struggle against pollution, entering into individual bargaining.

Amina, the mother of a farmer, said that, *“people unite if they see a possibility of a solution emerging from the protest. But if they see no such possibility, they prefer bargaining with the industrialists individually and getting whatever they can”*.

Once achieving opportunities becomes an individualistic pursuit, as Padmaja a DWCRA coordinator points out, *“a competitive culture increases, comparisons between families in terms of status grow. And individualistic behavior leads to a weakening of the community.”* As a consequence of this individualistic behavior and competitive culture, Venkataramani, another DWCRA leader, maintains, *“of late there is lot of friction between families in the village. Families are not sharing problems, resources, or labour. Mutual help amongst members of extended families has weakened”*.

During our field survey, we came across several cases of older people complaining of not being cared for and being neglected by their family. This was one of the most obvious fall-outs of this decaying community.

The agrarian culture in the village in itself has several cultural forms, especially in the celebration of various festivals. The timing, symbolism, and form of the festivals are linked to the seasons and the agrarian economy. Today, the destruction of agriculture due to pollution has reduced the village to a mere collective in form, without ways to express this collectivity in day-to-day life. Except for the Moharram during which both the Hindu and Muslim communities participate in the festivities, none of the other festivals are celebrated with traditional fervor any longer.

Narasimha, a farmer, says that:

before all the villagers were dependent on agriculture and there was lot of community life. Further, the earnings of the people was out of hard work. There was no easy money.

Traditional village based occupations have replaced these opportunities with opportunities outside the village. Most of the youth work as daily wage contract labourers, in the industries that do not directly pollute the villages in which they live. This is because the youth may object to industry dumping if it pollutes the village tanks from their own village. While youth go to industries located away from the villages, the youth leaders say that this new work environment has brought the youth in touch with a new migrant society. The migrant communities working in these industries have a very poor quality of life. This new culture has created a new section of youth who do not show serious concern for the issues pertaining to their village. The young are unwilling to identify themselves with agriculture and the rural community. This has further weakened the community.

While farmers maintain that the youth have very little commitment to the village, the youth say that farmers withdraw from the struggle as soon as they receive compensation. Women are constrained by patriarchal structures in taking independent decisions about acting against the pollution problem. Therefore, women are seen as a weak group that have more or less a residual role when men are constrained by compulsions. Women are seen as have mainly family interests with little social role. This being the case, livelihood for male members, or compensation, are seen as women's priorities rather than a commitment to eradicating pollution. Thus, what we have is a community which, over the years, has experienced a complete loss of trust amongst different social groups. It is due to this that youth associations, the farmer's organization, and DWACRA women are unable to work with one another.

"Political society" undoubtedly enables us to grasp the distinct dynamics of the subalterns in opposition and contrast to the norms of civil society. In this sense, it takes our understanding of the process of democratization beyond the classical, safe and settled domains of state and civil society. However, in mapping the dynamics internal to this domain it is flattened, and dodges the more important issue of sustainability of such seamless, alternative sites. First, the squatters of Calcutta could succeed in getting the state to recognize their "claims" as a "moral force" as long as they do not enter into conflict with major interests, either in the state or the civil society, and raise structural questions as they did in Kazipally. It is understandable why "strategic politics" cannot prevent vario-

us slums across the country from being demolished and displaced people getting rehabilitated by a state that acts “contextually” and “instrumentally”<sup>87</sup>. It is part of a systemic logic to acknowledge “strategic” interest-based negotiations, which eventually displace organized collective action. It is untenable to consider that these varied protest forms can co-exist within the undifferentiated “political society”. Second, a “political society” of squatters sustaining around “strategic politics” and emerging as a “community” or a “single family” is an anomaly. On the contrary, over a period of time, “strategic” or interest-based negotiations only make the community more vulnerable, thereby pushing social groups and individuals to pursue individual benefits. The growing culture of compensation and declining trust between the youth, elderly, farmers and women in Kazipally stands as testimony; such “negotiations” are directly in conflict with collective interests, and articulated around the available social stratifications. “Community festivals” remain as mere symbolic gestures of a collective life without the necessary resources that could sustain collective action for rehabilitation, employment and dignified living for the squatters in Calcutta, or the closure of industries and revival of agriculture for the people of Kazipally. Finally, “political society” as “strategic politics” only reflects politics that generate perpetual insecurity for the vulnerable by bringing unsustainable notions of mobility – those that can only be used by social groups that are better equipped to gain patronage of the social elites, government functionaries and political leaders. Far from “making a large array of connections with other groups in similar situations”, it merely increases the possibility of excluding the more vulnerable, such as the landless people in Kazipally, without minimum resources. For these groups, the state, far from responding through “welfare policies”, increasingly becomes unable to cope with and aid the uncivil developmental processes. This was more than evident through the implications on active villagers in false cases, threats and physical assaults by the mafia during public hearings, not to mention brazenly biased police brutality in Kazipally.

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8 Partha Chatterjee in his more recent work informs us about the court order to evict the squatters he had earlier studied and the increasing possibility of them being forcefully moved, “thus it is quite possible for the equilibrium of strategic politics to shift enough for these squatters to be evicted tomorrow...Such is the tenuous logic of strategic politics in political society” (*Politics of the Governed, Permanent Black*, Delhi. 2003, p.60). However, does not still acknowledge that such “strategic politics” grow in lieu of organized political activity and cannot actually co-exist with it in a “political society”.

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