

***The Power Dynamics of New Social Movements in Post Industrial Society:  
A Theoretical Analysis.***

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## **Introduction**

Since time immemorial, as when Buddha provided an alternative to the Vedic way of life, Spartacus the Roman gladiator-slave fought for liberty or the French Revolution of 1798 challenged absolutism, the struggle for entitlements have been vigorously manifesting as an ongoing saga of peoples' expressions to threats and opportunities. People have striven to survive with dignity, honour and fortitude. Rights to a decent livelihood, equality, freedom from discriminatory practices and access to opportunities are entitlements driving communities, nations and the globe. At present, we bunch and qualify these innumerable drivers under an umbrella term called "global justice". We are located today in this era of global justice.

One of the principal forms of accommodation of the interests of people is collective expression or collective actions, demonstrated through a gamut of expressions ranging from moderate protests, picketing, sit-ins, candlelight vigils, strikes, demonstrations, campaigns, body painting, storytelling, to violent revolutions. Through the passage of time, people have found it necessary to air their grievances and concerns as well as place their demands by collective engagement. These collective negotiations have been determined by the cultural, economic and political fabric, the ideologies and orientations that govern its people, their social relations and the superficial / deep structures that determine the quality and direction of a society. Thus, obviously the stage for enacting the repertoire of Social Movements is Society. This mandates an examination of the tenor and contour of a Society.

Society is the totality of a way of life of a people. It is an aggregate of the ideas, habits, learned and accepted modes of behavior, norms, and values. It ascribes status and roles, develops, identifies and stratifies itself into groups, cultivates structures that create conducive environments for cohabitation and inter/intra relations and fosters socialization. Obviously, constituents and the processes of a society are inter and intra dependent. The components, interrelations, networks and patterns of behavior, combined with the ideas and its expressions, constitute the culture of a Society (Clyde Kluckhohn, 1951) in a nutshell describes culture which is the kernel of a society, as "a design for living" adopted, adapted, updated and cultivated by its practitioners.

## **Mapping the Content of Social Movement**

SMs are a type of group action. They are crystallized expressions of the hidden tensions, aspirations, ideals, ideologues, critique, anger and disappointments that emerge from the deep, hidden or emerging social or structural conditions of a people or their society. Therefore, society is the crucible in which a SM is fostered or rocked. It is obvious that the arena of SMs is indisputably in a very broad sense, Society, involving collectivities.

Further, in society, the changing representations of society are equally important in defining a movement. For instance an industrial society, harkening to Marxian ideology envisioned materialistic gains of better working conditions, well-being and inclusive role in political representation. These SMs more so labour movements, had a limited focus based on 'class conflict.' The post –industrial societal concerns are neither so homogenous nor limited. The 'class paradigm' in the post-industrial context has collapsed as an inadequate explanatory model in a post- industrial society because

the SMs in this society like anti-racism, feminist movement and the like do not have class identification as its base. In fact, NSMs have become transnational movements cutting across all boundaries of identities, groups and space. So, the conceptions and representations of society from industrial to post-industrial, modern to postmodern, determine the nature and type of SMs. As the Africans say ‘When the music changes, so does the dance.’

Society is also in a constant state of flux. Specific structural contradictions or gaps keep emerging over time due to this flux, creating certain conflicts or conditions that demand change. Thus, a movement is always sitting on the precipice of change, waiting to happen. There is always the potential for a movement and what differentiates one society from another is whether the opportunity is seized. What differentiates the intensity and sustainability of action is whether it is taken forward by a leader or a group and the commitment and organizational ability, of the people involved. For instance, the collapse of the Berlin Wall on November 9th 1989 saw the end of the GDR but this did not happen overnight. It was linked spatially, historically and ideologically through a series of events, movements and counter movements happening across China, Russia, Hungary, West Germany to preparations in GDR that had started in 1982. The opportunity for change was seized because the organizational process had been put into motion and the collective action had generated a momentum. Thus, it is important to reiterate that SMs are one of the key agents of bringing about change. They are instrumental in creating awareness about the condition of a particular society.

But this should not let one assume that Social Change is synonymous with SMs. As mentioned earlier, SM is change waiting to happen in a society but is not Social Change in itself. Social change is a very broad, overarching, all pervasive sustained and continuing condition or social reality. Social change can be considered a product of SMs. SMs need not also be a pervasive constituent of Society.

Hence, SMs are not a universal phenomenon, whereas Social Change is omnipresent. For instance, the Women’s Suffrage Movement began in 1866 with a petition to the British Parliament, demanding inclusion of women in suffrage reform. The movement went on till WW1 with the concerted efforts of many feminists and supporters from a broad social base and from different ideologies. This demand was fulfilled under the Weimar republic in 1918. The point to note here is that it altered the condition of women all over Europe. Women across Europe celebrated their identity under the Banner of International Women’s Day . They united to fight for equality and justice as women workers laboring shoulder to shoulder with men. There was an irrevocable shift in the perception and status of women thereafter which can be perceived as social change, a byproduct of the Universal Suffrage Movement. The Social change regarding gender equations was deep and broad based, its roots originating in a SM. This significant agenda of promoting gender balance still continues to date, through perceptible shifts and changes more so, after globalization. In Toto, social change is a universal phenomenon prevalent in all human societies (and even among some lower order species where there is organized behavior like the ants, with a capacity to transfer learnt behavior) made necessary by man’s need to survive and adapt to different locations among different kinds of people. SMs are not such an all pervasive, indispensable constituent of society.

Moreover, SMs can be located in specific time, place, or event as they have a cognizable source of origin and an apparent trajectory unlike Social Change. As Rajendra Singh clarifies they have a definite career and a life span (Rajendra Singh, 2001). Further, SMs are explicitly organized assertions or contestations for or against some norms, practices, policies, structures or systems whereas Social change may not bear such organizational character.

Another feature to note is that SMs have as its motive or root, some form of conflict. As SMs are large informal groupings of individuals or organizations, attempting some form of redress, it is obvious that contestations, dissents, protests and resistance are the core characteristic of such collectivities.

This should not lead to a presumption that all conflicts are resolved through SMs or that existence of conflict presupposes existence of a SM. Structural imbalances and collective discontent that emerge out of the gaps in a society and shared denial and deprivation expressed collectively, is a SM. No society is completely homogenous, or in a state of perfect equilibrium. Voices of dissent and discontent will always exist, more so in those societies that are pluralistic, comprising a varied diaspora. Added to this, a democratic polity will have more scope for airing dissent through SMs. The web of destabilization within a polity is a potential political opportunity but it does not always translate into increased protest.

A significant contribution by Ruud Koopmans describes two kinds of manifestations of political opportunities—one, top down and the other, bottom up and the reality comprising a mixture of both. When the hierarchical structures are watertight or the regime is too authoritarian to make room for protest, dissent is possible through elite support (Ruud Koopmans, 2004). For instance, Mr. Gorbachov initiated through gentle prodding, public debates directed against the opponents of Glasnost. Collective support from the grass roots is equally necessary to exploit political opportunities as the Chipko movement demonstrates. The bottom up approach exposes the latent weaknesses inherent in a society by opening up of a public debate. The initial stages of the Anna Hazare movement against corruption got its steam from the civil society participants and more importantly, very ordinary people speaking as one voice.

To sum up, SMs are enacted in society comprising networks of social relations and determined by the ideologues, values, structures, norms, dissents/concerns of the participants. The type of SM is determined by the condition or conceptualization of the society in which the movement is enacted. They are either micro or macro collectivities entailing group action with a specific time frame or life cycle. The focus maybe change or transformation, with limited/ vast, deep/ superficial impacts entailing conflicts, struggle, dissents or demand for rights/entitlements. In other words, SMs' terrain is the society. Its fabric is dependent on the physical, mental and spiritual resources at its disposal and by the way these resources are structured /harnessed/mobilized through its different groups. They are also directed by the manner in which human rights, dignity and individual spaces are protected/defended/preserved or destroyed. They are also influenced by the ensuing structural, political, social and cultural imbalances or identity crises that emerge in sharing / distributing/expressing these elements as perceived or in actuality, by different stakeholders of society locally, nationally or globally.

Further, social change and SMs are both processes and not the cause and effect, respectively. In everyday life, both influence each other begging the chicken-egg syndrome. Both are in states of 'becoming' constantly making and breaking each other, as it were. As Mr. Rajendra Singh opines, this inter-linkage can be expressed as an extension or continuation of each other (Rajendra Singh, 2001).

This drives home the point that singular as a SM is to a particular society, SMs are also widely expressed social phenomena as the existence of society is universal. However, this cannot lead us to presume that the nature and type of SMs, irrespective of the society in which they are fostered are homogenous. The core of a SM definitely has a few decisive traits but, the similarity ends there. The core of a SM is conflict and potential for a SM to emerge is universal but the nature, form, direction, pattern and focus changes with time, space and culture.

### **New Social Movements (NSMs)**

The current scenario is replete with terms like postmodernism, neo-liberalism, participatory democracy, alternative development strategies, activism, polymorphous change and the like, that only serve to underline the complexities of social processes. Moreover, the information explosion has resulted in a revolution of sorts, in the way people access, process, organize and apply information. Possibilities for multiple actions, manifold solutions, and media-supported action or virtual action exist. The individual can spread the word for a cause using a cell-phone, media and social networking sites before you can utter Rip Van Winkle. Further, one can get people to congregate faster, for collective action. It is in this context that it should also be underscored that the dynamics of New Social Movements are located through a paradigm shift in the understanding of society.

In the 1990s NSM theorists Jurgan Habermas (Jurgan Habermas, 1985), Touraine (Touraine, 2006), Melucci (Melucci, 1996) began espousing different causes. Their inquiry revolved around the structural tensions around which movements were formed because the 90s saw a drastic change in world power structures, ideologies and issues. The postmodern world acknowledged the need to shift approach and analyses from Eurocentric to the Oriental. Cultural, pluralistic forms, narratives, traditions were given a rethink. The belief that an idea moved a group only if it had 'cultural resonance' started gaining ground. NSMs understood that SMs were more about interactive social processes and were predominantly plural for that very reason. Crossley observes that:

'NSM theory, ...generally focuses upon the ways in which social movements seek to achieve change in cultural, symbolic and sub-political domains, sometimes collectively but also sometimes by way of self-change. It takes seriously the feminist slogan that 'the personal is political.' (Rajendra Singh, 2001).

Polymorphous expressions thus gained currency ranging from anti-racism to civil libertarianism, from collective to personal change. It also reflected shifts from modernist to postmodernist, as there was a major shift and interrogation of the growth and development model from the Western perspective. Thinkers like Edward Said have popularized discourses from the Oriental perspective, thereby shifting the very foundation of the modernist homogenizing agenda of measuring prosperity in

Eurocentric terms. The very wheels on which the vehicle of capitalism and neo-liberalism ran, were being re-examined.

Melucci says that movements, far from being unitary, are 'made of multiple motivations, relations and orientations,' (Melucci, 1996) and 'their origins and outcomes are equally heterogeneous.' (Jonet Conway, 2007). In fact, he adds that NSMs unlike working class movements go beyond seeking material gains. NSMs challenge the very notions of politics and society in their attempt to realign among many other things, the individual and community space. He goes on to add that SMs overlap to grow and learn from each other.

NSMs emphasized that shared culture was central to a movement's sustenance and sustainability as they are essentially cultural endeavours, animated by the identity of its participants. The identities are derived from the shared narratives, ethos, rites, rituals, dress, rallies, symbols, ceremonies and the like which are central to a movement formation, action and identity. Thus, NSMs focus more on the interactive processes of talk, dialogue, debate and discourses.

This paradigm shift emerged as a result of the rise of issues that were non-materialistic, rights-oriented and humanistic and goals that were neither solely localized nor homogenous. Participants were becoming global and the issues, international. Actions were motivated in the direction of dignity in human existence, rights to rights and entitlements, rather than on ideological contestations of 'isms'.

More importantly, NSMs in the context of pluralist societies are also plural in form, approach, expression, and in the type of conflicts or deprivations they negotiate. This is a natural concomitant of the shift from a modernist to a post-modernist society wherein post-modern societies have questioned intensely, the growth and development paradigm or are negotiating for alter development strategies. This context necessitates new strategies and approaches for SMs. A new paradigm of collective action was required to address the emerging needs of a post-modern world, vastly different from the modern.

In brief, the 90s were new times and challenging times, rising to the needs of a new society in the making. This society was vastly different from the modernist society of disorientation, fragmentation, parochialism, nationalism and its consequent disillusionment; a far cry from Eliot's "Wasteland". A new world order with the collapse of communist Russia and the breakdown of the Berlin Wall realigned forces in Europe and brought an end to the Cold War. The communication revolution with its associated technological software revolution recalibrated the role of so-called developing countries with ventures like offshoring and outsourcing. In the words of Thomas.L.Friedman, the world had become "flat" offering 'a level playing field' to all who cared to play the new game of enterprise. A new hope and myriad aspirations and opportunities arose for the developing countries wherein they could stake a competitive claim in a larger share of the global pie (Thomas. L. Friedman, 2005).

However, new problems have emerged with the new world order and its emerging power equations, mandating a paradigm shift in SM strategies. The role of the State in ensuring welfare of the individuals is shrinking. A vast and deep abyss has developed between Civil Society and the State due to the intense market oriented strategies of

the conglomerates. With information accumulation and its concentration with the organization being the order of the day, breakdown in communication seems a natural outcome. Power holders in industry have usurped the very process of communication. The contemporary world that rests on the dictum of “Information is Power” has unleashed a new social force. It has jeopardized the autonomy of the individual over his basic right to live as he chooses to do so. NSMs respond to the dehumanizing process of the loss of right to dignity in existence by raising a clarion call for freedom of informed choice, to live a life of dignity with rights to one’s body and mind. Claims to reproductive rights, Gay/Lesbian rights etc., are the new foci of NSMs as the minority contestations that had been marginalized, are being engaged with, seriously.

Added to this, personal space is also being encroached by expanding markets mentored and supported by the State, in the name of economic development. This has resulted in control and domination of the State. It is making inroads into all aspects of an individual’s life, making NSM theorists feel that the individual is a passive, defenseless recipient of the double domination of the State and Market. It is in this context that movement theorists have felt the need for voicing the strategy of ‘self-defense’ of the community and society against the combined intrusions of State and market. For instance, currently, political locations apart, a large group of people in India are expressing their fears against FDI as a defense strategy, to protect their unorganized sector and traditional markets. They have expressed the need to protect the varied and threatened local market heritages against the homogenizing big players in retail business.

With rampant encroachment of private space of individuals through the agencies of state and market, a new kind of self-awareness is emerging in the civil society. By civil society, I refer to a concept that is fundamental to democratic governance and SMs here. Civil society as an ‘intersection of the economic, political and social relations that human beings enter into in their collective existence.’ (Jayaram, 2005). As and when the civil society shrinks due to increasing State Control, struggles of a diverse kind including issues from all spheres of life like ecological, feminist, ethnic, regional, identity, displacement, anti-development emerge. As Jean Cohen observes, the sites of the struggles go beyond the traditional workplaces, farms or fields. The agenda of NSMs is directed by the currents of a contemporary post-modern world.

NSMs have also abandoned the Marxist paradigm of class struggle as SMs like anti-racism, anti-nuclear, disarmament struggles are neither class struggles nor do they demonstrate any class affinity. In NSMs ‘there is a general collapse of the “class paradigm” according to Rajendra Singh (Rajendra Singh, 2001).

With diverse struggles going beyond class, borders, regions and the sites being pluralistic and heterogeneous, NSMs have become transnational. Thus, most of the issues are with reference to human conditions of existence and to claiming the rights to rights. The human condition in a postmodern, society is at the core, a universal condition, albeit with different strokes in its expressions. Through the digital world, people have found the means to exchange, collaborate and negotiate globally, as conflicts and tensions are now international with issues like nuclear pollution, peace, disarmament, going beyond terrain or group identities.

NSM strategies generally evolve through grass root actions or grass root politics as they have experientially found mobilizing micro-movements, very effective. This is where civil society plays a major role, as NSMs do not directly deal with the economy or state, being too vast to address local issues effectively.

Significant facts that emerge from the direction and manner of NSMs are that they do not want to retrieve the agenda of a homogenized undifferentiated so-called developed society of the modernist world. So also, they respect the dignity of difference and in as much, try to struggle for preserving and maintaining plurality, within the fundamental framework of democracy, inclusiveness, participation and representation. Most important is that as Jean Cohen says, the NSM actors accept that the State and market economy are here to stay. The base is heterogeneous and the strategies, unlike the classical movements, defined by their plurality of purpose and orientations. NSMs aim to reorganize the network of relations among State, Society and the economy as well as create self-awareness in the members of the civil society, motivating the people to participate, group, regroup and negotiate. NSMs are therefore integrating forces galvanizing people from all the corners of the earth under an umbrella of active global/local concern. Moreover, NSMs reject the traditional bases of self-identification like right, left, liberal or conservative. Claus Offe locates the participants in the new-middle class people who work in the service sectors, a few elements of the old middle class and people from the peripheral sector like the students, homemakers and retired persons.

To summarise, the salient points of NSMs as pointed out by T.K.Oommen (Oommen, 2010)

are as follows:

1. 'The social background(s) of the movement participants are structurally diffuse.'
2. NSMs do not get straitjacketed into compartments of ideology or "isms". They reflect a spectrum of ideas and values.
3. NSMs have not only reinvented/resurrected/modified old identities but have also created new identities
4. '...NSMs...embody counter cultures; '
5. ' NSM are concerned with intimate aspects of human life such as dietary practices, dress patterns, sexuality and the like; ... '
6. New strategies and styles of mobilization have emerged predominantly utilising non-violence or civil disobedience mechanisms
7. NSMs interrogate and engage with the style and functioning of traditional political parties and as a consequence of their engagement may give rise to new types of political parties like "AamAadmi Party," a political party in India.
8. They 'tend to be diffuse, decentralized and segmented.'

### **New Social Movements and Globalisation**

One major propellant in Society, of what is currently termed as New Social Movements (NSMs) is the advent of Globalization. This phenomenon arrived quite early with the advent of decolonization and much later with the entry of computers, revolutionized markets, market strategies, mass consumers and the media. Galvanizing these forces meant also, a major upheaval of social structures, geo-political power equations and altered or altering social interactions. Change of a vast

and profound kind created gaps and imbalances in structures, functions, institutions/organizations and people to people inter-relations.

Globalization therefore, laid bare the underbelly of globalization which has been scarred by multifarious disconcerting issues-human rights, ecological concerns, development interrogations, displacements, identity politics, identity locations/assertions and unresolved consequences of modernity. But what was singular in the global/local expressions of discontent after Globalization were:

- 1.The polymorphous methods employed to address issues
- 2.The sheer heterogeneity of the emerging problems that could not have homogenous solutions.
3. The local terrain of the problems which were unique and demanded specific solutions in consonance with the area, its society and its people.

Earlier, decolonization had initiated a process of assertion of cultural identities consciously or unconsciously, in the act of nation building across the globe. From the 60s of the twentieth century, with the advent of the computer, the world became not only a different place, but a world where there could be no time reversals. Culture and identity studies caught the attention of movement theorists and social scientists. With the decolonized nations engaged in nation building and the dismantling of the concept of the Second World, along with the emergence of the eastern nations as powerful economic entities, not only did the world become more localized, but also the local spaces became globalized instituting paradigm shifts in our understanding of the world. Simultaneously, there was a growing awareness that the modernist development agenda of homogenization of the world would no longer be possible with the emergence of multiple identities of nations, people, sub-altern discourses and methodologies to contest challenges.

Let us consider this brave new world and its major game-changing events. Profound shifts in technology use and Communication, the Russian narrative of Perestroika and Glasnost, the interconnectedness of the globe, the dissolution of the Cold War, the collapse of the Berlin Wall and its aftermath of political realignment, the acknowledgement of the limitations of Marxian analysis for interpreting the emergence of non-class identities, the significant focus on politics of identity building, the emergence of cultural studies, the accentuated discourses of the oriental vision and deconstruction of Eurocentrism, the failure of liberal theory to resolve the discontents of modernity, rising mass and popular culture, growing power of the social media, post-modern, post-industrial studies, are the axes on which the brave new Global world has aligned itself. They are either the products or the processes of Globalization.

Given the fact that Globalization is a powerful phenomenon that has steered the direction of the cultural, social, economic and political aspects of all nations and peoples, it should also be admitted that it has kicked up the greatest dust in the sandstorm of movements. This is more so because, the powerful agenda of globalization which is, homogenization through development, has been critiqued and contested in no uncertain terms, by anti-globalization movements and alter development theories. A powerful connection exists between SMs and Globalization because it has sparked off the greatest resistance on various fronts and from different

peoples. Postmodern studies and the aspiration for participatory democracy have fired the possibility of sharing myriad pluralistic visions and spaces in today's world.

The postmodern world is concerned with re-composition of society. With powerful systems controlling the agencies of communication, human beings are becoming conscious of the need for finding and constituting the self, culture and identity. Human beings are also aware of the myriad complexities that exist in the attempt to find locations in an increasingly complex and volatile society. Added to this is the fact that the strong market mechanism controlled by conglomerates, decimates the identity of the individual. Therefore, gender identity, ecology question and issues of human dignity have become the concerns for SMs in a post- industrial, globalized world. With global institutions' roles redefined, multinational strangleholds, transnational capitalist class and transnational state, there has been an upsurge of international advocacy networks and transnational SMs. Moreover, there is simultaneous assertion of identity in this world as development without a human face is being interrogated. This has also created parallel micro SMs and grass root movements. NSMs respect these inter-linkages and privilege inclusive models for moving ahead.

NSMs have attempted to synthesize the different streams of thought in movement studies. In fact, dynamic SMs are incubating new strategies and practices. They demonstrate that new perspectives and alternatives go hand in hand and the post neo-liberal world has taken up emerging new alternatives to solve many global crises. For example, NSMs are not fighting shy of locating local solutions to engage the formidable adversary of globalizing agencies. The Farmers' protest from across 20 States that utilized the narrative of the Quit India Movement against Monsanto, the transnational Seed Company at a demonstration on the eve of commemorating Quit India Movement in New Delhi in August 2013 is a case in point ("You have quit",2013). There is recognition of the need to integrate the local and global tools to fight for human rights issues, with the admission that some micro strategies need to be home-grown. NSMs acknowledge the importance of such tools. For example, there has been an ongoing assertion of the identity of intersex persons (commonly called hijras or eunuchs in the local parlance), as active members of participatory democracy in India. The agenda aligns itself on a universal front to the LGBTII movement contestations to identity. But, in local parlance the fight for gender justice through the local identity of a "Mangalamukhi " connotes interrogation of deep- rooted bias going beyond the legal or economic frontiers. NSMs adapt local positive narratives to assimilate this socially alienated community into the mainstream as it understands that political or economic empowerment of the "development" agenda does not ensure social acceptance.

## **Conclusion**

The societal power dynamics in new millennium has qualitatively changed due to the fact the society has become more virtual, seamless and borderless unlike the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This societal qualitative shift is the direct off shoot of the emerging new information technology. This technology is converting exponentially tangibles of yesterday to intangibles of today, physical geographic centric goods and merchandises to virtual omnipresent non-physical services that could be easily transmitted globally in the form of data. It is this qualitative change in society that has created a global virtual society. This is a borderless society as such its dynamics is dependent on the borderless ideas. The 20<sup>th</sup> century social movements were driven by compartmentalised ideology of isms and class struggle because the societies were deeply separated and divided geographically. The social movements of the new millennium are NEW in the sense they driven by IDEAS than ideology as the global society today is borderless, amorphous and all pervading in its dynamics.

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