# New Social Movements in Nepal

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### Introduction

Most of the contemporary social movements[1] have emerged outside the mainstream political system, political parties and formal institutional life. Today they are reshaping the political and communicative boundaries of nation-states. Their debate centres on both the state and non-state activities and they tend to engage all who are affected by the issues of public interest they advocate. The space for social movements in society has become a source for challenging constitutional status quo and for preparing the community for social transformation. Inspired by the non-hierarchical, participatory form of democracy, human rights, social justice, environmental preservation and peace, the social movements have opened up a space for vertical (caste, class and gender) and horizontal (professional groupings and intra-ruling class) interactions in society for articulating public needs and concerns that remain unsatisfied by the governance systems. Due to deepening social polarization created by the hegemony of the political class dominating the systems, the social forces attempt to open new routes to political access, communication, participation and activism so as to extend democracy to the marginalized. In this sense, social movements have emerged as better catalysts of democratic functioning in authoritarian societies and are more than the "collective behaviour," which emerges in response to problematic situations—anomie, riots, demonstrations, agitation, etc. These new social movements are beacons of post-modern, post-industrial or post-capitalist society because they aim to de-traditionalise modern society by establishing the sanctity of living species and conserving the natural bases of human life.

The post-modern knowledge contests, questions and even deconstructs a number of assumptions of modernity-based social science and the rationality of enlightenment articulating that reason is a sort of illegitimate power because it excludes and disqualifies the existence of pre-modern local identity, authority and knowledge located in "particular circumstances of time and place" (Hayek, 1945:3) beneath the required level of conceptualisation. How can those excluded and marginalized accept the illegitimate power morally binding? Over use of such power has evoked local people's instinctive expression of revolt. Postmodernists posit a critique of the role of science and instrumental rationality in modern society. Such rationality lays stress more on the efficient marshalling of means for technical control of society rather than its emancipation from authority, oppression and continuous de-politicisation. For postmodernists, too many reasons and too little feeling towards the people, makes social scientists uncreative, bottled up and heartless mercenary.

The contemporary social movements have localized and pluralized the concept of legitimacy and normalized a new form of collective action aiming to alter the medium of knowledge, communication and the structure of social, economic and political power. Both as a response to the information revolution and the inability of traditional political system to respond to popular needs and aspirations, such movements are attempting to create new political space and forms of power for participatory forms of politics. In this

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[1] Mario Diani argues, "A social movement is a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity" (2002:165).

sense, they reject the subordinate development of certain groups in society and link their struggle for social justice against the unjust structural and constitutional foundations of national order, which seem increasingly unable to provide security to its citizens. The quality of discourse in the thought and actions of social forces has instilled among them new forms of consciousness where they feel that the national state is subordinated to the imperative of national and global capital and unable to act in the interest of its citizens. This consciousness is transforming people from being spectators to actors. In some cases, such movements have helped to rectify the situation of gross maldistribution in access to power, wealth, education and other institutional resources of the state, market and civil society by removing the condition of marginality, bringing a coalition of social struggles of peripheries into the centre of discourse and challenging the system constructively.

This paper briefly narrates the concept, nature and implications of contemporary social movements in general and Nepal in particular especially focusing on women, Dalit and trade unions, assuming that the movements of these forces are coming into sharper discourse and shaping the political dynamics of social change. Proceeding from the different conceptions of social power, they have built a new web of connections extending across the national borders and overwhelming the power of the state to manage politics, economics and society. As it is very difficult to capture and generalize various types of social movements, such as human rights, ecological, ethnic (*janajati*) and nationalities, religious and regional groupings, only a few that are constantly struggling to establish just order in society are discussed. Not all of them, however, can be said to be democratic in aims because some of them link modern politics to the evidence of history, psychology and anthropology. Especially, proliferation of clan and lineage based pre-modern associations of solidarity among the high caste Bahuns, Chhetris and Newars and ethnic Magars, Rais, Limbus and Thakalis are being redefined and strengthened in the modern Nepal context. Nepal is a country of minorities with no ethnic group making up more than 18 percent of population. The *aadibasi* or indigenous people's movement also draws attention to the misery and destruction of ecology and culture and, consequently, evokes anti-modern, ethnocentric reactions. Many of the groups are struggling to sustain their physical, economic and cultural survival.

**Rupturing Functions of Society**

Information revolution and the growing incongruity of society, economy and the polity in the nation-state system are continuously deconstructing the existing functions of society as a self-reproducing system leading to proliferation of new social stratification. Nation-states have often contrived and codified nationalism selectively, determining specified divisions of those included and those who are not. Those states, which seek to manage diversity by manipulating and reinforcing differences, denial of rights, forced conversion and expulsion, face crisis of institutional legitimacy and organizational commitment to provide public goods—both productive and distributive. The state, the market and civil society of Nepal are dependent on international regimes for their survival and development. This post-national constellation has effectively disconnected the constructive "assemblage of political and legal systems, economic cycles and national traditions within the borders of a territorial state" (Habermas, 2003:89).

As result, the recrudescence of the excluded sub-national societal forces is often aimed at forcing themselves into inclusion in the structures of governance. This dialectic of inclusion and exclusion has often posed tensions in the management of multiple centres of political power such as the state, market, civil society and the international regime as well as eroded the national commons and the public sphere, thus marking the logic of collective action extremely heterogeneous. Management guru Peter Drucker

argues that the "organization of the post-capitalist society of organizations is a destabilizer. Because its function is to put knowledge to work—on tools, processes, and products; on work; on knowledge itself—it must be organized for constant change. It must be organized for innovation" (1993: 56) for what Josephs Schumpeter calls "creative destruction." At the social level, diverse peoples have already started to construct, invent and reinforce the image of a common identity for trying to nationalize the state.

The politics of new social movements cuts across the most exclusionist boundaries of power and the system and stimulates multiple resistance against hegemony whether located inside the state, political system, government, political parties or other powerful social, cultural and economic institutions. They do so by sensitising the social energy of victim, excluded and marginalized people and fostering their visibility and voice in the decision-making. Inspired by promises of better futures and founded on a shared set of beliefs and a sense of affinity, these movements are intrinsically related to democracy and inclusion, whether local, national or global. New social movement theorists believe that power is not inherently rooted in governmental authority but in the ability of people to acquire it by effective resistance. The increasing denationalisation of the state and the market forces and growing de-territorialisation of decision-making continue to denationalise social movements pushing them towards acculturation to global culture. If this process continues it will produce a "failed culture" where natives will not have any will, beyond the accumulation of money, to live together in the nation-state (Falk, 1996:32).

Marx explains the reasons of *alienation* of workers under capitalist relations singling out the separation of workers from products as causes for misery and conscious class action. Emile Durkheim invented the concept of *anomie* to describe a situation where forced unequal division of labour in society creates deviant behaviour. Max Weber laid stress on the *rationality deficit* in the modern society causing the withdrawal of consent and legitimacy crisis. To Alain Tourine, social movements bring into play "a double dialectic of domination and contestation." McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly offer three main orienting concepts for the growth of contemporary social movements: "political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing process" (1999:144). New social movement theories "seek to explain the anti-institutional nature of contemporary movements which are said to pursue radical social transformation through mainly cultural means" (Gladwin, 1994: 59). The common preconditions for social movements are *construction of collective identity*, *close interpersonal relations*, *exposure to similar political opportunities* and *engagement in collective action.*

Anthony Giddens believes that modernity excludes those groups of people who do not fit into its domain of reason, universal knowledge and progress. The mounting discontent of marginalized and isolated groups and their fight against oppression, inequality and injustice underlie the motive of new social movements. Especially peace, human rights, ecological, feminist and people's movements at the grassroots level have transformed the nature of top-down and class-based politics. This process has offered the possibility of politicising people at the grassroots level, institutionalising bottom-up decision-making and widening their participation in the public life. In other words, new social movements have helped the people to reclaim sovereignty and universalise their needs, rights and responsibilities.

The modern rationality is, however, also tied with the notion of freedom—freedom from irrational, pre-rational and non-rational traditions and false consciousness. It questions the traditional forms of legitimacy rooted in ascribed rights, privileges and the importance of unconsciousness in public and private life. The failure of the program of mainstream leftist parties to eliminate poverty through re-distributive mechanisms and of the rightist political parties by the efficient allocation of resources through market

mechanisms resurrected the necessity of what Anthony Giddens calls "life politics." "Life politics is a politics of identity as well as of choice" (Giddens, 2000:93). Life politics is, therefore, considered to be capable of enhancing the "reflexivity" of the groups it purports to address. To him, politics of choice is uplifting even for the oppressed and inarticulate population.

Social movements are symbiotically locked to the politics of self-actualisation or an emancipatory form of politics. It is the politics of life-chances because it tries to achieve what Jurgen Habermas calls liberation of the life-world from the penetration of technological, bureaucratic and economic rationality in everyday life (1995:335-7). New social movements differ from the old class-based trade union movements or the movements of political parties in the sense that the former symbolizes "inclusionary" politics in a highly stratified society and economy and seeks "emotional fulfilment," while the latter aspires for material achievement. Economic deprivation was the main source of conflicts in old movements while affluence and opportunities provided an impetus for new movements. The newly stratified modern society requires an individual who is rational, flexible, mobile and educated to compete in the knowledge-based economy. In this context, political socialization means learning to be rational and adaptive to changing norms, values and institutions.

To Giddens, new social movements contain "the democratic potential of late modernity,"[2] which tries to modernize social life without destroying the positive elements of cultural traditions and developing a path of social change. Fearful of technological, bureaucratic and corporate domination of society, these movements also try to capture "reformed vision of rationality, universality and evolutionary development" (Tucker, 1998: 127). In the industrial society, identity was subsumed at the level of class and social movements arose out of unsatisfied re-distributive demands and aspirations within the sovereign territorial nation-state. Distributional conflicts were centred on the expectation of equality, justice and participation. New social movements transcend class bias, tend to project identity at the cosmopolitan level and attempt to seek new solutions to newer types of risks and challenges produced by a new modernity of what social theorist Ulrich Beck calls, "risk society. " As specialized knowledge becomes widely available in public life, people free themselves from social structures to define their own lifestyles and identities" (Tucker, 1998:145). In highly specialized post-industrial societies conflicts occur at the level of knowledge, symbols, information and communication.

David E. Apter brings many social movements under what he calls "inversionary discourse" because they attempt to disrupt both "boundaries and jurisdiction as conventionally given" and "activate events which bring out all the powers of the state, revealing its hegemony" (1993:33). McCarthy and Zald offer a model of social movements as "rational, instrumental and increasingly professionalised as organizations mature and pursue their goals using a repertoire of informal and unconventional means, as well as by negotiation with political parties, institutions and the state" (Gladwin, 1994:60). Employing a "critical theory" they often resort to post-modern discourses, which continuously challenges the hegemony of power and seeks epistemological break from modernist discourse. To them, victims are the agents of transformational change but their success lies in what Theda Skocpol calls, "the dynamic of political culture, coalition building and agency" (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 1999:146). The synergy arising out of the interconnectedness and simultaneity of actions continues to dramatize the goal orientation of new social movement

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[2] " Later modernity is increasingly characterized by a replacement of bureaucratic party systems with a mediatic populism based upon a seamless fusion of money and technology" (Stewart, 2001:233).

actors. Such movements are the cornerstones of a praxis, which forges the ideals of movement actors into action.

## Chaos and Complexity of Social Movements in Nepal

Are contemporary social movements a response to the structural instability and degeneration of Nepalese politics or just a reflection of normal coalition and bargaining politics? What basic values do new social movements of women, Dalits and trade unions carry? What sorts of implications do these movements contain for national unity? Are these movements indigenously inspired or externally induced? Can they fit into a larger framework of public action or symbolize spontaneous expressions of social energy devoid of a clear objective? How do they harmonise their narrow social action and broader public interest and public action? Obviously, these are important research questions related to the dynamics of contemporary social movements in Nepal. But, research on these fields has been overlooked largely because it was difficult for the historians and social scientists to tie them down.

In Nepal, governance historically derived its rationality and authority from the notion of *dharma*, institutional duties of the holders of power and the governed. Classical Hindu-Buddhist treatises lay stress on rational, instrumental action (*rajdharma*) for the achievement of common good and, by implication, justify the revolt or anti-authority struggle of people if rulers deviate from the path laid by *dharma*. The anti-authority struggles of the governed, according to Foucault, embody "transversal struggles" aiming "power effect" on the "immediate enemy" (2000,11). The movements of people from the state of nature to society and freedom from the arbitrariness of state have been historically constructed through their self-transforming efforts. The state acted as an enforcer and mediator of the interests of contending social castes and classes. Caste hierarchy and feudal system created a society of many divisions, and respect for authority by the people was passed on from the old feudal regime to multiparty democracy. Since the unification of the country in 1768, the founder of modern Nepal Prithvi Narayan Shaha and the later Rana rulers (1856-1950), fashioned the Nepali state according to Hindu code of law where the state class acted as a patron, thinker and decision-makers, and society abided by them. In particular, the Shaha rulers tried to create the superiority of the sovereign state over other forms of rule and sought the centrality of national loyalty to political power. National communicative space, which existed before unification through the spread of Nepali language and culture, helped to fuse nationalism and political space into the *Nepal Mandala*, and its adoration in *Nepal Mahatme*.

Social reform movements, which started in the late 1920s, broke the wall of silence, contested the power of the Rana oligarchy founded on primordial ancestry, expressed various forms of domestic disaffection and envisioned the possibility of making Nepal a fairer and democratic nation. They invoked the lesions of classical Hindu-Buddhist treatises—*Vedas*, *Ramayan*, *Mahabharat, Bhagawat Geeta, Arthshastra, etc.* to awaken the Nepalis from slumber, helped to invent their own *karma* and renew their *élan vital*, the living energy. Nepali societies were fully opened to the influence of Gangetic belt and Tibet and were interacting with other systems, generating consciousness for fellowship and breaking the chain of ignorance, powerlessness and inequality. Hindu-Buddhist conception of *sanatan dharma* (cosmological order) holds that people are committed to a highest order interest in living with others in order to attain *nirvana*. Behind each specific reform, such as abolition of child marriage, granting formal rights to people, stopping burning of widows, introduction of political education through *gurukul* and *sastrartha* (discourse), etc. lay a desire to replace self-serving familism of ruling culture with an ethic of service and responsibility to reshape the

nation. After the application of modernity and democracy in Nepal in the late 1940s, *dharma* lost some of its public utility and became a matter of concern only to those involved in spiritual quests.

The concept of democracy provided Nepalis a "reference point" to interpret their negative conditions of life and transcend those circumstances through empowerment solutions, involving their self-organization into social groups and political parties. Efforts to overcome political alienation from the status of *raitis* (subjects) and recognition as *nagrik* (citizens), was the source of social and political movements. These efforts were also aimed to bridge the gap between the "objective conditions" of peoples' existence and their own subjectivity, as sovereign citizens. The political movements of the late 1940s, where many social movements were infused, aimed to create a civil or constitutional state capable of realizing the needs and freedom of people. The rebellious spirits of critical mass released the pent-up feelings among the citizens and violated all social taboos and restrictions aiming to contribute significantly to the creation of a liberal political culture. In that sense, the popular upsurge of 1950 tried to introduce the concept of modernity conforming international conscience for a change from a feudalistic set up to a pluralistic form of governance. That was the beginning of a political culture of weakening kinship ties, caste system, local community, and the questioning of religious authority and tradition.

The system of law and constitutional rights replaced *dharma* marking a fundamental shift in the system of relations between society and the state, political institutions and social groups, and the transition of society from the inherited to self-chosen, duty-bound to right based, co-dependency to conflict based and nation-state centrism to a supranational public. For the citizens, it was a collective learning process about the functioning of modern organizations and a shift in their roles from the ascribed to the achieved and the acceptance of universal norms over the local ones. One can also discern a great mutation of ideas in Nepal. Even ordinary citizens began to believe that democracy cannot be imposed from above but is something built from below. Social and political forces invoked both *dharma* and democracy to inspire the people to oppose the old order and contest its legitimacy on spiritual, legal-rational and revolutionary grounds. Nepal's legal system is based on Hindu legal concepts and English Common Law tradition. Subsequently, after 1950, the installation of a centralized, aristocratic and bureaucratic establishment in the form of Westminster system produced a new constellation of political class that did not know how to run *rajdharma*, and statecraft became dependent on bureaucracy, aristocracy and the business community. This constellation submerged into the materiality of state culture it began to construct state and society guided by the ideology of "nationalisation," rationalisation and constitutionalisation. The constitutional drafting process in Nepal often reflected the power equation of political class in the commanding height of political economy rather than state-society equilibrium and the representation of social interests. This new social engineering proved counterproductive for the growth of economic entrepreneurship, social modernization and political development.

This does not mean that new social movements derive their strength from political alienation or disappointments with the native history, literature, culture and ideology rather they grew out of the discrepancy between democratic ideals and undemocratic performance of the regime. The fuelling of discontent of those left behind, left out and stepped upon by hegemonic groups claiming to represent the nation-state formed the ideological basis of the new social movements. During the Panchayat regime (1960-1990) the democratic ideals of a critical mass of change leaders helped to keep political movements aiming social and political change alive. The system tried to overcome political alienation of people through *Nepalisation*, cultural alienation through

*Sanskritization* (lower castes of people learning and adopting the culture of higher caste people) and social alienation by co-optation, thus facilitating the articulation of social interests into political power and *politicising* the people with the notion of nationality. Each reform whether in the area of land, education, civil code, law and political practices sought social integration of people with system integration. Many civil associations, from cultural groupings, literary societies, educational institutions, cooperatives to social reform programs allowed space for civil society to articulate the power of the public against the domination of single-party Panchayat system and to express the voices of the common people.

The social and political movements pursued policy objectives congruent with—or, at least seemingly congruent with—the references of the public for democracy. After the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990 and the drafting of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal the same year, however, political leaders altered their stated positions to correspond to the expressed preference for market 'maximalism' policy and ideology. Since the days of unification until 1990 the decision-making process in Nepal remained patrimonial where the kings, Ranas and political leaders as patriarchs made decisions. The state class and its rivals were also state-centric in thinking. But, after 1990 as the political class assumed market ideology and left the diverse societies to organise the way they liked, the historic coherence between the state and society began to unravel. Paradoxically, the aspiration-driven politics of the politicians evoked the desire of social forces to struggle for freedom, equality and identity beyond the state structures. The post-1991 official policy of globalisation began to dislocate the political process, sought to create trans-national space for the economy and offered the rational choice for increasing de-politicisation in every area of public life.

This process generated discourses reinforcing the people of their identity capable of self-representation. In a short span of less than a decade, however, the entire political class was radically diseased by excessive privilege and set aside the promises of social transformation. Afflicted by corruption, authoritarianism, arbitrariness and violence, it took refuge to draconian measures to shield itself from public protest and dissenting voices and advocated the "crisis in democracy" mode of socialization through the media. As their utopian promise of a better future to citizens dissolved into dystopian nightmare, diverse societies of Nepal began to mobilise and revolt against the denial of social, economic and political security. The new social movements can now be expected to confront and reduce the growing democratic deficits and re-politicise the people for cultural regeneration, political trust and to prevent the country turning into a failed state as a result of prolonged constitutional gridlock and political stalemate.

The disconnection of the state class from the critical mass within various social groups engaged with various stakeholders at local, national and regional levels turned out to be fatal for Nepali democracy. The crisis in democracy occurred as reformist leaders, crazed by their power and by the fear of losing it, collaborated with the forces of status quo and weakened the state-society interactions at the periphery causing people to opt for a politics of difference. The real energy of new social movements, therefore, comes from newly honed political consciousness, contextual agenda framing process and organizing skills of critical masses within the oppressed and their supporters outside.

One major achievement of democracy in Nepal is the growth of critical mass in every social group, such as women, ethnic community, Dalits, religious and regional minorities, etc. If this critical mass located in various social subsystems are not integrated into the state, they might start the process of withdrawing consent and create a legitimacy crisis. Social movements gave fillip to the oppositional movements of political parties in 1950s, 1970s and late 1980s but as the latter succeeded in achieving their goals they pushed the social agenda into the backburner. The new social actors are,

therefore, starting their movements from the same point where the old class-based and party-oriented movements discarded their concerns. Effective resistance is a collective necessity for the oppressed, victims and the deprived for it liberates politics from pre-political *affno manchhe* ('clientalist') service orientation, anti-political rhetoric of businesspersons and hegemony of non-political forces (disciplinary agencies), and conditions its own reflexes. A democratic polity should ideally reflect the aspirations of its citizens to legitimise its power to govern. The other forms of legitimacy are losing relevance.

The problem faced by the Dalits is specific to Hindu caste orthodoxy. They are disadvantaged by the government policies, which have failed to account for the structural rigidity of the caste system that prevented their mobility to achieve positive social status. The Dalits were forced to accept *Sanskritization,* an acculturation to high caste Bahun-Chhetri-Newar culture. The Dalit movement in Nepal is, therefore, largely emancipatory in nature as they seek to renew selfhood by way of overcoming alienation, untouchability, de-humanisation and de-culturation by a process of critical self-learning, self-enlightenment and self-transcendence (*mukti*). Liberatory transformation abolishes the oppressive structure of power. It is also ascriptive in the sense that they are struggling for equal social integration in Hindu-Buddhist society rather than taking refuge to the exclusive appeal of modernity and offering historical alternatives of societal development. The roles for Dalits and women are socially constructed, culturally specific, informed by the medium of knowledge and media and reinforced by disciplinary institutions. The women's movement is a response to partly the Hindu code of law and partly gender discrimination rooted in religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth, etc. and the deep structural inequality embedded in traditional society. It is expressive because educated women invoke the idea of modernity, human rights and democracy and mobilise women around the project of changing and improving their status in society. Their empowerment strategy is based on resisting the societal pressures to remain within the confines of expected behaviour and life-choices. A choice model of economic and ideological considerations drives trade union movements in Nepal. Trade union politics confronts the hegemony of capital, both national and international, where public interests are subordinated to the logic of market-integrated society.

The Dalit and women's movements are pre-occupied with "identity politics" while the trade union politics relates more to the dignity of labour and distributional questions. Identity is mainly derived from the collective learning process of actors. Freedom, equality and solidarity are the basic values of all the movements. The trade union movement is closely related to political parties and its development and decay depend on the performance of political parties and the nature of political regime. Women and Dalit movements cut across party politics and reject existing stereotypes. All these forces seek to construct protected space to define the boundaries of collective identity through the process of acting together in the course of their movements. Labour movements mainly represented by Nepal Trade Union Congress (NTUC), General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT) and Democratic Confederation of Nepalese Trade Unions (DECONT) are cooperating sufficiently to uphold shared interests and have instrumental and economic goals of advancing welfare politics, such as employment security, respect for trade union rights, social security and organisational articulation. The women and Dalits are looking for proportional representation in politics and participation in public sphere which until recently was largely denied to them. There is also a social struggle between the women's organizations seeking to defend tradition and social rank and those seeking new socialisation and political culture.

Loose coupling of a number of Dalit organizations, the degree of heterogeneity among them and dissimilar ways of interest articulation despite common concerns have

posed problems for them to effect collective action. Dalits of the hills and Tarai regions embody heterogeneous needs and dissimilar perspectives. Like Dalits, women's organizations are also loosely integrated characterised by fragmentation and complexity. Their networks of interaction favour not interest representation but only formulation of demands and stimulation of social mobilisation designed to end oppression, entitle them with civic rights and enforce social justice. Trade unions and women's movements have, to a considerable extent, become more successful to forge coalitions across the national borders compared to the Dalits and have achieved considerable success in the politicisation of women in general and working women in particular. All the contemporary social movements are historically grounded and indigenous, and in part carried through by the deliberate efforts of the leaders from above, followers from below and sympathizers from outside. The life of a nation is reflected into the self-conscious system of its interlocked multiple parts.

Foreign assistance for Dalit and women's empowerment in Nepal has enhanced better the scope of the movements compared to the trade unions which are suffering from mass layoffs due to de-industrialisation, cuts in agriculture subsidies, migration of workers, squeezing labour market and domestic conflict. Political parties in Nepal would have become stronger had they accorded priority on the expansion of industrial and economic development and accorded legitimate space for trade union movements rather than restricting their space through the introduction of draconian laws, politicisation of police and bureaucracy, weakening of trade unions and human rights movements and institutionalisation of the role of security forces in development. The governments often took union demands as a matter of law and order, took the side of capital and postponed pluralist sense of justice. But, the "free collective bargaining process" of the trade unions, their system of representation in economic decision-making[3] and their social dialogue with the state and employers are better institutionalised than the other two forces. If trade unions become successful to enlarge their political constituencies by integrating other social organizations and agriculture sector workers they will have greater capacity, voice and visibility in the policy domain. History has examples where even subordinate groups have lifted themselves to higher stages of development where they have been able to build coalitions for action. Many of the minority groups have also questioned the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, especially the ethical justifications for many principles.

Nationalism is considered a liberal doctrine because it constructed the idea of the nation-state and citizenship rights, including the right to livelihood. But, the primacy of national identity could not do justice to other subsidiary identities, such as gender, class, caste, ethnicity, religion, region, etc. and they began to politicise everyday life of citizens with their exclusive identity assertion. Why did it happen? As the post-1991 leadership opted for a centralised polity, despite rhetoric of democracy and decentralisation, it basically projected the interests of the dominant class consisting of bureaucracy, political class, big business houses and urban professionals and not the aggregate desires and aspirations of majority of people distanced from the centre of power. This left the social agenda of democratisation of social forces largely unrealised. Whatever political consensus had emerged across political parties of various spectrums in the Constitution remained tenuous verging on even evaporation. The "reform agendas" put by the

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[3] Trade unions actively participated in the formulation of poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP), a policy paper whose goals have become a key development strategy for the Nepalese government.

government, unstable combination of five-party combine[4] and the Maoists are yet to be negotiated for new political consensus. The agendas indicate the rejection of both the political consensus of 1990 and constitutional status quo pointing to the possibility for evolving a new vision for Nepal. The political struggle in Nepal is centred on who should participate in the determination of people's sovereignty over the state power and how.

In the 1990s progressive erosion of state sovereignty accompanying an alteration in the medium of power from the political to the economic as well as growing influence and legitimacy of trans-national actors propelled civil society and social actors to agitate against the bourgeois lives of their representatives and to ignore the political boundaries set by them. The coherence and integration of society maintained by the centrality of the state suffered radical de-centring giving ways to the proliferation of several dissatisfied social groupings which defined their own system of rights, legitimacy, authority and justification. In everyday public life, Nepalis are no longer bounded by the government agenda communicated by Radio Nepal, Nepal Television and official newspapers. The structural and ideological change occurring at the global level reconstructed the patronage character of the emerging state structures and entailed it to construct national public domain for sub-national forces. There is also competition among the social forces for scarce resources. Therefore, need for a consensus and cooperation is imperative for effective public action.

Especially the movements of ethnic groups and nationalities tend to challenge the self-referential rationality of the unitary Hindu state and argue for its federalisation and secularisation. "What is challenged is not only the uneven distribution of power and/or economic goods, but socially shared meanings as well, that is the ways of defining and interpreting reality" (Diani, 2000:163). The people of Tarai and marginalized groups argue for the inclusive form of citizenship. The linguistic and cultural groups as well as religious minorities are struggling for cultural and linguistic survival and progress. The protagonists of the resource mobilisation theory argue that social movements emerge "when broad social conditions facilitate their mobilisation and the development of organizational structures" (Gladwin, 1994:60). The National Association of Village Development Committees of Nepal (NAVIN), Association of District Development Committees of Nepal (ADDCN) and Municipality Association of Nepal (MuAN), Federation of Community Forestry Users Groups in Nepal (FECOFUN), etc. are evidence of grassroots movements of people's representatives for greater consolidation of local struggles into institutional power, democratisation of decision-making, devolution of power and a more people-oriented approach to development. Dissolution of all elected bodies—the parliament and local bodies by the elected prime minister—created a "democracy vacuum" and paved way for nomination of party workers in public institutions fostering a clientalist regime. Re-linking of social struggles can potentially synergise new social movements but they have to include two main dimensions—a democratic dimension and a national dimension and their continuous politicisation for the reinvention of citizenship by way of public action.

## Implications for the Polity and Society

Political life in Nepal is characterised by continually changing constellation of struggles over power, resources and identity. The contemporary social movements in Nepal have produced a rich array of political symbols, slogans, cartoons, poems, articles and images exploring the new interpretation of politics and the code of behaviour seeking a new

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[4] Nepali Congress, Communist Party of Nepal Unified Marxist-Leninist, Nepal Sadbhavana Party (Anand Devi), Jana Morcha Nepal and Nepal Workers and Peasants Party.

social contract between the government and citizens and have unleashed major changes in the social structure. These movements are trying to horizontalise the vertical integration of Nepali society and to mobilise new groups, especially from the lower and middle strata, to accept political accommodations whereby every member of the society shares common goods equally, regardless of wealth, position and power. This denotes that new social movements have tended to alter the dynamics of power relationship between the society and the state espousing one of the most fundamental forms of citizen action.

The new social movements in Nepal have produced a critical mass of conscious people outside the hegemonic class representing the state and political parties. This critical mass is trying to construct a genuine multiparty democracy capable of reflecting and representing multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-layered social microcosm of the nation into political power and attaining their empowerment. In no way, however, do they aspire to conquer the state or political parties. Springing from a set of plural interests, they are basically competing for influence on public policies and are also cautious about the possibility of transforming themselves into an appendage of political and economic societies like in the 1990s. None of the movements aspires for the rupturing of the state. Among all the social movements the *janajati* movement appears more articulate in terms of its demand formulation and radical democratisation.[5] The policy questions are: Has the Nepali government adequate means to address their particular and universal concerns? Is the strategy of forming various temporary committees, commissions and caucus groups sufficient to mollify their grievances and is it able to bring reasonable social change?

In fact, there are deep stirrings at the grassroots, the upsurge of previously marginalized and excluded section of people, generating real hopes for the regeneration of democratic politics which is also capable of stimulating social transformation. Inspired by the highest level of consciousness, the new social movements reflect a horizontal series of groups struggling against penetration, fragmentation, exclusion and atomisation of society. Based on the ideology of democratic pluralism these groups are socialising, mobilising and politicising people's identities, activities and relations and are seeking to cast vertically integrated Hindu-Buddhist caste society into a new form.

All these movements seek the renegotiation of social contract whereby the state is entitled to help citizens realise their basic needs, rights and duties. Democracy, social justice and human rights underline the theme of all these movements. Located within civil society they are trying to enlarge the space of politics beyond the activities of parliament, political parties, interest groups, bureaucracy and elites. The new social movements in Nepal have made the moral majority of dominant political party powerless to act arbitrarily. Some social movements, especially conducted by ethnic and regional groups, defend the proportionality of representation in power while others, for example, bonded labour and Dalits, seek liberation from unwritten transcripts of society that governs their life. Under post-modern conditions, politics is neither confined to the domain of the state, nor is the citizenship confined to the bounded territory called the state. Multiple memberships of citizens define the politics of their liberation, entitlements, life and choice.

The process of globalisation has marked a radical economic shift in relation of production and disrupted the traditional form of polity having enormous consequences for the production of citizenship. Trade union, environmental and consumer groups' movements against negative fallouts of globalisation reflect aspirations of diverse people to control the local economic system. Nepali trade unions are now building coalitions

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[5] The *janajati* demands, *inter alia*, are: inclusive democracy, proportional representation, federalization, right to self-determination, devolutionary form of local self-governance, conversion of Upper House of Parliament into a House of nationalities, etc.

with consumers, environmental and women's groups and integrating agriculture sector workers, bonded labourers, child workers, informal sectors and un-organized people into their organizational framework to enlarge the base of collective action. In the mid-1970s the social movement of agricultural wageworkers in the Tarai was successful in increasing the daily wages in cash and kind. Ecological movements have also linked the meaning of human lives with the lives of other species and seek to enforce the concept of inter-generational accountability.

Women's movements have also been breaking the patriarchal and patrimonial boundaries in law, property relations, tradition and leadership, and integrating more women to enlarge the framework of gender politics. They have become successful in enacting a semblance of property rights and increased the degree of representation in structures of local self-governance. Similarly, Dalits have been integrating non-Dalit underclass and other victims of society for collective action. All these movements are conscious of their identities but they suffer from a lack of relative autonomy from the dominant institutions of society—political parties, interest groups and the state. This has weakened their position in movement building, co-determination and free collective bargaining to renegotiate social contract with those institutions affecting their life, identity, liberty and property. Critics, however, argue that a political competition exists among these social movement groups to put pressure on the government into producing policies favourable to them.

**Conclusion**

A respect for diversity and difference is one vital element of good society. Only a complex society can accommodate many layers and levels of people's needs and aspirations. One, however, cannot conceive a stateless society. And unrealistic demands coming from spontaneous forms of social mobilisation often directed against the state has weakened its authority. The future of new social movements depends on the example and the capacity set by their leaders for effecting social change. The organizational quality, agenda framing process, communication, social mobilisation and linkage building have also significant bearing on their growth and development. If the old-style social movements do not incorporate the contentious interaction of diverse groups of un-represented constituents they will create a set of potential losers who, in the long run, might become powerful force to resist the structure of domination. New social movements have emerged as a critical response to the negative aspects of the globalisation process because it undermined the legitimacy of the public sphere and the notion of public good. But, this globalisation has linked the new social movements of the periphery closer in their relations to the political centre and helped to deepen the nexus of people to democracy and multiple public spheres independent of state power and domination. It is, therefore, reasonable to suppose that new social movements have been provoked by the domination of society by the capital, the state and undemocratic technological, political, economic and social institutions. Inclusive form of governance can synergise the social struggles for social transformation and attain broad international acceptance.

All the Nepali political parties have special focus on the empowerment of women and uplift of Dalits. But, this is not sufficient to mediate the interest of the state and society for coherence unless adequate policies are adopted to minimize suffering in society through welfare measures and demonstrate the power of politics to serve public interests. The success of new social movements rests on their coherence in seeking balanced socialisation by which their sectoral demand-orientation helps to attain collective goods. New social movements purport to allow the power of society to self-

organize, communicate and effect collective action. In a way, they set out to emancipate society from its own ideological and institutional rigidity, tend to deepen the social base of politics and widen the responsibility of the state towards people by enlarging the choices so that even ordinary citizens can participate in the society's productive life and develop feelings of identification with the state. Their ultimate success is proportionate to their power of movement integration, collective goal orientation, and adequate incentives for the participants, leadership quality and the ability to absorb continuously changing aspirations of the younger generations. The best way to repair Nepali democracy is to revitalize the multiple social movements and energize their collective action.

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