What is ‘New’ in the New Social Movements?  
Rethinking Some Old Categories

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The 1990s saw the introduction of new economic policies by the Indian government to integrate the economy into global capitalism. In 2011 India emerged as a not so inconsequential global player in global capitalism. The 1990s also witnessed the collapse of the existing socialist states. In 1989, Francis Fukuyama and his supporters, a resident scholar at the RAND Corporation, Washington, DC, argued that Western liberal democracy and capitalism had won an irreversible victory over all their ideological competitors, most importantly over socialism. I state these bare but defining facts to emphasize the privileged position and interests of global capital and, therefore, of an increasingly transnational capitalist class. Indian capitalists themselves have been increasingly investing globally and form part of this transnational class. Class matters even if working class movements appear to have been overtaken by a host of other social movements based on caste, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and environment. Class matters because division of labour and division of property remain indivisible in contemporary capitalism. It is in this context that I argue that any analysis of social movements, even that of the New Social Movements (NSMs), which appear to break away from a class-centric perspective, has to therefore engage with class.

This chapter attempts to look at NSMs, both as an empirical phenomena and a conceptual claim. Old Social Movements (OSMs) were seen as primarily class-based with reorganization of power as a central goal, which usually functioned within the frame of political parties. NSMs in contrast were not about changing distribution
of power in society but often about quality-of-life issues — such as a clean environment, personal choices such as alternate sexualities, expressions of cultural identities — and were non-party based. Central to the distinction was the retreat of 'class'-based movements empirically and a decline of class analysis theoretically. I would like to argue that 'class' remains a fruitful analytical category today and can be productively used to understand the 'new' social movements whether caste- or gender-based or those led by an aggressive new middle-class 'civil society'. In other words, class analysis (a conceptual matter) should not be conflated with empirical presence or absence of class-based movements.

I seek to build this argument by drawing from the Dalit and women's movements, the new visibility of the Indian middle-class in the public sphere and the new kind-of 'civil society'-led social movements often rendered hyper-visible through both the old and new media. My analysis would therefore include: (a) the historical contexts within which the NSMs emerged in the West; (b) a look into two social movements — the Dalit and women's movement — to examine whether they can be accurately defined as NSMs; (c) an exploration of the visibility of the Indian middle-class in contemporary India and a simultaneous refashioning of the 'public' by a powerful media to understand new models of 'social movements' led by this middle-class; (d) a look, albeit cursory, at the dominant conceptual frameworks used in the study of social movements in Indian sociology to understand why NSMs as a conceptual claim found such ready acceptance. I further seek to link this with extant pedagogic practices in India that made the schematic, feature-wise contrasts between NSMs and OSMs particularly amenable for incorporation in the existing syllabi, ideally suited for memorizing, reproduction in examinations and scoring of marks — the end goal of education.

In an attempt to address these four tasks I hope to draw attention to the obvious but much neglected aspects — that concepts emerge in specific historical contexts, ideology and theory are closely linked, and every theory has a propensity to focus attention on some aspects of society and render others invisible. In my treatment of NSMs I seek to show how both 'class' and 'capital' disappeared, not empirically but conceptually, much like 'gender' at one time. Further, in an attempt to make them visible, both an empirical and theoretical effort has to be made. This chapter seeks to do this.
NSMs emerged at a distinct historical point of time in the West. A wave of social movements arose in Western Europe and the United States of America (USA) in the 1960s and 1970s, quite different from those of an earlier period. Post-World War II had seen a host of intense anti-colonial movements, often with a fare presence of working class and peasantry. The Indian national movement is a good example of this. Prior to the rise of a host of nationalist movements in the non-Western region, the West witnessed a wide range of socialist movements. While one strand moved towards formation of state socialism (Soviet Union, East Europe and China), the other moved towards a social democratic consensus (much of Western Europe) with a state committed to social welfare and protection of basic needs of its citizens — health, education and shelter. In all cases, whether the social movements were anti-colonial, socialist or social democratic, they were party-led and driven by wider goals of universal social justice and equity — characteristics of OSMs. The state then was itself constitutive of social movements, no matter how different their subsequent trajectories could be.

The movements in Western Europe and USA in the 1960s and 1970s arose during the war in Vietnam where forces led by USA were involved in a bloody conflict in the former French colony against Communists. In Europe, Paris was the nucleus of a vibrant students’ movement that joined workers’ parties in a series of strikes protesting against the war. In USA, Martin Luther King led a civil rights movement and Malcolm X the Black Power movement. The anti-war movement was joined by tens of thousands of students who were being compulsorily drafted by the government to go and fight in Vietnam. The women’s movement and the environmental movement also gained strength during this time of social ferment. Significantly, the West at this point was marked by unprecedented growth and prosperity, a context where class inequalities did not stare at one’s face as it does in our parts of the world.

Further, it was difficult to classify the members of these NSMs as belonging to any one class or even nation. Issues such as environment and gender, race and sexualities were raised in a fashion and scale not seen before. It was now argued that class-based movements had perforce subjugated all other identities. Each identity
had an equal right to articulate its presence and class could not subsume the other identities that people had. This was also a time when an increasingly multi-cultural West sought to celebrate distinct identities and argue that identities were not fixed, immutable but fluid and multiple. Theoretically the rise of cultural studies and postmodern ideas theorized this plurality and fluidity. At another end, the late 1980s and early 1990s saw the incredibly swift and apparently sudden collapse of USSR and other socialist states. Class analysis appeared redundant and retreated from the academia, for obvious empirical, theoretical and ideological reasons. OSMs were thus replaced by NSMs, movements more suited to the new times.

One has already alluded to the fact that the category of NSMs with the related assumption of the decline of OSMs was readily accepted within Indian social science. However, talking of contexts and concept, the pertinent question here is whether India did witness the rise of NSMs comparable to the West. In other words, did the ready acceptance of this classification of social movements have empirical and theoretical justification?

Indeed India has experienced a whole array of social movements involving women, peasants, dalits, adivasis, and others. Can these movements be understood as ‘NSMs’? The fact of the matter is that concerns about class inequality and unequal distribution of resources continue to be important elements in these movements. Farmers' movements have mobilized for better prices for their produce, peasants for better wages and right to employment, tribals for access to forest and land rights. Dalit labour has acted collectively to ensure that they are not exploited by upper-caste landowners and money-lenders. The women’s movement has worked on issues of gender discrimination in diverse spheres, such as the workplace and within the family, and foregrounded the multiple oppressions of the working class and the dalit women. Questions of inequality have remained very central to the NSMs, though of course neither were they just about economic inequalities, nor were they organized along class lines alone. A quick reference to the Chipko movement would elucidate the point better. At one level we could define the movement as ecological and therefore an NSM, context-specific, issue-based, and outside political party control. A closer look would suggest that what was at stake was the question of subsistence — the villagers’ right to get firewood, fodder and other
daily necessities from the forest. The economy of subsistence was pitted against that of profit. It was also a movement of women and right to resources. Questions of class and differential relationship to property and resources were central even as it entailed ecological, gender and caste issues. What to me appears more distinctive to the NSMs is the major shift from ‘others’ speaking on their behalf to self-representation, whether it is of the Dalits or ‘divasis’, women or gays. One recognizes the historical significance of this shift. At the same time, I argue, it is productive to deploy class analytics to understand NSMs and identity politics itself.

What is meant by class analytics? Broadly I draw from Marxist understandings of society as constitutive of material and social relations of production. Social movements too would likewise emanate from the tensions and dynamics of these relations. What is perhaps a shared view between Weber and Marx would be that individual’s life chances are constrained by their location within their society. What distinguishes Marxist class analytics is a very specific understanding of social relations of production, in this case capitalist, that not just determines class locations but form the very motor of production and reproduction of a given class society. Capitalism sans division of owners and non-owners of means of production does not exist. What does exist is the differential form and nature of this relationship. Thus, if Fordism is best suited for capital to function at one time, flexible labour could be best at another. Indeed the current neoliberal era itself can be better appreciated from this perspective.

This return to Marxist theory may appear strange given that it has been widely acclaimed as failed, particularly within Indian sociology within which it was anyway very weak. I instead argue that the very victory of capitalism that heralded the 1990s means that a theory of capitalism, delineated at length in the many works of Marx, would be productive even as workers of the world may not unite to end capitalism. What remains illuminating are some basic insights into the making and working of social formations that help us to understand contemporary class relations, contestations between them and the state, and most significantly the defining role of capitalism in all of this. In other words, it may help us understand why ‘Dalit capitalism’ and ‘professional feminism’ discussed later in this chapter are one face of ‘social movements’ in contemporary India.
The Old and the New in the Women's Movement

A central contention of the NSM thesis has been the rise of issue-based, often identity-based array of diverse movements instead of the older class-based movements articulated outside the political party mode of mobilization. In India too in the late 1970s the rise of the autonomous women's organizations made an expressed break from what were seen as party-affiliated women's organizations where women's issues were rendered secondary. Significantly, the decades that followed saw a broad consensus between party-led women's organizations and autonomous women's groups. Left party-led women's groups took up issues such as sexuality and violence, while questions of development, livelihood and equity were accepted as important by autonomous groups. More recently, in a post-liberalized India, developmental issues and questions of inequity have once again acquired renewed salience within both the women's and Dalit movements. It is important to underscore the fact that the incredible prosperity that post-World War West witnessed, buttressed by a strong state welfare agenda, conducive to NSMs often 'lifestyle' demands was not replicated in India. However, in post-liberalized India we do see lifestyle feminism making its presence felt, as we shall see later in this chapter.

Shifts in Gender and Developmental Frameworks

In the neoliberal framework the informal sector is at the heart of the market economy and represents its prime model. Since women are seen to predominate in this sector, it is their creativity and potential that needs special attention (see Kalpagam 1994). A significant development in this period is the appropriation of feminist findings by the developmental sector and international institutions to further models of development, which run counter to feminist premises. Mary John, in an analysis of one such World Bank report, observes how it focuses on 'the incredible range of tasks poor women perform, their often greater contribution to household income despite lower wage earnings, their ability to make scarce resources stretch further under deteriorating conditions' (John 2004: 247). These were documented and debated in the past, but now the feminist
findings have been reworked. ‘Through a crucial shift in signification, these findings are no longer arguments about exploitation so as much as proofs of efficiency’ (ibid.). Not surprisingly, therefore, a great deal of development gender discourse is now exclusively addressed within the microcredit framework, premised upon the idea that women are efficient managers and can be trusted to repay. The strength and resilience of the poor woman that feminist scholarship had highlighted was reinterpreted by international institutions such as the World Bank as a justification of withdrawing state support. The argument was that since poor women are not passive victims but potentially generators of wealth, the correct prescription was not state subsidies but market credit (ibid.).

Commenting on this appropriation of feminism by neoliberal discourse, Nancy Fraser argues that what was truly new about the second-wave women’s movement was the way it wove together, in a critique of andro-centric state-organized capitalism, three analytically distinct dimensions of gender injustice: economic, cultural and political. Subjecting state-organized capitalism to wide-ranging multifaceted scrutiny, in which these three perspectives intermingled freely, feminists generated a critique that was simultaneously ramified and systematic. In the ensuing decades, however, the three dimensions of injustice became separated, both from one another and from the analysis of capitalism. With the fragmentation of the feminist critique came the selective incorporation and partial recuperation of some of its strands. Split off from one another and from the societal assessment that had integrated them, second-wave hopes were conscripted in the service of a project that was deeply at odds with the larger, holistic vision of a just society. ‘In a fine instance of the cunning of history, utopian desires found a second life as feelings currents that legitimated the transition to a new form of capitalism: post-Fordist, transnational, neoliberal’ (Fraser 2009: 99).

The Women’s Reservation Bill: Class, Caste or Gender?

The fate of the Women’s Reservation Bill (WRB) seeking 33 percent reservation for women in parliament still remains uncertain more than 15 years after its birth, with a display of persistent and fierce resistance to its passing. The Bill has evoked a wide set of varying responses, ranging from the crude anti-women remarks
that the presence of women would invoke catcalls and whistles to a more politically correct invocation of the downtrodden women which this Bill would purportedly marginalize. Fears are being expressed that the Reservation Bill would generate possible shifts in the nature of political influence of different social groups. The argument is that ever since the rise of middle castes in contemporary India, subsequent to the Green Revolution and land reforms, the traditional, pre-dominantly upper-caste ruling class has been feeling decidedly uncomfortable, shaken by the prospect of an almost certain loss of cultural and political hegemony. In the WRB they see a possible way back to capture political and cultural dominance. The assumption is that the Bill would erode the base of these new sections, particularly so because the rotational system proposed in the Bill would disturb their hold on the constituencies. What one witnesses therefore is ruling class negotiations and contestations among its different fractions, even as the site of contestation is caste and gender, buttressing my basic contention that class still matters and class analytics allow us to explore the deep structures of society. The events referred to later in this section illustrate this.

The Congress heading the current coalition government that came to power in 2009, was initially disinclined to conduct a caste census, demanded by the parties representing the Other Backward Classes (OBCs). However in an attempt to woo the support of these political parties on quite different but critical matters, namely the passing of the Finance Bill and the contentious Nuclear Liability Bill in a parliament where the ruling coalition was not sure of majority support, it revised its view on caste census. That the same group has been spearheading the anti-WRB has obvious implications for the fate of the Bill. This propensity of gender issues to become sites where larger political battles are fought has been a constant of sorts in the history of modern India. Significantly, the demand for caste census by social justice movements was to map socio-economic indicators. What however came to be was enumeration, counting of numbers with a sole intent of the struggle for hegemony. It is therefore no surprise to see that the WRB has been opposed tooth and nail, sometimes directly, sometimes by ridicule, sometimes disingenuously using politically correct social justice language, and sometimes as a strategic tool to manipulate people (Teltumbde 2010: 15).
Honour Killing: Caste and Gender? Struggle for Class Hegemony?

In a 21st-century India where women’s presence in public life is widely visible, the fierceness of some of the 19th century and early 20th century resistances return to haunt us as we bear witness to a growing number of honour killings, executed at the behest of the Khap Panchayat, or traditional village councils, to punish defiant young adults for marrying outside society’s norms. As seen time and again, community/caste boundary maintenance is about following community rules of marriage. A violation of one rule necessarily amounts to a violation of the other. However, the matter of honour killing is also an assertion of social hegemony over the public domain. The message sent out by the Khap Panchayat is that not only do they control the community, but their ownership of both land and capital ensures their place within the ruling class, which control politicians and thereby also the state. It is this relationship that class analytics is most suited to unravel. Recent years have seen a growing challenge of the entrenched social group within the village by both ‘lower caste’ and women’s social movements. Honour killings are a brutal resistance to change but articulated in a rhetoric of tradition against modernity, customs against state law, indigenous against the Western. The defenders of honour killing have rightly identified that there is a gap between the state law (product of long years of social movements — nationalist and women’s) and the social law (in this case, congealed practices of dominant classes/castes). In the absence of a commensurate law, the ‘society’ has to exercise sanction, murderously if needed, to deter erring members (Bhardwaj 2010).

The Dalit Movement: Of the Old and the New, of the National and the Global

The rise of the Dalit movement in the last decades has been momentous to say the least. The strength and visibility of the movement has been such that the left political parties themselves have been introspecting their purported failure to take caste into consideration in their exclusive focus on class. At one level, therefore, quite clearly, this indeed is a retreat from class-based movements and a loud assertion of identity claims. The claim for recognition was
sharper than that for redistribution. I would however also like to maintain my assertion that if we have an empiricist understanding of caste or class we would fail to recognize that in a class society, it is imperative that class relations and contestations would operate even if played out in the language of caste or gender, ethnicity or culture. Certain developments within the Dalit movement interestingly throw light on the manner a movement for social justice can get transformed and appear conducive with the neoliberal model of globalization. And how claims for recognition could also be transformed to those for greater say within the state and nation while shifting the terrain of the movement to a global level, drawing both the mobilizing power of the diaspora as well as using the instruments provided by international institutions.

The Durban Conference itself was a high point that raised the issue of Dalit discrimination at the United Nations level. More recently, the British government has recognized caste to be a practising form of discrimination within the United Kingdom. I would like to look at some of these developments, namely: the perceived need and theoretical claim of a Dalit bourgeoisie for growth; the possibilities of the neoliberal regime for development and therefore the position articulated on globalization; the persistent focus on reservation; and finally, the internationalization of the movement itself apart from the active role of the international institutions.

Why a Dalit Bourgeoisie is Considered Important

Recently, a newspaper report covered the meet of the Dalit entrepreneurs and the Finance Ministry as part of the pre-Budget confabulations. This was not a one-off event but a part of a well-thought-out programmatic way forward by the Dalit movement. The first tangible beginnings for this felt-need were expressed at the Bhopal meet, held on 12–13 January 2002, where a decision was taken to earmark 22.5 per cent of the government’s procurement from Dalit manufacturers and traders. Chandra Bhan, the noted Dalit intellectual, rued that while Dalits constituted a very large percentage of India’s population, no millionaire or billionaire could be counted among them. He argued that wealth creation among Dalits was critical for the growth of the community, and the state could ensure this by committing itself to purchasing a set portion of its requirements from Dalit entrepreneurs. The government could, for instance, buy a Compaq PC from a Dalit trader at
the same MRP rates as elsewhere in the market without losing any money, as governments all over the world buy billions of goods from the open market. The margin money will would then go to the Dalits who were historically excluded from such processes.

**Focus on the Doable**

The argument spelt out by those such as Chandra Bhan has some obvious implications. One is that the extant path of global capitalism is taken for granted as the only way forward. It has thus been argued:

"From the outset, the new dalit movement focused on the 'doable' — on policies which did not run counter to the neoliberal development agenda as it unfolded in the 1990s, on the policies which could be argued from within the neoliberal discourse. Dalit activists dug deep into liberal US academic discourse and policy tradition, and based their core arguments on the applicability of this to the Indian context. The compatibility with the (neo)liberal thinking was a necessary ingredient in the strategy. There was ample 'policy space' for a (re-)formulation of caste discrimination within the international human rights discourse. The detailed lesson-learning by the new dalit movement, of liberal ways of combating discrimination of minorities, took the reformulation logic a step further, by influencing the policy focus of the movement (Lescher 2008: 257)."

This practical approach is a product of the broader ideological moment where, in a very real sense, there simply appears to be no alternative. This orientation however has very obvious implications. Engaging with the international mainstream policy agenda meant that certain policy alternatives, rather than another, were given lower priority. The Dalit empowerment agenda could not gain the same impetus from engaging with the international development community. Empowerment of a social group does not figure in neoliberal individualist policy-making, where 'power' is seen in relation to individual capabilities, not to group-level social oppression, and where solutions are based on enabling such individual capabilities. Emphasizing 'employment' (and that too for a minority of the Dalits) over empowerment may be as much an unintended consequence of the internationalization strategy, as a choice based on the self-interest of the Dalit elites."
Connected to this persuasive view of doing the doable, I wish to touch upon the idea of utopia more generally, and the need for a critical analysis within social sciences more particularly. In other words, I return very briefly to the sociology of knowledge question, the matter of contexts and concepts with which we began. For an engagement with theoretical questions alone would equip us to explore whether there is indeed a justification to proceed with the handy feature enumeration mode of analysis of the old and new social movements; and whether class as an analytical category offers any possibility of productive enquiry to see the deeper structures of capital, class and state at work.

Social movements have often held some form of a better future, a utopia if you like. However social movements in the current context have to be understood as operating with an anti-utopia project, a dominant state of belief. By the end of the 20th century, utopia had come to be reviled as illusory, dangerous and against human nature (Couton 2009: 93–94). This chapter’s attempts to question given frameworks of understanding new and old social movements should be read in this light.

The International Advocacy Network and the Dalit Movement

It has been argued that the focus of the new Dalit movement on affirmative action also relates to the fact that the new movement formed part of a transnational advocacy network. There are several aspects to this. First, given the strong involvement of the Ford Foundation and Human Rights Watch in the formative years of the new movement, it appears that the Indian-based new Dalit movement was not in the driving seat in the relationship with the international advocacy network. Rather, there seems to have been a more symbiotic relationship between the national Indian elements and the non-Indian organizations involved in the network (Lersche 2008: 257–58).

Within the confines of liberal thinking, the Dalit movement successfully extended the existing policy space, in India and internationally. Without the Dalit movement campaigning, international mainstream development organizations would not have expressed positive views on ‘Dalit’ Corporate Social Responsibility, nor participated in and co-funded Dalit international policy conferences. Without campaigning, the argument that the US experience regarding
private sector affirmative action was relevant for India would not have won the day in the country. More generally, the question that remains is how an advocacy-based 'shortcut', without the active involvement of the Dalit grassroots, would be able to achieve the quite major social changes that are required in order to change the power relations underlying the social discriminations of Dalits. Or is this a story about hegemonic contestations and Dalit capitalism?

That caste and gender are my preferred sites for arguing my position on class and struggles for hegemony in state and society is linked to my view that we need to seriously look afresh at the received wisdom about old and new social movements. One of the central tenets of the NSMs is purportedly the retreat of the universal cause on the one hand, and metanarratives as explanatory schemes on the other. What we witness worldwide is however an ascendency of global power, global decision-making, global institutions, transnational corporations, and even a global developmental sector. One has sought to show how both the women's and the Dalit movements are inextricably engaged with not just the state but international institutions. An understanding of the transformed nature of capital, functioning increasingly, at a global level, provides insights into changes in the nature of social movements. Perhaps the buzz word 'glocal' captures the point. I shall return to this in my conclusion for the genesis and growth of the term 'glocal' allows us to interrogate the received wisdom of NSMs. For now, I would like to turn to the third part of my illustrative instances, namely the centrality of the middle-class in contemporary Indian public discourse, and its role in the media to argue my case that we need to examine the given ideas of the features of the NSMs at greater length.

III

The Centrality of the Middle-class:
Implications for Class Analytics

The introductory section of this chapter has already set the post-liberalized Indian context within which I am looking at the phenomenon of NSMs. This manner of entering this exposition on NSMs offers us a vantage point to understand how the world and how
India has changed. This invocation of the 'world' and of 'India' at once is deliberate. For I argue that many of the recent changes that have undermined the strength of 'old social movements', such as class-based movements of workers and peasants, are consequences of state policy shifts in developmental models globally, in particular the growing hegemony of neoliberalism. Yet not all sources of change can be directed to global developments. There is an Indian story here. The intended and unintended consequences of many decades of a developmental state and the new economic policies that formally can be dated to 1991 are both many and deep. The social structure that defines India is certainly transformed even as it contains many of the old and persistent forms of inequalities. There is a class contestation, even as it may appear to be that of a caste or ethnic or tribal one. The class contestations are those between ruling blocs from primarily an old-established, usually twice-born caste groups and those of an assertive ascending ruling class bloc from the backward and marginalized caste groups. This essentially ruling section contest for hegemony, backed by their respective middle-class constituencies, renders other conflicts and tensions invisible to public media except for the episodic and violent ruptures. The earlier exposition on the WRB and honour killing explicates these tensions. Working class movements may have declined but labour strife and peasant unrest are very much present. Does the empirical retreat of class-based movements and ascendency of identity-based movements (NSMs) imply that class analytics cease to be fruitful in understanding contemporary India? I would argue that class analytics would help analyze both the emergence and visibility of middle-class politics, which we witness today and which may appear to go against a 'prophecy' of ascendant working class struggle.

I argue that this celebration of the middle-class is perhaps justified, as the beneficiary sections of the economic reforms are indeed largely middle-class, numerically large and rapidly increasing, even if in terms of percentages it is small. This centrality of the middle-class in India's public life has its own very specific historical past, which needs reiteration. A colonially mediated modernity had led to the emergence of a Western-educated middle-class imbued with modern, liberal, bourgeois ideological visions but with no family resemblance to the Western bourgeoisie in structural terms.

On the one hand they were products of an English education introduced by the colonial masters and therefore victim to a Eurocentric view of
modern society, on the other, they were victim to the feeling of historical denial which the original stock of middle class that could most profit by contacts with the West slowly got on its bones (cited in Chaudhuri 2011: 12).

The story did not change substantially in independent India. The bourgeoisie never achieved hegemonic status and working class formation was weak and fragmented. Instead the middle-class had a major role to play in managing the ruling bloc, which included the bourgeoisie and landed interests. It has been further pointed out that at the macro level the new middle-class has been ‘forged at the intersection of a liberalization and a political context marked by organized political challenges from below’ (Fernandes and Heller 2009: 147).

I have argued elsewhere that, in the context of Indian media, the construction of a new Indian middle-class with new world visions was a central task undertaken by the media. In the early years of liberalization, advertisements were a key agent to change public discourse even as it created the new Indian man and woman (Chaudhuri 2001). Ten years later, the news, everyday details, editorials, features, everything together has transformed the meaning of ‘public’ (Chaudhuri 2010b). Since the media has had a very special role to play in this new transformed India, I shall return to its analysis at greater length, the key role it has played to project a new middle-class vision of global India and its position and role in the democratic process.

This trumpeting of the new middle-class needs to be taken seriously. It cannot be dismissed as propaganda that have little to do with reality. And if we take propaganda as half-truth then the ‘half’ has to be taken note of seriously. I contend: (a) that the middle-class in this current context has a critical ideological role to play. My discussion on the media in the last part of the chapter will discuss this; (b) *India Incorporation’s* projection of the successful Indian middle-class announces India’s arrival as an economic power, as an amorphous body fêted for its consuming power. And significantly marks for itself far more direct say in the Indian state; (c) for the Indian state it means flouting its global power and visibility; (d) for the middle-class themselves this is a loud assertion of their success upon which rests a concomitant claim for greater political visibility and power within the state and society. This focus on the state may
appear a bit dated given that dominant rhetoric of globalization suggests a retreat of the state and greater say of international institutions. I argue that if one were to focus on a movement, such as the women’s movement or the Dalit movement, one would notice that the matter is more about transformed nature of class power of the state and the manner that this power gets played out through often strategic alliances between the state and international institutions. It is not an either-or choice. One shall see this in the global Dalit movement’s lobby of their case through international institutions, which often are posited as against the Indian state; for instance, the Durban conference and the Dalit movement’s assertion to get caste discrimination recognized as racial discrimination in the United Nations. At the same time the Dalit movement would work with the state whether to hear the voice of Dalit entrepreneurs or ensure reservation in both employment and education. If we see the state as relational and constitutive of changing class dynamics and the assertion of the elite from marginalized groups, whether Dalit or backward, we would see class at work even as the rhetoric remains that of identity and the claim that of cultural recognition. Here I do not wish to enter into the civil society movement against corruption with an unlikely leader in Anna Hazare that India witnessed in 2011. But its middle-class support and character is self-evident.

This loud assertion of success by the middle-class, and a claim for greater political power, I argue, is done in two related but apparently dissimilar fashions: (a) if we take the case of caste and gender on one hand, a story unfolds which pits one section of the middle-class against the other, often evident in social movements for and against reservation. The debate over the WRB plays out middle-class contestation for hegemonic control even as no one wishes to leave the rhetoric of social justice just as yet; (b) if one takes the rise of illiberal social and political assertions of the middle-class on the other hand, we tangibly notice a veritable backlash within the women’s movement and the wider representation of women’s issues. I have argued earlier and at length about the manner in which ‘feminism’ is represented in the media. There is a loud and categorical assertion of the individuated woman whose claim to success is precisely her ability and competence, and not because she had anything remotely to do with collective movements such as the women’s movements which anyway give a bad image to the story of India’s middle-class success. This individual
model of achievement also becomes a part of developmental models for poor achieving women, which is a section of this larger story of ideological transformation; (c) the acceptance that the issue of reservation has in public space needs further explanation. Both the proponents and opponents have deep angst and anger which they deem appropriate to vent in public domain and address to the state. In part I explain this with reference to the clout that the middle-class, of whichever shade, (notwithstanding the persisting control over the media by the ‘twice-born’ middle-class) has come to occupy in public space. To some extent, I link this to the rise of identity politics, which privilege claims for ‘recognition’ rather than those for ‘redistribution’. For as Nancy Fraser puts it,

after all, this capitalism would much prefer to confront claims for recognition over claims for redistribution, as it builds a new regime of accumulation on the cornerstone of women’s waged labour, and seeks to liberate markets from social regulation in order to operate all the more freely on a global scale (2009: 112).

If this is so, can we really go along with the idea that the rise of gender or caste-based social movements indicates a retreat of class? What is probably a more accurate description is that while class remains, class contestations play out not as class-based social movements but identity movements of various kinds.

V

Media and Social Movements

I proceed with Charles Tilly’s view that social movements are historically specific, and that national states played an essential part in the creation of the modern national social movement. Further, and this is important for my broader argument, nation states ‘play an essential part in the creation of the modern national social movement’ (Tilly 1979: 19). The mentioned exposition on women’s and Dalit movements suggests that negotiation with the state remains a key site and mode of social movements, but at the same time international institutions and global strategies become increasingly significant. Tilly further argues that mapping and explaining the changes in the collective action repertoire is an important task. Today mass media have reshaped our perceptions and tactics (ibid.).
The role media has had in representing social movements, and more importantly in shaping broader understandings of the meaning of democracy in neoliberal times, cannot be overemphasized. My study of changes within the Indian media since the 1990s has shown how centrally it has played a role in the transformation of India from its earlier economic and political vision to one where neoliberal ideas work as both the operational economic framework as well as an ideological vision. My argument was that a ‘concerted ideological campaign thus has to be carried out to establish the legitimacy of the new economic regime, to which advertising contributes’ (Chaudhuri 2001: 375).

The two important social processes within which any meaningful reading of popular media and feminism can be attempted today are the women’s movement and the process of economic liberalization initiated in India. The two have very different genuses and very different trajectories. But as is the wont of history, there are times when disparate social processes meet and new social forms take shape. While the Indian state heralded the policy of liberalization and opening up the Indian market in the 1980s, the tangible impact on the media, on the lifestyle of a new middle class, on urban life in general made its presence felt only in the 1990s. Increasingly visible now are the more upmarket magazines’ projection of a post-liberalized post-feminism, where the individual corporate woman is the icon (Chaudhuri 2000: 264).

I had contrasted this assertion of the individuated woman to an earlier period where issues of class, caste, tribe, poverty, and social justice formed an intrinsic part of feminist struggles in India, both in colonial and independent India. I had noted that autonomous women’s groups which emerged in the 1970s contested the centrality of class in the formulation of women’s organizations affiliated to the left. Their point was that this tended to obfuscate the specificity of the women’s question. Both groups have moved a long way since then. While left groups have played a visible role in the women’s movement, autonomous groups have increasingly taken up questions of economic deprivation and matters of class (ibid.: 269). Quite clearly the rise of the women’s movement did not displace class issues in the manner that models of NSMs would suggest. To return to our central contention about the role of media I draw examples primarily from the women’s movement and its representation in the media, with which I am most familiar. A look at the transformation of the Woman’s Day is instructive.
International Women’s Day has been traditionally celebrated by women’s organizations and other political unions that aligned themselves quite unambiguously with democratic and progressive forces. We now have a riot of ads with the specific day’s messages appearing on 8 March every year. Ponds has an advertisement titled ‘The Millennium Miracle: A Curtain Raiser’ with an image of a woman’s mask, an hourglass and some paintbrushes. The text reads:

As we are poised for a flight into the year 2000, what does it portend for women? A closer look at the trend-setting explosions on the careers, fashion, fitness and beauty minefields … She’s what make the world go round. Yesterday. Today. In the new millennium. And for eternity (Chaudhuri 2000: 270).

Advertisements, representative of high-powered beauty shows, were marketed through the 1990s as matters of choice, upward mobility, success and agency. Feminism is projected as a matter of choice. A deliberate break was made with the women’s movement, yet the language used for the construction of the new woman was often appropriated from the women’s movement. And this works, as all co-options do, as simultaneously a form of sharing in the spoils and a displacement (Sunder Rajan 1993: 132).

The broader argument I make is that an advertisement-driven media actually altered a broad consensus within the public discourse and the middle-class about the importance of social movements and a perception that they were morally worthy.

I would like to claim that India’s colonial history of struggles, whether by reformers, nationalists, peasants, workers or women, were seen as part of the larger anti-imperialist struggle and perceived as inherently moral and worthy. Therefore, unlike the West, in India a formal consensus existed about the legitimacy of oppositional movements and organizations. Concern for the dispossessed formed part of the rhetorics of nationalism and entered the consciousness of independent India’s middle class. Liberalization ushered in the new Indian who disassociates himself or herself from movements unless it is a question of celebrity endorsements of causes. The strength of dominant ideologies is their ‘naturalness’. Where advertisements defining how we ought to live appear natural and celebrate choices, a campaign by a woman’s organization to oppose this would appear as a violation of choice and a killjoy attack (Chaudhuri 2000: 274).
Studies on media representation of social movements would show the shifting priority of the media and reveal to what extent a new construction of the nation, in a kind of mirror reflection of the post-liberalization middle-class, has gained ground and legitimacy. The implications for collective social movements of peasants and tribals, workers and craftsmen is that they get rendered not just invisible, but marginal to the new mainstream consensus where politics is seen as disruptive, and economics the steering wheel of change.

One has to locate this change in the transformed nature of the state. Three decades ago, the structure of state power in India was usually described in terms of a coalition of dominant class interests — capitalists and the rich farmers as the two dominant classes, competing and aligning with one another within a political space, aided by a powerful bureaucracy and supervised by state, relatively though not entirely autonomous of dominant classes. The changes introduced since the 1990s have transformed this framework of class dominance. Recent events have shown how both the state and the media are increasingly dependent on the corporate sector. Where would the space for autonomy for the state or for the media stand in such a case? In a recent piece I have argued that:

This often strident appropriation of the nation and the Indian 'public' by a middle class ideologically aligned with the project of liberalization is most evident in the media today. I argue that this is done in two ways: by an overt ideological defence of an unbridled market and an attack on the very idea of an interventionist and welfare state; and by the everyday quotidian features and news that inscribe corporate speech, create a new imaginary of a global Indian and a global Indian middle class (Chaudhuri 2010b: 62).

VI
Returning to the Conceptual Question

I return in the tail end of this chapter to two dominant conceptual frames that have often been deployed to study social movements in India. My choice of only two, namely, structural functionalism and postmodernism, may appear arbitrary. I justify this preference on the grounds that while the former has been the most dominant theory deployed in Indian sociology/social anthropology, the latter has been hugely influential in the West and in significant quarters
in contemporary Indian academia. That however is not my sole reason to invoke postmodernism. I do so for it captures, in a way, the spirit of global capitalism, the idea of NSMs, the retreat of class analytics, and critique of foundational epistemology. Both approaches do not address either the issue of production relations, class or the specific dynamics of capitalism. This chapter has foregrounded the privileged position and interests of global capital which has had its own impact on the direction and form of NSMs.

Structural functionalism looked at social movements as systemic responses to felt needs and response to some kind of mal-integration. I have referred to few scholars here, who were dominant from the 1930s until the 1960s in the USA. For J. Davis (1930), a social movement emerges to meet a ‘new-felt need’, while for H. Blumer (1951) they arise out of ‘undefined or unstructured situations’, which cause stresses in the system. Linton (1943) looks at social movements as attempts to compensate for the frustrations of the society’s members, while Banks (1964) point out that social movements are functions of dissatisfaction with the existing social order. Conceptualizing society as a system necessarily implied that one did not enter either questions of production relations or interest groups and conflicts. The idea of needs was a generalized one emergent from the society as a system. While scholars have critiqued structural functionalism and been careful to emphasize ‘the property of the situation in which they originate and crystallize’ (Oommen 2004: 196; emphasis added), studies on social movements have operated primarily by identifying certain elements of social movements — namely, goals, organization, ideology, and leadership of social movements, rather than the historical specific context within which social movements emerge. Studies within Indian sociology on the dynamics of production relations, class and ideology, which led to the rise of a social movement are few. (Dhanagre 1988). A. R. Desai’s work on the social background of nationalism is an exception. In a context already marked by a paucity of class analysis, it is not surprising that NSMs as a conceptual claim found such ready acceptance (Desai 2005).

For postmodern analysis, I would like to draw from Arjun Appadurai’s take on NSMs. He writes:

[S]uch movements are, in their aspirations, democratic both in form and telos. And increasingly they are constructing the global not through
the general language of universal problems, rights, or norms but by tackling one issue, one alliance, one victory at a time. The great progressive movements of the past few centuries, notably the working class movements which have characterized the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with universalist principles of solidarity, identity and interest, for aims and against opponents, also conceived in universalist and generic terms. The new transnational activist movements, always worked have more room for building solidarity from smaller convergences of interest, and though they may also invoke big categories, such as "the urban poor," to build their politics, they build their actual solidarities in a more ad hoc, inductive, and context-sensitive manner. They are thus developing a new dynamics in which global networking is put at the service of local imaginings of power (Appadurai 2008: 305; emphasis mine).

Sharply in variance with Appadurai’s contention that ‘global networking is put at the service of local imaginings of power’, my chapter has shown how strands within the women’s movement and Dalit movement have often been at the service of global networking.

An argument that has informed this chapter has been that the decline of class as a critical category of political mobilization cannot be seen as the end of relevance of class as an analytical category, for the simple reason that we live in a class society. The intent of this chapter, however, has been not just to ‘see’ class dynamics in NSMs but also to emphasize the importance of understanding the nature of production and reproduction relations that define class and class society at any specific historical juncture. This includes both the production of material and ideological relations. In the present context, this means engaging with the present regime of capitalism and the complex institutional and ideological structures that it spawns. Such an approach alone would help us address the role of the state, the role of international institutions and understand how social movements have changed. The state from such a perspective is not an entity over and above the divisions of society but constitutive of them. This I argue is not very different from the dynamics that inform the functioning of international institutions, which we saw has had an increasingly significant role to play.

Apart from constantly ‘revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society’ (Marx and Engels 1848), capitalism has an incredible ability to assimilate critique. The women’s and
Dalit movements have borne witness to this. I would like to wind up this chapter by bringing back a concept, in some disuse today, namely 'utopia'. Social movements, especially old social movements, have often held some form of a better future — a utopia if it may be called. While anti-utopia is the dominant state of belief with a focus on the 'doable' — a point alluded to in this chapter. Frederic Jameson associates utopian literature (and I contend social analysis) not with the capacity to imagine a more progressive future society, but rather with the failure to escape the constraints of the present in order to do so:

Its function lies not in helping us to imagine a better future but rather in demonstrating our utter incapacity to imagine such a future— our imprisonment in a non-utopian without historicity or futurity — so as to reveal the ideological closure of the system in which we are somehow trapped and confined (cited in Couton 2009: 97–98).

Notes

1. I have argued elsewhere how this has had far reaching implications for nationalism and feminism. See Chaudhuri (2010a).
2. Two examples would be the media-led campaign to punish the murderer of Jessica Lal and the recent campaign against corruption and for the formation of a Lok Pals to check corruption and ensure accountability at the highest level.
3. A random example of the way NSMs would be taught is a list of features, such as those given as follows with no reference to contexts:
   - critical of modernism and progress
   - focused attacks on bureaucracy — they emphasized interpersonal solidarity (not class solidarity)
   - wanted to reclaim autonomous spaces (rather than seeking material advantage)
   - structures were open, fluid organic (unlike the often highly disciplined labour movement)
   - were often non-ideological, encouraging inclusive participation
   - put more emphasis on social or cultural aspects than on the economic
4. The shift to the term 'Dalit' illustrates the point best. Three decades ago Gandhijis coinage of the term 'Harijan' was widely prevalent. Today it would be seen as both derogatory and humiliating.
5. There has been considerable debate on the terms 'adivasi', 'tribal', and 'indigenous' itself. (See Xasa 2010).
6. India has witnessed a strong and very visible gay movement. The Supreme Court decriminalized homosexuality in 2009.

7. Mulayam Singh Yadav's statement came at a Samajwadi Party event that was organized to mark the birth centenary of Ram Manohar Lohia. Yadav had said that women members of parliament (MPs) belonging to families of businessmen and bureaucrats if elected to the Parliament would be whistled at by young boys around (http://dance. www.withshadows.com, March 24th 2010, accessed 3 April 2010).

8. The media carried captions that read 'Women's Bill traded for UPA's Survival: Yadavs call the Shots'.

9. Under pressure from the backward-class lobby cutting across political parties, the Congress-led UPA government gave in to the demand for caste-based Census for 2010 late on Friday, 7 May 2010.

10. Lalu Yadav representing the OBC voice ridiculed the BJP and Congress for their support to the Bill, saying that they are living in an illusion that they would get women's votes if the Bill is passed. 'It's a male-dominated society and women will do what their men would say' was the shocking statement from Lalu on International Women's Day (8 March 2010; emphasis mine).

11. 'Congress members are telling me, "please save us as we are being made to sign on our death certificates by supporting this legislation",' he said while speaking briefly on the Bill. In a speech full of sarcasm, he even dubbed the Bill as an onion that will bring tears to the eyes of the members once they peel it (rediffnews 11 March 2010, accessed 19 April 2010).

12. Addressing a gathering of Muslim Community in Patna, Yadav said, '[t]he government will have to throw me out of the Lok Sabha by deploying marshals or military then only the bill will be passed. I am not against the Bill'. But Muslim women, poor women, backward women and women who are wage labourers, they are also daughters of India and must be brought to Parliament', he added (ANI 14 March 2010).

13. Jagmati Sangwan, State President of the All-India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) has a force of over 1,000 women activists. When the powerful panchayat in Karora village of Jind district was adamant on the social boycott of the family of Manoj after the infamous honour killing in which he and his wife Babli were murdered for marrying 'despite belonging to the same gotra', Sangwan was the first to support their families (Siwach 2010).


15. The post-Independence ideal of a secure, protected labour force in India has been supplemented by the more typical phenomena of
capital's pursuit of cheap, flexible informal workers without state protection; the percentage of workers in the formal sector has dropped by 2 per cent since 1990. India's agrarian sector offers evidence of crisis and armed conflict. In April 2006, India's Prime Minister Mammohan Singh addressed the chief ministers of six states affected by violent agrarian insurgency: 'It would not be an exaggeration to say that the problem of Naxalism is the single biggest internal security challenge ever faced by our country' (Singh's comments in GOI 2006).


17. This may appear redundant but not if one looks at curricula and textbooks deployed widely in Indian colleges and universities even today. This takes us back to the question of links between ideology, theory and pedagogy that I referred to at the start of this chapter.

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