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Change Conundrum: Societal Solicitation & Social Movements

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ABSTRACT

Desire is a fundamental human emotion that can be defined as a strong wish to do/achieve something. However, where does this desire come into picture in a society which seeks to reproduce itself through the medium of socialisation? Perhaps the answer lies in the understanding of 'social movements'. When individuals or groups feel strongly about a particular cause, they may be motivated to take 'collective action' to bring about a variation in their community, society, or even the world. Desire for societal change often sprouts from a sense of injustice/inequality, a responsibility to future generations, or simply a desire for personal growth and fulfilment. This paper attempts to explore the role of desire as a driving force behind societal change and answer various questions along the way like- is desire enough to change society? How can one's desire motivate others to take action? In the pursuit of desire, how come comfort becomes less important, at the cost of which change occurs? The youth are considered as the torchbearers of transformation, hence, their say is recorded as a part of research methodology. Society may appear static on the face of it but it holds the ability to change gradually. Thus, by recognizing and harnessing the power of desire, we can strive for a positive and meaningful change in the world.

Keywords: socialisation, social movement, collective action.

I. INTRODUCTION

From a completely sociological standpoint. Social movements take place for rights, against violence, for political and/or economic emancipation or lifestyle choices. Eg. Richard Flacks says that politics and music were more deeply intertwined in the 1960s than ever (Eyerman and Jamison 1998).

“Social movements are conscious, concerted and sustained efforts by ordinary people to change some aspect of their society by using extra-institutional means” (Goodwin and Jasper 2015).

Mancur Olson evokes the ‘Logic of Collective Action’ to say that people come together on the basis of a cost-benefit analysis to gain something despite being rational individuals.

The role of social movements in translating desire into change can be understood from the lens

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of economics, politics and culture:-

(A) Economic

For Marx, revolution was a temporary coalition among many segments of population with grievances against existing affairs of state. However, he is often labelled as an economic reductionist for dividing people on the basis of merely social class, based on their relation to the means of production. He talked of a 'class consciousness' which got people to act. Changes were derived by class contradiction in such a set up. Despite the criticisms, Marxism was the only school of thought to not consider protestors as automatons (mindless mob) under demagogues and considered movements necessary for the society.

(B) Political

Durkheim opines that shared consciousness in the mind of every common citizen governs the society; collective consciousness, which is threatened by the division of labour. In this gap between differentiation (force of disintegration) and shared consciousness (force of integration) lies anomie which leads to 'undesirable' or anomic action. The interaction amongst these forces may lead to three kinds of collective actions namely- routine, non-routine and restorative.

- Routine Action - differentiation < shared belief
- Non-routine (anomic) Action - differentiation > shared belief
- Restorative Action - differentiation = shared belief

Samuel Huntington expresses, the larger the discrepancy between institutionalisation and modernisation, the greater the disorder with revolution on the extreme. He defines revolution (desire for change) as a spontaneous increase in political consciousness and rapid mobilisation of new groups, so much so that existing institutions can't assimilate them. If the political institutions are too rigid, they will still inhibit essential social change. Thus, change is inevitable and there are two paths to it; the rapid one via revolution leading to modernisation or the slower one characterised by rigidity resulting in institutionalisation (Tilly 1978).

(C) Cultural

The 'New Social Movement' paradigm from the 1960s onwards took the cultural and cognitive factors into account (McAdam 2000). Cultural drivers of movements would entail- cultural contradictions, suddenly imposed grievances, system vulnerability and master protest frames. Snow and Benford express that movements cluster in time and space because they are not independent of one another. Frames are said to be a form of cultural appropriation (Goffman). Eg. Civil rights movement serves as a master frame for the LGBTQIA+ rights movement as

both share a common ideological imprint of equality and non-discrimination. Movements also evolve based on the prevalent cultural identity for example, Feminism today is characterised by an ‘activist’ cohort, much different from how it began in the 1960-70s (Whittier).

Cultural consequences could include a replacement of the old culture by the new (dominant) one (Gramsci), contact may be established between segregated groups; two value streams producing a hybrid culture (Harrison White) and lastly ties forged to cultural elites.

Some of these perspectives cut at each other but they are perspectives after all.

Ralph Turner rightly points out that the most transformative ideologies in the world owe their origin to social movements.

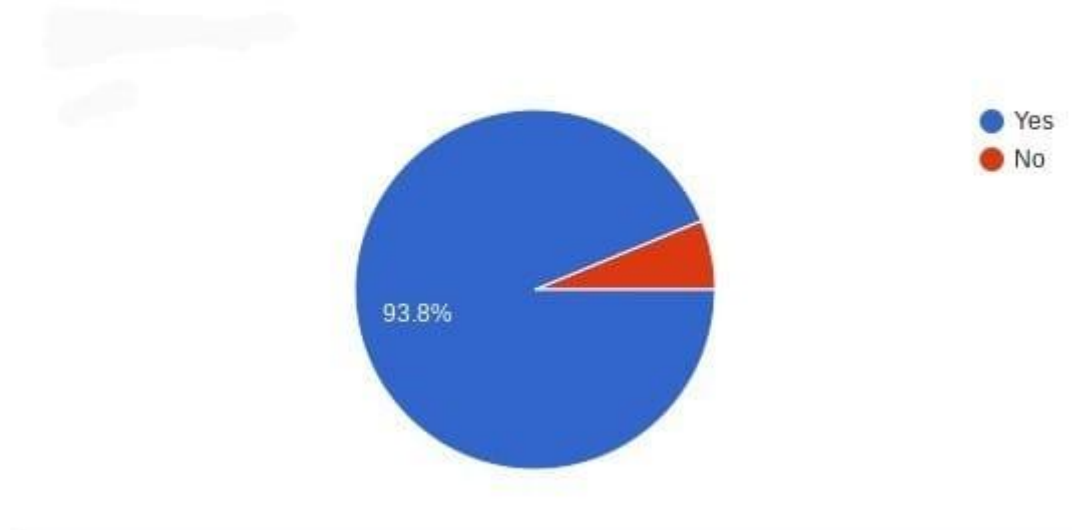
II. FINDING

The youth as a category cuts across class, caste, race or gender. The mass culture around the globe has come to be structured in a way that it responds to the demand and feeds the desire of the youth. Social movements too seem to be all consumers, producers and takers of popular culture.

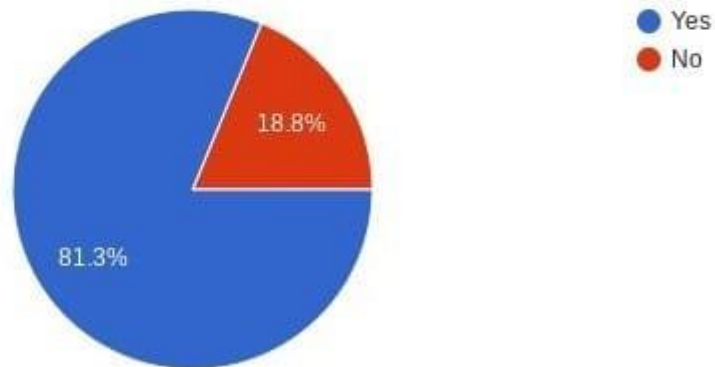
That is why, a google form was circulated amongst a sample of university students as a part of research to gauge a better understanding of their opinion on ‘desire and social change’.

The findings of the survey were as follows:

Do you desire to change something about society?



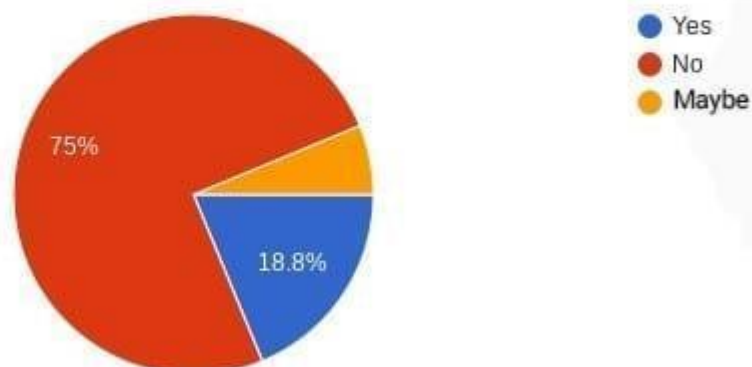
Are you willing to take action for the same?



Surprisingly, 93.8% responders desired to change the society but only 81.3% wanted to do something about it.

Incidentally, only 75% of the students were correct in indicating that desire is solely not enough for a social movement in particular and societal change at large.

Is desire enough in your opinion to drive a social movement?



III. CONCLUSION

Humans are self interested but also labelled as social animals, I believe social movements are arrived at when these extreme notions collide. Social movements can also be targeted at preserving the status quo (conservative), contrary to the focus of this paper. The most successful movements are deemed to be heterogeneous, which compel different people divided by their socio-economic reality to come together for a single facet which they desire to change about

the society. The lack of something begets desire for it, for example there's consumption for economic desire, lust for sexual desire and similarly, change for social desire.

Goodwin and Jasper fail to capture the cultural component in their definition of social movement. Interestingly, movements may not always be targeted at the state for its dismissal but for its protection eg. Dalit Movement. States also at times foster opportunities to translate into mobilisation, a shared meaning usually binds these two together for the activists. In contemporary times, desires and demands for change are being very well harnessed by the use of new technologies.

In the context of the survey results, there is a need to match the number of change seekers to change makers and it cannot be realised until the students realise that their desire could mean something if they come together. However, desire is not enough, it takes persuasion, organisational networks, strategy, interaction with institutions and more importantly, a will to act to bring about societal change via social movement. Moreover, a society is sui generis (of its own kind) and not merely a collection of individuals. That is why the meaning of identity changes when referred to in terms of a group. To address these collective demands, usually, social movements constitute oppositional politics to pan out a blueprint for the future. Additionally, awareness needs to be imparted to ultimately lead to some action.

Evidently, social movement forms the missing piece of the puzzle between desire and change. If desire is the thought and change is the result, social movement is the action part of the equation.

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