



White paper: Social capital as a concept in India: Some Instructive Lessons

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An introduction of the concept

The concept of social capital has its origin in Sociology and with its integration into various disciplines, has mutated from its original heuristic and theoretical objectives. In the process, far too many, definitions have emerged creating ambiguity over its usage. Also as there is no widely held consensus on how to measure social capital, the concept is used rather imaginatively to endorse any societal phenomenon.

Review

According to Baum (2000) there are three theoretical models underpinning the concept, one that follows neo-Marxist logic (or a structural analysis of societal phenomenon) the second, a Rational-Choice model and the third, a neo-Liberalist perspective: the first is, typified by Bourdieu, the second by Coleman and the third by Putnam. The neo-Marxist approach places greater emphasis on access to resources and issues of power in society. The rational-choice approach situates itself in the philosophy of utilitarianism that assumes interaction of the actor for purposeful ends. The neo-liberalist perspective presupposes the pre-eminence of the market and diminishing role of the state. It rests on the presumption, that creation of 'civic engagements' ensures development and community life.

Bourdieu (1985), formulated the concept while examining particular social phenomena, such as how some people or groups of privilege managed to gain access to powerful positions through their social connections. He was able to demonstrate how social capital can be used to create inequality. Bourdieu was concerned with how oppression and power are reproduced especially through non-economic means. He engaged in questions of stratification and conflict, seeking to avoid economic reductionism by specifying the contextual specificity of the associated relations and processes, and the necessary creation of meaning in the corresponding endeavours. (Fine, 2003: 36-37)



Bourdieu places the source of social capital, not just in social structure but in social relations and connections. For him social capital entails “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.” (Bourdieu, 1983: 249) His treatment of the concept is instrumental, focusing on the advantages to possessors of social capital and the “deliberate construction of sociability for the purpose of creating this resource” (Portes, 1998). His elaboration of different forms of capital (economic, cultural and symbolic) is aimed at explaining the mechanisms of preservation of the social stratification system and the legitimization of dominant-class reproduction strategy. His conceptualisation attempts to show case the ‘constructedness’ of social capital and that it is used for specific instrumental ends such as domination and rule as opposed to the idea (Putnam) that it is inherent and has a positive and normative function alone- that of societal cohesion.

Coleman defines social capital as “a variety of entities with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of actors...within the structure” (Coleman, 1988, 1990) – that is, social capital is anything that facilitates individual or collective action. He argues, that the processes that generate social capital are, networks of relationships, reciprocity, trust, and social norms. According to him, social capital is a neutral resource i.e. whether society is better off as a result depends entirely on the individual uses to which it is applied. (Portes, 1998)

However his most important contribution was how social capital, functions as a strategy to maintain social control. Of particular significance is his discussion on ‘closure’, which means observance of norms through primordial social ties, which entails social control over individuals in the group. This concept of ‘closure’ has similarities with the notion of ‘bonding capital’ (which is used by Putnam) in which norms and values play a crucial role in sustaining tightly knit networks based on particularized trust. Practices in such trust networks; generate common value systems that strengthen consensus and compliance oriented behaviour patterns amongst members. It is through such networks that power can be organised and exercised. Bourdieu was more concerned with how power is organised and reproduced to create



inequality, whereas Coleman's interest lay in how social capital, functions as a strategy to maintain social control and cohesion. (Harriss, 2002)

Putnam's conception of social capital is specifically organised around comprehending the functioning of democracy. An important deviation of Putnam from his predecessors is that, whereas Coleman and Bourdieu consider social capital an attribute of the individual or group, Putnam has developed it as an attribute of communities and nations. Like other types of capital social capital is also productive, as it makes possible the achievement of ends that would not be attainable without it. Thus for him unlike other kinds of capital (economic and human capital), social capital is, first, a moral resource whose supply increases with use and becomes depleted if not used; and, second, social capital represents public rather than a private good. (Putnam 1993: 167-171)

Putnam's model has three components: moral obligations and norms, social values (especially trust) and social networks (especially voluntary associations). He equates social capital with the level of 'civicness' in communities, towns and even entire countries. This he argues is through three types of networking- bonding, bridging and linking. Bonding social capital refers to development of networks within a community through sharing of common cultural values, morals and obligations. Bridging refers to networks between communities and groups having disparate social histories and linking social capital refers to networks across hierarchies.

However Putnam's notion was critiqued by scholars such as Harriss (2002:19-20) and Portes (1998:15, 2000:4) on the ground that it systematically evaded the issues of power. The critics argue that, social capital creates unequal access to resources and therefore there are bound to be enclaves of inclusion, leading to a rule by a few. This limitation of Putnam's thesis to address the issues of class, power and hierarchy and therefore presents a purely formalistic view of democracy.

Why Putnam's framework becomes important in 1990s

Social capital became an immensely popular tool to interrogate democracies across the world in the 1990s especially after the publication of Putnam's (1993), Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy. His later work Bowling Alone: The



Collapse and Revival of American Community (1995) elaborates his thesis of 'bonding' and 'bridging' capital. He argues that having the latter kind of social capital smooth functioning of democracies, possession which leads to minimal conflict and therefore peaceful societies. This was also the time when the former U.S.S.R disintegrated and the world was moving towards a unipolar power centre, with the United States of America as its leader.

The early 1990s was also a moment when the Indian state faced one of its major economic crisis (Its foreign exchange reserves were as low as to last only a couple of weeks of imports). It was through intense negotiations with the World Bank and the IMF that these institutions (it is no wonder that these are headquartered in Washington D.C) agreed to haul the Indian state out of indebtedness but with many riders- devaluing the Indian currency, ending of subsidies to the agricultural and processing units (thus in effect ensuring state protectionism for these sectors), ensuring that the Indian state open up its economy to the processes of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation (henceforth the World Trade Organisation rules which always were tilted in favour of the northern nation-states would apply to India- related to intellectual property rights, patents, anti-dumping provisions and trade sanctions. One of the major implications was that the Indian state henceforth lost the power to peg the Indian rupee to that of major acceptable International currencies (US dollar, Pound Sterling and later EURO). Now the international value of the Indian Rupee was to be determined by open market operations rather than the Indian state. In light of the inability of the Indian state to even exercise decisions regarding its external and internal economic policies and programmes, scholars viewed this as the erosion of the sovereignty of the Indian state- terming it now as a neo-liberal state. (Frankel, 2005, Jayal. and Pai 2000)

With the North, becoming the centre of this unipolar configuration, newer institutions and systems and ideas congruous to the north began to proliferate and impinge upon the south. The domination was not only political and economic but also much cultural- a kind of neo-colonialism. The world was now made to believe that democracy and capitalism were now inseparable (especially after the rout of communism from the Eastern Bloc). Globalisation as understood now ushered in a new era of 'free' exchange of goods and services, labour and most importantly knowledge. Of course knowledge in its hegemonised form i.e. ideologically oriented to suit interest of the predatory forms of



capitalist logic is anchored in the global North. The Indian state witnessed the incursion of Transnational chains, Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Inflow of resources- Foreign Direct investments and also short term investment in the form of Foreign Institutional Investments. These foreign investments now entered erstwhile public enterprises in India other than defence and other sensitive sectors. Two of the state owned sectors that were probably most proliferated were that of telecommunication and Information and broadcasting (especially electronic media). The new buzzword was private-public partnership. The Indian state now gradually withdrew itself from controlling the economy to merely supervising it. Also sensitive sectors such as health and education were now left to the realm of private-public partnership enterprises. It is also in this period that the idea of micro-credit institutions became extremely popular (the Grameen Bank model became especially important with the World Bank legitimising it as 'the' development model to eradicate poverty).

The new hegemonic knowledge system invented newer conceptual tools to examine the societal process especially in the south. It is no surprise therefore that the discourse on social capital in India the 1990s shared the Putnam's and the World Bank notions. It was Putnam's (1993) work after all that popularised this concept across the globe. It was also the most accepted notion especially as it was backed by the World Bank. However Putnam's conception faced much criticism in the North (Portes, 1998, Fine, 2001 and Harriss 2002)

Critique and support of Putnam's model in India

Similarly in the South in India too questions of its applicability were raised. Rudolph (2000) critiques Putnam's thesis on the ground of 'path dependence' i.e. that social capital grew over the centuries in certain parts of Italy and not in others. She also raises doubts as to whether social capital as a tool of analysis is apt enough in the Indian context. She wonders if the concepts of civil society and social capital can effectively be used to gauge any societal process in societies marked with high levels of inequality and which face radical social change?

While commenting on existing literature on social capital and especially that on Putnam, questions regarding certain assumptions inherent in the concept of social capital were raised such as - skills and networks organized in collective ways are always



positively transferred and reflected in local governance and larger political contexts (2000: 1764-1765)

Hans and Swain (2001) in an attempt to respond to Rudolph undertake an exercise to justify the usefulness of the theoretical and methodological tools of social capital per se. Though not explicitly stating that they defend Putnam's thesis implicitly they acknowledge the same. They argue that social capital as a concept can be used to explore both micro and macro level societal phenomenon. It can link everyday life with structures such as democracy, capitalism and nation and that social capital may be found in political action and even in everyday societal interactions. Their article also points towards research through the lens of social capital should also look for particulars rather than always attempting to find generalisations especially in a country that is highly unequal.

Bhattacharyya, Jayal, Mohapatra and Pai, (2004:23) point out that the concept of social capital is basically extracted from the North and that it has limitations to address the issues of inequality, class, power and hierarchy in the Indian context and also because of its methodological ambiguity. They argue that as it is a construct of the 'North', where societies are individuated, in which public life turns largely on identities that are individually chosen rather than collectively ascribed they ask how this can hold true in the context of Indian democracy. These essays highlight the regressive effects of 'bonding capital' and also questions the efficacy of 'bridging capital' for societal good. The essays interrogate the usefulness of the concept especially of the bonding, bridging and linking social capital while analysing civil society networks. The findings of this research suggest that Putnam's framework of social capital does not answer and rather contradicts the findings of societal processes in India. (Bhattacharyya, Jayal, Mohapatra and Pai, 2004; 26)

The essays argue that functioning of electoral democracy is based on identity politics especially intervening through caste and communal identities. Democracy here rests on the principle of majoritarianism, which results in unequal representation and creates enclaves of inclusion and exclusion. Politicized communities based on ethnic, religious and grounds; interface, leaving little space for 'bridging' networks. The argument in the book, is rather critical of Putnam's thesis and supportive of Bourdieuan understanding



of social, cultural and symbolic capital. (Bhattacharyya, Jayal, Mohapatra and Pai, 2004; 26)

They argue that although Putnam's work remains the overarching backdrop of the essays, the critical dimension of this work is informed, although implicitly, by a Bourdieuan spirit which interrogates sites and locations of power. For instance, Pai's (2004) essay examines in the context of the politics of identity, the role of social capital in resolving conflicts among social groups competing for the benefits of development within the new panchayats (local forms of government) established under the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (decentralisation of governance) which in the State of Uttar Pradesh in North India. The essay demonstrates that the new panchayats are an arena of conflict and contestation over scarce resources, social status and political power.

Das (2004), in his research on the State of Orissa argues that the World Bank notion of social capital in comprehending poverty is faulty. He demonstrates through his research that there are other factors that intervene in the overall dynamics of poverty alleviation through social networking. Similarly Serra (2001) questions the feasibility and the validity of both measuring social capital at the level of various States of India and also in identifying its role in explaining the differential performance of states. Serra identifies three kinds of lacunae in the application of the Putnamese methodology to inter-State analysis: appropriate measures and variables to calculate social capital; locating alternative indicators valid for inter-State analysis; and interpreting the statistical association between social capital and State performance.

Review of literature on the concept in India

While reviewing literature on the usage of social capital as a theoretical tool in India two broad categories can be drawn up. The first that does not assess the power relations present in societal processes and social phenomenon. These papers also assume the state to be benign and therefore the examination pertains to how social capital may be operationalised with the support of the state or through state institutions. The second category views the Indian state as inherently capitalist (or even neoliberal) and also acknowledges the unequal distribution of power in society and therefore seeks to comprehend organisation of social capital through social movements or even



mobilisations from the margins. This view therefore is critical of the state and hence assumes that radical politics alone can resolve the situation for the marginalised sections of society. All these papers are either abstracting the existing Putnamese methodology as it is or critiquing it by addressing context specificity or even employing the critical version of the same methodology. However there are two exceptions to these afore mentioned categories.

Gidwani (2002: 85) reviews the literature on social capital and opines that in much of the research the idea of communitarian ties or loosely culture is equated with economic benefits or yields. He opines that this assumption inherently draws on the logic of rational-choice theory, which he argues is insufficient to explain human behaviour in totality. According to Gidwani (2002: 88), Bourdieu's symbolic capital unlike Putnam's theoretical model which always deems social capital as individual agency based and as productive, posits it as having both the potential for returns as well as costs. Unlike other social capital theories, his notion of social capital emphasizes the seemingly irrational (and therefore debunking the myth of rational choice theorists) amassing and displaying symbolic capital. Thus it is double edged. Further this social capital is the product of member interactions within communities, clubs, networks etc. and therefore is appropriated by and through membership. He demonstrates how the dominant Patel caste of Gujarat State in western India in the pursuit of symbolic capital to maintain 'distinction' with lower castes has actually led to an erosion of their wealth and therefore their power.

He, asks so, why is their power now being challenged by previously less powerful groups? Should the accumulation of symbolic capital not strengthen the Patel caste's domination? But this did not happen. In their quest to accumulate symbolic capital in order to draw boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, the Patels of Gujarat begin to adhere to certain social distinctions. Patels' urge to display their status strained their assets. These distinctions such as cessation to work as sharecroppers and wage labourers, delegation of agricultural work on piece rates and no longer involving themselves, incurring huge expenses in marriages (displaying power of wealth so as to gain acceptance), engaging in uneconomical enterprises which have high public visibility etc. The changes in the economy due to green revolution and canal irrigation has meant - newer employment opportunities for the lower caste peasants and



appreciation of wage rates. Moreover erstwhile wasteland which was usually owned by the lower caste members gradually became productive with introduction of new technologies.

Jadhav's (in the press) paper 'Caste as Social Capital: A Case of Citizenship and Maratha Rule in India' in this book examines how social capital is constructed by members of the Maratha-Kunbi caste cluster of Maharashtra to organise it as a political bloc. He draws on Bourdieu's concept of cultural and symbolic capital to argue that narratives, myths, historical legacies and received historical notions help organise a common 'imagined caste' identity. He traces the formation of this bloc through the colonial period to the present. He investigates how once in power the Marathas now use state institutions and policies to distribute resources to its members. This patron-client relationship is conducive to the kind of electoral politics in Indian democracy. It is no wonder that this caste bloc has managed to retain power for over five decades.

Thus both Gidwani and Jadhav draw on Bourdieu's model to demonstrate two contradictory social phenomena i.e. how social capital may limit one community's domination and on the other how it can aid the organisation of a caste bloc for rule.

A) Paper's employing Putnam's concept of civic ties and networking

The set of papers that I review below can be classified as those belonging to the first category drawn up earlier i.e. those that use Putnam's categories of bonding and bridging capital and civic ties rather uncritically. Scholars such as Krishna and Uphoff (1999), Krishna (2002, 2003, 2006), Varshney (2001, 2002), Morris (2002), Singh (2003), Sharma (2005) and Kingston (2005) employ the methodology of social capital to assess how social networking can be effected through state institutions.

Krishna's (2002, 2003) argument following Putnam rests on the premise that social capital (bonding social) is a benign resource and it is through collective action of members that a community can access resources and intervene in the political sphere. The extent of social networking determines the density of bonding social capital that disparate communities possess. Thus for Krishna social capital amounts to mutually beneficial collective action. The assumption here is that dense social networking usually leads to better development prospects (Krishna and Uphoff 1999, Krishna, 2002, 2003)



Krishna's research explores the question of whether and to what extent does social capital contribute to participative citizenship, economic development and community peace. He argues that in India, democratic participation is hampered due to lack of intermediating (formal) institutions between state and market on the one hand and citizens on the other. This institutional gap manifests in unequal development. To overcome this obstacle he emphasises informal collective action through networking for common gains. He premises his argument on the basis of an analysis of the following variables of social capital- a) Membership in labour sharing groups b) dealing with crop disease c) dealing with natural disasters d) trust e) solidarity and f) reciprocity. Based on the intensity of participation of these variables, he deduced the density of networks which he calls social capital.

However taking a slightly different path from Putnam he suggests that while social capital is 'significantly associated' with such outcomes- economic, social and political- social capital alone does not explain the variation in any of these, nor does it automatically guarantee such outcomes (Krishna, 2002: 8-9). To get activated and yield results, passive stocks of social capital require 'an appropriate mediating agency', which in the case of his study is provided by a new type of local political leadership. Over the last two decades, he argues, younger and somewhat better educated political leaders have emerged, who on the basis of their familiarity with and understanding of the procedures required by the state agencies- mediate with these agencies on behalf of the villagers. These agents are essential for the operationalisation of the stock of social capital which is then effected in ensuring benefits. (Krishna, 2002;163)

Varshney (2002) whose work examines the processes of communalism and ethnic conflicts, argues that 'inter-communal' or 'inter-ethnic' civic ties, facilitates trust building, leading to a harmonious associational life between the communities i.e. Hindu and Muslim. So, for him it is not just formal civic ties (such as through social associations, clubs etc. as per Putnam's understanding) that foster the spirit of democracy, but rather it is the informal networks that cut across and bridge religious and ethnic identities that are important.

Varshney (2002) has for his field work compared three pairs of demographically similar cities in India. One city in each pair is comparatively peaceful, whilst the other



experiences frequent communal (Hindu-Muslim) violence. Varshney finds that in each case, for various historical or economic reasons the populace in the peaceful cities is relatively integrated compared to the violence-prone cities. In the more integrated cities, formal and informal “networks of civic engagement”, frequently built on an economic symbiosis between groups, facilitate communication and constrain polarizing behaviour, thereby helping to prevent riots. Varshney’s thesis is that social and economic interaction can create trust and thereby reduce the frequency of riots. Also Varshney’s argument recognises the political constructedness of social capital and does not completely endorse Putnam’s equation between social capital and good governance. Thus both Varshney and Krishna do in their own ways, is to seek out the civic elements of social capital, recognise the processes through which they are politically constructed and establish how they help in promoting either social peace or economic development.

Morris’s (2002) paper attempts to correlate poverty indices to social capital closely following Putnam’s understanding. He argues that the different States of India have performed differentially due to high or low levels of social capital. His argument rests on the premise that social capital if organized can help in alleviation of poverty. Using Putnam’s framework rather uncritically he posits poverty as a manifestation social capital i.e. a rational-choice econometric model of explanation. He concludes that there is some evidence to support the argument that States with high levels of social capital fare better in terms of reducing poverty. The problem with such macro-level examination is that it cannot really grasp power relations, dissensions, politics within groups and communities. This kind of an assessment tends to club all kinds of individual based interactions also as social capital.

Singh’s (2003) article using Putnam’s model explores the field of micro-finance through the lens of social capital. He opines that micro-finance as an institution enables the actors from the weaker sections to mobilize savings, obtain credit and through it realize self employment. Singh argues that it is only with the intervention of NGOs such as the Grameen Bank, that altruistic transformation in favour of the poor can take place. The idea here is premised on the idea that the formation of Self Help Groups (SHGs) which are grass root level communitarian organizations are highly democratic as the policy and planning is done by the marginalized actors themselves. This paper fails to assess



the power contestations within SHGs. It takes for granted that communitarian networks is always democratic, which it need not be in all instances.

Sharma (2005) argument is similar to that of Singh (2003) wherein he opines that micro-credit institutions have the capacity to create community based action. His argument similarly falls into the homologue trap- that community based organisation is always democratic and ensures social justice.

In an interesting article, Kingston (2005) attempts to conceptualise the relationship between corruption as a practice and social capital. He asks if corruption can be reduced if there is a collective understanding of the nuisance of corruption and action by the actors. It is premised on the idea that paying bribe for a favour turns out costly for other individuals as they too have to resort to bribe payments to realise the same favour. It thus reduces the benefits available to everyone else. He poses the question what if all the bribe-payers collectively decide not to pay bribes will this reduce corruption? He deems this collective action of non-cooperation with the officials as social capital i.e. a collective action based on informal norms that can generate trust levels to achieve common objective. But how do we measure this form of capital? He states that literature on corruption suggests that frequent transfers of officials are usually deemed as action against the malice of corrupt practices and therefore if collective action against corruption is successful then there ought to be less frequent transfers of officials. However his findings suggest that social capital organised in such a case has actually led to an increase in transfers.

He considers measuring corruption as methodological challenge just as it is to measure social capital especially in terms of variables like "trust" or "civicness". He contends that lack of social capital in certain Indian states could be due to ethnic diversity and frequency of riots. In assuming so he follows Putnam's (1993) and Varshney's (2002) logic of bonding (strong) and bridging (weak) ties i.e. riots are less frequent when there is a denser bridging social capital that links members of the different communities. While the paper is instructive on how social capital may help in such situations, it seems to see corrupt officials in a political vacuum i.e. the administrative and political hierarchy is not examined - role of political actors, higher officials and bureaucratic practices. The conclusions therefore can be ambiguous and not really attestable.



B) Social movements as Social Capital

Some scholars such as Swain (1997, 2000), Bhattacharyya, Jayal, Mohapatra and Pai, (2004), have assessed social capital as social movements and thus their work presents a much more critical perspective than the papers discussed previously. They draw on the research of scholars such as Frankel and Rao 1989 and 1990, Kohli, 1987, Harriss, 2003 have examined State-wise differences in terms of governance and development. These scholars have argued that disparate ideological orientations followed by various States of India have led to differential manifestations regarding state-society relationships.

Kohli (1988) argues that political ideology has a major role to play in poverty alleviation schemes. He contends those 'left' regimes have always performed better in reducing poverty levels in comparison with 'multi-class' non-communist regimes with loose organization and diffuse ideology. According to Kohli, such a party regime has to have the following characteristics- a) coherent leadership b) ideological and organizational commitment to exclude propertied interests from direct participation in the process of governance c) an organizational arrangement that is simultaneously centralised and decentralized so that the regime is both in touch with the local society and not being subjected to local power holders.

On the other hand Frankel and Rao (1989) have emphasized the importance of class interests in poverty alleviation in regimes that are non-communist. According to them, electoral politics can offer a possibility of reducing dominance of upper class interests when leadership from lower classes emerges.

For instance Das (2005) while interrogating the nature of the Indian state wonders how relations of trust and cooperation between state representatives and the rural poor actually aid the latter. His fieldwork is based on primary data conducted in two villages of the State of Orissa in Eastern India. He raises two pertinent questions. The first concerns the nature and extent of the trust relations and cooperation between the state representatives and rural poor and if it exists is it specific to certain spatial zones? The second asks a methodological question- what are the factors that explain the observed level of trust and cooperation between state representatives and poor rural people. He concludes that the power of state representatives and the resulting social-economic



inequality between them and the rural poor exist unchecked; therefore, the conditions for state-society synergy are actually undermined. He argues that it is especially when a pro-poor political organization exists that the possibility of state-society synergy would be higher resulting in percolation of at least some benefits for the rural poor. The following sets of papers interrogate this aspect of civil society intervention as a form of social capital.

Heller (1997) argues that state intervention and class mobilization in the State of Kerala, has manifested in two forms of social capital i.e. bonding and bridging. He traces the movement from the bonding kind of social capital that Kerala typified in the pre-independence period to the bridging type of social capital and in doing so transformed itself into a successful model State. He argues that Kerala's high level of social development, successful redistributive reforms and social justice are a direct result of mutually reinforcing interactions between labour movements and a left oriented democratic state. Kerala has the most extensive networks of cooperative societies, NGOs, caste self-help groups and also is a cent percent literate State. It also has a history of active civic engagement. He explores this responsive state and conscious labour class interaction in the organized factory sector and the unorganized (informal) sector.

Drawing on Putnam, he argues that the particular social history of Kerala- the erstwhile princely State of Travancore which enabled formation of community organisations such as religion based tightly knit communities that promoted educational, health, and cultural activities. These in turn activated successful political movements demanding more jobs and more political representation from what was then a Brahmanical state. This kind of bonding social networks continued to remain until the decade of 1930s. However since the early 1940s, the Communist Party of India (CPI) successfully united landless labourers, poor tenants, and urban workers overriding caste, religious and ethnic considerations. This in turn led to sustained attacks on the feudal institutions—landlordism, the attached labour system, and the exploitative caste system. Thus with this kind of bridging social capital the CPI built a strong cadre-based organization and labour unions together with farmers' associations, student groups, village libraries, and a powerful cooperative movement. The instrumental and universalistic character of the movements' demands invited effective state intervention.



However as Heller argues, the Kerala state was by its very ideological orientation antithetical to the forces of the market. This was proving to be costly for the labour movement as it was faced with the dilemma that too much collective action in an economy governed by private investment was non conducive for preservation of labour interests. A scenario such as severe economic crises, Heller argues, sets limits on the left oriented state's capacity for inclusive social justice. The labour-state synergy transforms and the parochial loyalties begin to reappear in the political landscape. He argues that in Kerala in the factory sector, organized labour has stressed on the idea of increased productivity so that it can offset labour retrenchment and in the unorganized sector, the organizational capacity of unions has been combined with bureaucratic intervention by the state to ensure better labour-private entrepreneur relationships.

Swain (1997, 2000) employs the concept of social capital in a much more diffuse manner. He argues that it is through social movements (in this case environmental) that the civil society can intervene in protecting ecology. He opines that it is the non-party political activism that can thwart the designs of the Indian state. In his article he provides the reader a synoptic view of the colonial policies and also the post colonial state policies regarding environmentalism. He views the Indian state as capitalist and its policies as marginalising the politically weak. He argues that the only way that those at the periphery can intervene is by organising a strong civil society.

In his latter work (2000), Swain directs his enquiry towards examining social movements that emerge in two spatial zones of Orissa- the coastal areas and the interior areas. He notes that the environmental movements that were organised in the coastal regions were far more successful in their objectives than those that of the interior region. He enquires as to why this is so. He argues that it is the availability of certain political opportunities that enable people having common suffering to form collectivities, which later open up opportunities for further action. These collectivities are organised on the basis of existing social networks through which social relations are organised such as caste, class, ethnicity etc. This kind of mobilisation draws on features such as trust, norms, common histories and networks to sustain it. But this still does not answer why some movements sustain and other does not. In order to assess this problem Swain Operationalises Coleman's notion of social capital. Coleman, while defining social capital gives importance to the existence of weak ties in



society i.e. inter-communal networks (weak ties) are better than intra-communal networks (strong ties) in aiding mass based mobilisations. A movement drawing support from a dense social network based on loose ties is more likely to spread and be sustained. Strong ties which as often found in homogeneous groups due to their commonly shared notion of oneness are more likely to produce in-groups and factions in a movement whereas weak ties among social networks are conducive for broader mobilisation and large-scale collective action. Weak ties are more likely to link members of different small groups than strong ties, which tend to be concentrated within a particular group. This is similar to Putnam's conception of bonding (strong ties) and bridging (weak ties).

John and Chathukulam's (2002) paper titled 'Building Social Capital through State Initiative: Participatory Planning in Kerala' explores how the civic associations, especially those with mass bases affiliated to political formations i.e. Communist Party of India (Marxist) has led to an unforeseen situation wherein dense form of social networks in various arenas of power can conflict. They argue that with the return of the left oriented government in Kerala in 1996 new policies of decentralisation and devolution were effected. The State drew upon the successful experience of the NGOs working in this field i.e. Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP), the leading pro-left non-governmental organisation. With this in mind the left led government operationalised the 'peoples' plan' in which participative democracy and state-civil society relationships would be strengthened. In this whole process the involvement of the civil-society was instrumental in making this successful. However the authors argue that as these multiple sites – NGOs, non-party political formations, Self help groups, Neighbourhood groups etc. organisationally grew stronger they had a negative impact on the newly inaugurated decentralised state institutions i.e. the panchyats. In other words they are wary of the fact that too many people's organisations may lead to dissension and contestations and undermining of one another. A situation where social capital actually is adverse especially for the local units of popular representation.



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