
*Marxism and Social Movements* is a well-timed and bold contribution to the literature of Social Movements Studies. When the field has become rife with analyses that are repetitive and redundant, such an edited volume offers some stimulating insights, ideas and arguments. The range of subject matter that it covers is indeed diverse and ambitious. The volume is huge and covers a period of 150 years, spanning six continents and numerous movements. It presents a convincing case for reviving Marxist analysis for studying social mobilisations. Collectively and critically, all the chapters in the book provide thought-provoking and interesting studies of various kinds of social movements.

There are various struggles, movements and mobilisations that erupted and emerged into the political scene of the contemporary world, especially after the world economic crisis of the 1930s. The prominent movements among them are the anti-austerity movements in Europe, the Occupy Protest throughout the world, the democratisation wave in the Middle East and many more. These movements have been well studied by social movement scholars, but their views are too focused and microscopic.

In fact, most of these social movement theorists study social movements with a microscopic view. They have tended to look at social movements as separate and disconnected phenomena that are not connected with the overall systemic malaise and power relations. They fail to connect the threads and give their analysis a macroscopic and holistic perspective, overlooking the systemic circumstances that produce these multifarious struggles. The editors/authors argue that these movements are the result of a crisis in Global Capitalism, rising inequality and a political system dominated by capitalist elites.

The volume editors argue that mainstream social movement theorists have often ignored capitalism and class analytical categories in their work. This partly happened because of the rise of identity movements and decline of labour movements in the 1980s. Moreover, there has been a redrawing of disciplinary boundaries, with an accompanying reallocation of specialised study areas to different groups. Everyday resistance became a part of cultural studies, whereas revolutions became the forte of political scientists and industrial strikes became the subject matter of scholars of Industrial Relations. A holistic and critical sociological study of social mobilisations is urgently needed in social movement theory and a Marxian approach can offer that.

Two prominent schools of social movement theory (a) Resource Mobilisation (RM) Theory and (b) New Social Movement Theory (NSM) are inspired by
Marxism, yet they don’t use Marxian concepts directly for analyses. Scholars such as Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow engage in intellectual dialogue and sparring with Marxism but situate themselves outside Marxist theory. Moreover, there are anti-capitalist scholars like Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (with an Anarchist streak) whose concept of “multitude” is interesting and describes processes that operate within social movements, but has failed to generate a coherent Philosophy of Praxis. They are also vocal about achieving a “strategic transformation” of the society, a euphemism for the ultimate “revolution”. However, the editors of this volume believe that reforms are the necessary smaller steps that would lead to the ultimate overhauling of the system.

The concise aim of this project is to strive to develop concepts that are necessary for understanding contemporary social movements and bring back the erstwhile marginal Marxist political economic analysis into social movement studies, research and practice. The editors argue that there has been an excess of post-modernist and microscopic cultural analysis of social movements after the phenomenal cultural turn in social sciences. To counter that, this volume is in a way an effort to bring a Marxian theory of Capitalism and Political Economy back into the field of social movement studies. Though there is no Marxist theory of social movements, Marxism can offer “a theory of and for movements” (p. 15).

The volume in its collective effort argues that the Capitalist system is the central problem that popular mobilisations are facing throughout the world. The volume is openly Marxist in nature, yet the editors distance themselves from vulgar forms of Marxist-determinisms. They argue for democratic socialism from below that allows for the subjective space and political agency of multifarious actors beyond the political vanguardist agency of “labour”.

The book is organised into three sections: (a) Theoretical Frameworks; (b) How Social Movements Work; and (c) Seeing the Bigger Picture. The first section puts forward the basic tenets of Marxism as counteractive to contemporary social movement theories. I will not discuss all the papers here, just the important ones which best represent the depth and the expanse of the knowledge that this book proffers.

For example, Colin Barker in his essay, “Class Struggle and Social Movements”, brilliantly argues that movements are not opposed to class struggle, but are its “mediated expression” (p. 47). With this novel twist, he sets a new agenda for studying social movements. Thus, social movements should be studied as contextually situated expressions of “class struggles” against the exploitative capitalist system. Nilsen and Cox in their paper present a praxis-oriented approach for understanding social movements, where movements from below