



Society and Social Power

Janani Harish

Associate Fellow, World Academy of Art & Science;
Research Associate, The Mother's Service Society, India

Abstract

Society is the source of immense power. Over the past few centuries humanity has recorded phenomenal growth in its collective capacity for accomplishment, as reflected in the 12-fold growth in global per capita income since 1800. The remarkable achievements in living standards, longevity, science, technology, industry, education, democracy, human rights, peace and global governance are the result of the exponential development of the capacity of society to harness human energies and convert them into social power for productive purposes. Today, humanity possesses the power and capabilities needed to fully meet the multi-dimensional challenges confronting global society. The source of this energy is people. Human energy is transformed into social power by the increasing reach, frequency and complexity of human relationships. Society is a complex living network of organized relationships between people. Its power issues from channelizing our collective energies in productive ways by means of organizing principles such as coordination, systems, specialization of function, hierarchy of authority, and integration. This immense social power remains largely underutilized. Social science needs to evolve a comprehensive, trans-disciplinary understanding of the roots of social power and the process by which it is generated, distributed and applied. This knowledge is the essential foundation for formulating effective social policies capable of eradicating forever persistent poverty, unemployment and social inequality. This article is based on a series of lectures delivered by the author in the WAAS-WUC course on "Toward a Trans-disciplinary Science of Society" at Dubrovnik on September 1-3, 2014. It traces the development of social power in different fields to show that human and social capital are inexhaustible in potential. The more we harness them, the more they grow. Unleashing, directing, channeling and converting human potential into social power can eliminate all the problems confronting the world today.

1. Introduction

Human beings seek to accomplish goals to fulfill their needs and aspirations. People have sought different things, depending on their economic and social position, at different periods in their lives, and at different periods in history. Needs have evolved, from personal physical survival, to emotional fulfillment, to global and idealistic concerns. Needs change over time, new ones replace earlier fulfilled ones, but throughout, we see that they have all been met. Some are met readily and easily. Some demands are conceded after a prolonged struggle. But human aspiration is eventually fulfilled, and the power for this fulfillment comes from society.

Society not only facilitates the realization of aspirations, it also anticipates our needs and fulfills unexpressed wishes. It possesses great powers and capacities that are drawn from within itself. Its potential for accomplishment is infinite. A trans-disciplinary science of society that studies the formation of society, the generation of social power and the empowerment of the individual members for personal and collective accomplishment is essential for a new human-centered development paradigm that can solve all the problems that confront the world today.

2. Society as a Web

Society is usually thought of as something out there. It is that which is outside of us, our family, home, institution or work place. It is abstract. Like the air all around, it is invisible, intangible. But if it is not there, the absence is immediately felt, and existence becomes impossible. So, what exactly is society?

Society consists of people. We do not refer to society during the Jurassic period or in the South Pole. These people who are collectively described as a society are related to each other. These relations can be physical or psychological in nature. Society also consists of structures that bring people together, and like the relationships, these structures can be physical or non-physical.

Though society feels amorphous, it has a physical basis. The biological tie is one basis for bringing people together. The family gives a sense of belonging. It is the first group with which we all identify. The parents, siblings and children form a close-knit unit. The extended family and the clan come next. Geography is another basis for a set of people to be grouped together. People of one village, town, province, city state, region, country or continent are referred to as a society. We talk about the American society, the Arabs in the Persian Gulf, the Russians in the Siberian region or the Asian immigrants in Europe.

The sense of identity felt on the basis of geographic location or biological tie used to be confined to very small groups. Today, clan loyalty or fierce regionalism is increasingly giving way to a growing sense among many people that we all share a common identity and destiny as human beings. Society is evolving from the nation state to the human community.

Society is not adequately defined by physical groupings alone. It has a psychological basis as well. Ethnicity, educational background, profession, economic stratum, class, caste and institutional membership can distinguish and group people. Thus, we have the society of the Asian industrialists, European artists, Chinese communists, the Harvard or Oxford alumni, the upper or middle class, the people below poverty or without literacy, the world's billionaires, indigenous tribes of Africa, Silicon Valley entrepreneurs, the republicans, democrats, priests, warriors, doctors, teachers, scholars, writers and so on.

Ideas can bring people together, regardless of their location or other attributes. People who are opposed to the use of nuclear power, who care deeply for the environment, who advocate greater economic equality or who believe in religious harmony, anywhere in the globe identify with each other. In this way, society also consists of groupings that are essentially

mental in nature – beliefs, opinions, ideals, attitudes, sentiments, religion, political ideology and values. So we have people of different religions who are referred to collectively as a group – Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists. We have liberals and conservatives, communists and capitalists, Keynesians and monetarists, atheists and theists.

In theory, people can be grouped on the basis of various formal and informal, physical and mental coordinates. But to actually bring them together, some structures are required. Otherwise, what can make a person feel one with another person who lives a few miles away? How can one even know the other exists? Houses, roads, community halls and town squares are physical structures that bring people together physically. Villages, towns, cities and countries mark the boundaries of the groups. Shops, market places, schools, colleges and offices let them transact. Transportation facilities enable movement and help bridge distance. Telephone instruments, telephone lines, wireless devices, satellites, telecom companies, research organizations and government departments comprise communication facilities that keep people in contact.

The building that one calls house gives an objective reality to the biological tie of the family, but it is not just this physical structure that fully explains the idea of family. A set of rooms – some brick and mortar are not enough – and the social construction of roles and responsibilities are needed to make the biological tie real and complete the family. Society consists of many such non-physical structures that bind people. Language, manners, customs, standards and laws are some. They define and guide the interactions between people. They are like the standardized language, HTML, which makes it possible for billions of people to interact with one another on the internet.

Guilds, unions, currencies, governments, armies, religions, trade, markets, factories, ports, banks, courts, parliamentary assemblies, hospitals, schools, newspapers and other media are specialized institutional structures that enable society to engage in a wide range of activities – for self-defense, production, exchange, commerce, governance, healthcare, education and recreation.

Educators, educational institutions and education are three different but related components of society. Educators are a group of people, the institution is a physical structure, and education a social organization that encapsulates the collective knowledge of humanity and provides it to each child in a period of 15-20 years. Societal groups are interdependent, and often overlap. One can be an Indian Hindu software engineer, an American Republican lawyer, Chinese Buddhist Silicon Valley entrepreneur, a European banker belonging to the royalty or an African tribal who has studied to become a doctor and migrated to Canada.

Society is a complex, but organized, structure of such groups and subgroups of individuals and organizations.

3. A Living Organization

One and one makes two only in Arithmetic. In all else, ‘the whole is greater than the sum of its parts,’ as Aristotle said. Bringing together two objects, such as the horse carriage and

the engine can result in something far greater in complexity, utility and power, the motor car in this case. The integrated circuit chip, a screen and keyboard give the computer. When the computer is hooked to a telephone, we have the internet. Add any one component to the web – education, commerce, entertainment, socializing, advertising, news, book publishing – and a new industry is born. Perhaps the greatest illustration of Aristotle’s statement is society. Society is more than the sum of all people. It is an intricately linked, complex organization. It is like the human body.

“The recent Arab Spring shows how conscious society is.”

Various types of molecules come together to form cells, tissues, organs, organ systems and the entire human body. But the body is much more than a collection of molecules. It is a highly complex, sophisticated organization of all these molecules, cells, tissues, organs and systems. The smooth functioning of all the parts and the interlinks between them determine the survival and functioning of the body. Even the slightest change or disturbance can result in a breakdown. Every part is integrated with every other part. A change in any one affects the whole, which is true for the human body as well as the society. Society is alive.

This living organization, just like the human being, has senses. It responds to stimuli, expresses itself, and has survival instinct. It remembers, learns, reacts, acquires skills, aspires, grows, evolves.

Minutes after Britain’s Princess Kate steps out of her car, dresses similar to what she is wearing are sold out in online stores. Society seems to be watching, literally. Fashion is one of the simplest signs of society’s senses. Society responds to its surroundings. Whenever there is any natural calamity in one part of the world, aid pours in from everywhere. Whether it is a tsunami in Asia, typhoon in the Caribbean or famine in Africa, the world comes together to act. When there is a success in one place, it is recognized, and emulated elsewhere. The Indo-Arabic numerals that we all use today originated in India, was improved in Arabia, reached Italy, and then spread to the rest of Europe. Try multiplying two 4-digit numbers using Roman numerals, and by the time you are finished, you will realize why this development is so important. Green Revolution, brought about by improved seeds, was developed and tested in Mexico. When this became a success, India imported these hybrid varieties of seeds and eliminated famine. Soon, other countries in Asia and Africa followed.

The recent Arab Spring shows how conscious society is. An unfortunate act of one poor vegetable seller in Tunisia sparked off a revolution in 20 countries, and impacted the whole world. Society sees, feels, thinks, acts. It also learns from past mistakes. After an economic crisis or humanitarian disaster, society takes steps to prevent its recurrence. After the Fukushima nuclear plant disaster in 2011, it was not only Japan that changed its nuclear policy, countries everywhere chose to stop or slow down their nuclear programs.

We are becoming increasingly aware that we cannot isolate ourselves from others; we all share a common fate as humanity. Terrorism and climate change are negative reminders of this fact. Everyone is becoming aware that if trees are cut in South America’s Amazon forests, or coal is burned excessively in villages in Africa, it can result in the melting of the

Polar ice caps and Himalayan glaciers and rising sea levels in America and Europe's coasts. When scientific discovery or technological advancement in one laboratory benefits people worldwide, or online learning democratizes education for all, they remind us that we are part of one living organization called society.

4. Social Power

Jules Verne published his famous novel *Around the World in 80 Days* in 1873. The novel portrays a wealthy English gentleman who wagers that he can travel around the world in a mere 80 days and achieves what was considered impossible at the time. When he manages to reach the shores of England after braving storms, fighting tribals, and crossing forests and raging rivers, everyone considers it a miracle. This is fiction, but it closely reflects the reality of the period. Long journeys, whether by sea or by land, were fraught with risk. Columbus could not get people to even agree with his idea that one could go east by sailing west. He failed to find financial support in Portugal, Genoa, Venice and England, and managed with great difficulty to get the backing of the king of Spain. Ferdinand Magellan, who is supposed to be the first man to circumnavigate the globe, actually did not. His ships and part of his crew did, he died along the way in the Philippines, in a battle with the native people. Travel was slow, dangerous, unreliable, difficult.

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Compare this with travel today. Travel agencies, online booking, and improved modes of transportation have made travel fast, safe and comfortable. Some amount of luck may be necessary, but surely there is no need for a miracle to enable us to complete the journey as planned.

Travelling around the world is no longer considered the achievement of a lifetime, but business as usual.

How did this happen? How have we become so powerful? There are airplanes, computers, internet and cell phones, true. But this change has not been brought about by technology alone. Technology cannot explain all of the power we possess today. This change over 50-100 years or more is seen not just in travel. We see it in every sphere of life. We are better off than ever before.

We live longer today. Healthcare has improved. Life expectancy that was 31 in the early 20th century is 72 today. We see less starvation and famine. The world has immense productive power, to grow more crops, to create more goods. 200 years ago, Thomas Malthus said that human population growth would outpace food production. A UN study predicts that the world will have surplus food, in excess of the needs of the population by 2030.¹ A 100 years ago, Ford customers had the choice of “any color you want as long as it is black”. Today, one does not have to be shopaholic to know that we are all spoilt for choice.

We live in the most peaceful of times. It is not easy to get this impression from reading the daily newspaper, but historically, the number of people killed in battle – calculated per 100,000 people – has dropped by 1,000-fold over the centuries. War like WW I or II is unthinkable in Western Europe today.

Primitive early man living outside society went out, and either returned with food, or had become food himself. It was each man for himself. Today, the family nurtures the young till the age of 18 or 21, taking care of their physical, social, emotional, financial and educational needs. The family is a microcosm of society. What the family does to its members, society does in a larger way.

Most countries provide its citizens security, law and order. We do not go to sleep wondering whether the neighboring country will invade our borders in the night and colonize us. We have our governments and armies, there is also international diplomacy. We are all covered by a fabric of law. We do lock our doors at night, but we are also fairly sure that powers stronger than our front door are protecting us, and that law enforcement agencies are policing and ensuring safety. The idea of human rights is established. We have rules for property as well as intellectual property. There are rules that bind international trade. There are conventions enforced even in the treatment of prisoners of war. There are even laws that protect animals and natural resources.

Better transportation and refrigeration facilities and trade links between countries have brought the world's produce to our supermarkets. When a major phone manufacturer launches a new version, it becomes available simultaneously in every continent. Online stores deliver all over the world. A hundred and forty years ago, Jules Verne said in *Around the World in 80 days* that the world has become smaller. Then how do we describe the world today?

Earlier, people had to wait for the next day's newspaper to find out what happened in the world that day. Later, radio and TV brought us news the same day, and then events began to unfold live. Today, we have live streaming video, not just from major international news channels, but from people on the street who have a cell phone and internet connection. We can also reach out to the world better. Expensive and cumbersome trunk calls are replaced by instant wireless communication.

Education is no longer the domain of a select few. It was expensive and not easily accessible. In the 16th century, a wealthy German merchant asked a learned man how to give his son a good business education. The learned man told him, *If you want your son to learn addition and subtraction, then any French or German university will do. But if you want the boy to go on to more advanced subjects like multiplication and division, then you had better send him to Italy.*² Today, all primary school children all over the world learn the multiplication tables without leaving their country or town or village. Almost every country has compulsory, free primary education. All the knowledge accumulated by earlier generations over millennia is made available in a capsule form, and delivered to the student through formal education in 15-20 years. We take for granted all the knowledge that we have. Among a group of illiterate people, the one person who could read and write enjoyed great power. We

all have that power today. Education has become more easily accessible too. Student loans are available. Books that were so few and precious used to be chained to libraries. Today there are book stores, book banks, private and public libraries. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have electronically opened up the classrooms of the world's best universities to all. With the advent of the digital reader, electronic books and online libraries, it is time and energy that are in short supply.

The internet has accelerated the pace of individual empowerment. Getting a book published, previously a challenge even for renowned writers, is a simple task today. Without the backing of a publishing group, without an investment, one can self-publish one's writing, through Amazon or other similar services. Ebay and many similar sites make a trader of anyone, we do not need a physical store to sell anymore.

Banks and other financial organizations allow us to do what was not possible earlier. If it were not for the bank loan, only the wealthy could venture into entrepreneurship. Today venture capital and bank credit can make an entrepreneur of anyone with an idea or skill. The opportunities that were available to only the wealthy or influential earlier are now available to every one of us.

Women in most countries can vote today, whereas a 100, even 50 years ago, they could not. Even some men could not. Being different is not condemned or frowned upon as much as before. Being colored, left handed, physically challenged, homosexual, unmarried, divorced, part of the minority, and being a liberal in a conservative society or a conservative in a liberal society are more accepted today. Individuality is accepted.

We were born with all these rights, we did not fight for them or have to ask for them. We received them, for no fault or desert of our own. All these powers we enjoy today are diverse expressions of the collective capacity of society. Society possesses great powers and capacities for accomplishment, and it enhances the power of its members to accomplish any and everything they seek to achieve. The experience and knowledge of the entire human community accumulated over countless generations are freely offered to each new generation. We are the product of a long line of evolution. We start off with the accumulated achievements of past generations, and build on it. So social capacity grows over time.

Not all development is positive, there are setbacks and digressions. Some movements seem to go in cycles. Even when there is progress, it is not uniform or fast. School enrollments for girls in Mali in 2012 are comparable to those in the United States in 1810. So there are countries that are 200 years apart. In Afghanistan, women are celebrating now because they are allowed to ride a bicycle. But the overall direction in which we're moving is progressive.

5. Empowerment of the Individual

As society makes progress, it empowers the individual members more and more. The individual does not exist separate from society. His or her growth is defined, sanctioned and supported by society. All movements headed by an individual derive their energy and power

from the support of the society. Success of any magnitude, in any field, for any person, has a parallel in the world around.

“The individual and the society are like nuclear physics and astronomy, one is the finite microcosm, and the other is the infinite macrocosm.”

When Martin Luther posted the ninety-five theses on the door of the Castle Church of Wittenberg in 1517, the Protestant Reformation was launched. But the Reformation was born not because he posted the theses, it was because his views were accepted by people, because the people were ready for the Reformation. Luther’s views spread like wild fire and within years 200 new religious denominations sprouted up around Europe. His power came from society, if not all of it, from some sections of it that endorsed his views.

All great leaders rose to power on the strength of their followers’ support. Mahatma Gandhi was able to free India from colonial rule because he was accepted and obeyed by 300 million Indians. Mikhail Gorbachev was able to end the Cold War and dismantle authoritarian rule because the Russians aspired for greater freedom, and people everywhere wanted an end to the threat of nuclear war. The individual and the society are like nuclear physics and astronomy, one is the finite microcosm, the other is the infinite macrocosm. The interaction between the two is the catalyst and formula for social evolution and personal growth. Neither is complete without the other. The individual is the quintessence of society, and includes all the complexity of this macrocosmic society in specific expression.

6. Sources of Social Power

The source of social power is people. It is from people’s aspiration, energy, and capacities that society derives its power. When individual capacity is organized and channeled through a system, it becomes social power. This process of this transformation is illustrated by the story of a 16th century Indian emperor, Humayun. Humayun was engaged in a military campaign, when his wife was expecting their first child. Humayun was anxious to get news of the delivery as soon as possible. The problem was his army camp was at a distance of hundred miles from the palace. The fastest horse and the best rider would take more than a day to cover the rough terrain in the scorching heat. One wise old minister said he had a solution, and announced that he would arrange for the news to travel to the emperor within minutes. Now, this was in the 16th century, before the era of instant long distance communication. So what did this minister do? He ordered tall towers to be erected every few miles between the city and the army camp. He stationed a man with a drum on every tower, and a code was agreed upon. The moment the baby was born, the drum message was relayed, from tower to tower, across the hundred mile span in less than five minutes. A simple system made possible a feat that seemed impossible. Hundred drums and hundred men together cannot do this, but when they are arranged at a uniform distance from each other, along the hundred mile route,

instant communication becomes possible. This is how society gets its power, by harnessing the energies and capacities of its individual members, and channelizing it through a system, much as the magnifying lens channelizes sun's rays and creates fire, or the dam and the turbine channelize the river water and generate electricity.

Society is made up of people – their aspirations, energy and potential. Therefore it is a teeming mass of this potential that is unorganized at first. Human energy is released by human aspiration – for physical survival, happiness, accomplishment. The more intense the aspiration, the greater the energy released. Aspiration arises in response to crises, such as war or the spread of a contagious disease. It also arises in response to emerging opportunities – independence, democratization, spreading education or entrepreneurship. Sometimes the distinction between crises and opportunities is blurry. The threat of global warming has opened up research and development of renewable energy sources. The challenge or opportunity awakens the aspiration for a solution. This releases energy.

Energy is of many types. It can be the physical energy of a laborer, skilled work of the carpenter, plumber or goldsmith. It can be the dynamism of the leader or industrialist. It can be the erudition of the scholar, the creativity of the artist, the imagination of the writer or the mental energy of the engineer. All human activity is an expression of this energy. All human accomplishment is the result of the proper direction and application of the energy. The energy when directed towards finding a solution, becomes force. Force organized, becomes power.

A simple analogy to this process of generating social power is seen in the everyday task of lifting a heavy object. A box that one person cannot lift alone, can be carried by four people together. When the four individuals, who represent society here, come together, and aspire to lift the object, they exert themselves and energy is released. When each directs it towards lifting the object, the energy becomes a force. When all four lift the object, at the same time from four different sides, the force is organized, and the power thus generated lifts the box. This coordination of four individuals gives the power to do something which none of the four can individually accomplish.

In this way, society is a huge reservoir of all our energies, skills, capacities, knowledge, intelligence and aspirations. A group of people lifting an object, and the old minister stationing hundred men on hundred towers are simplistic models. Society is filled with more complex organizations – family, market, trade, industry, economy, government, army, law, education, value systems – that focus and organize human energy so that individual human capital is transformed into social capital. The quality of the organization through which the energy passes decides the quality of the power that issues. The knowledge with which the power is directed and administered decides the productivity of the power. Over time humanity has evolved more and more effective forms of social organization.

7. Coordination

The idea of four people lifting a heavy object together is so simple that there hardly seems to be any theory behind it. But this marks an important step in the evolution of society. By coordinating the efforts of many people, society acquires capacities that are not available

when everyone acts in isolation. When the caveman went out in search of food, if he came across a lion, or a pack of lions, that could be the end of his story. If on the other hand, he found a deer, he could chase it or aim a spear at it, and if it was too fast for him, he had to try his luck elsewhere. But when two or three men went out together, things became different. One could herd the animal in a direction, another could be ready for it, a third could watch their back, and the bigger the group, the stronger and safer they all became, and more effective became the hunt. When the hunter gatherers took to farming and settled down in one place, they built their dwellings close together. There was safety in numbers. Villages formed, and collectively, everyone had the protection that the lone individual lacked earlier.

Insurance is another organization that empowers through coordination of another type. It divides the risk among everyone. In return for a small sum, the power of the collective offers everyone the capacity to tide over a heavy personal loss.

A small contribution from many sources amounting to a massive work is seen in the online encyclopedia Wikipedia. It is the work of over 30 million editors, 3 million of whom have been active at different times, each contributing a miniscule part of the compilation. No one man or woman is capable of doing this task alone, but each small addition or edit has gradually resulted in this repository that contains 30 million articles in 287 languages. The vastness of Wikipedia is not only because of the internet or the wiki application. Technology is such an integral part of every aspect of our life that it is very easy to explain everything as a result of advances in science. But science itself is a product of social evolution. Before the internet or the wiki, a similar project was carried out. In the mid-19th century, Professor James Murray led a literary project that similarly drew from the knowledge, expertise and time of tens of thousands of people. He gave an open call for volunteers to submit all the words they knew in the English language, along with the first known use of the word, its origin, meaning, usage and so on. This project received over six million submissions over a period of 70 years, and became the first edition of the Oxford English Dictionary.

By coordinating us and our efforts, society has generated remarkable power, with which it empowers each one of us.

8. Specialization

Specialization is an improvement on coordination wherein different individuals or sub-groups within a group perform different tasks, and collectively accomplish far more than would otherwise have been possible.

An examination of the organization of an army, the ancient Roman army for instance, reveals power of specialization. Instead of entering as a single large mass, the Roman Army broke into many columns during the battle. They had specialized divisions, each with a specific role – foot soldiers, archers, cavalry, javelin throwers, signal bearers. Some soldiers had special skills, such as swimming across rivers to surprise the enemy, much like modern day commandos. In the background, the army was supported by physicians, blacksmiths, cooks, drivers, porters, spies, messengers and men who took care of the animals. No amount of

brute force, courage or determination of the enemy could match the tactical strength of such specialization.

Specialization is an improvement on coordination, and generates greater social power. The term *Specialization* has a rather high sounding connotation, but we see it in practice everywhere. The family has its own specialized divisions – for protecting the members, providing for everyone’s physical needs and comforts, housekeeping, taking care of the children, fulfilling the emotional needs of all, instilling discipline and inculcating values in the younger generation. Specialization exists everywhere – education, agriculture, industry, governance – and increases the productivity and efficiency of the organization.

9. Hierarchy

Specialized Roman divisions working in coordination defeated powerful armies. Imagine for a moment what would have happened if everyone in the Roman army had started giving orders during a battle? If a general had disobeyed the king, or a centurion had told his general that he had a better plan, or a soldier decided that he knew best, they would have simply been run over by the enemy. Vertical grouping and delineation of authority and responsibility are required for the smooth functioning of any organization.

Like specialization, hierarchies are seen in all organizations. Colleges have a vice chancellor, different departments with a dean to head each, and lecturers in the various departments. Schools have a principal, various grades and a class teacher for every grade. Political power is differentiated into local, state, national and international levels. Every profession has its hierarchy of expertise – from service technician to production engineer to designer. Authority and responsibility flow through this path so that the whole group functions effectively.

This vertical division is seen even in families, though parental authority is becoming more difficult to exercise! Many Prime Ministers and Presidents, or maybe all of them are criticized by their own countrymen, but no country that does not want to be dissolved into chaos can do without them. Also, how dysfunctional would a country be if each and every decision had to be taken by the President! Hierarchies prevent this by differentiating authority and responsibility vertically into different levels, so the highest authority is assigned matching responsibility, and the smaller issues are handled by others lower down the line. This raises productivity and efficiency of the whole organization. Social capacity combined with social authority gives social power.

10. Integration

Integration magnifies the energy of organization. Within a group, when the various subgroups and their activities are integrated, the overall effectivity is enhanced.

Amartya Sen, the Indian economist and philosopher who won the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1998, said that countries with functioning democracies do not suffer from famine. What is the connection between democracy and the availability of food? Society’s power to integrate is seen here. In democracies, the government is answerable to the public. The leaders are more responsive to their voters’ needs. Democracies generally have a free

press that reports unbiased news. So the press watches what the government is doing, the people are aware of what their leaders are up to, they can voice their opinion in the press, and the leaders know the entire country, even the world is watching. Lack of transparency will allow one to get away with anything. But this integration of food production and supply, responsible governance and the media has the power to eliminate famine.

In this way, society generates tremendous power through coordination, specialization, hierarchy and integration. This power is made available to every member of society, to make use of and benefit from.

11. Inter-convertibility of Power

Society offers different types of power –food, healthcare, governance, law, education, science, production, trade, commerce, communication, transportation, recreation. All these forms of power are inter-convertible. The Roman Empire converted military might into economic power. Today, a country with a strong economy can use its money power to leverage political power. A farmer, using the power of technology, can produce more crops, and make more money. He can use this money to educate his children. So the power of technology can be converted into food, wealth, education and more. A commercial organization can use better transportation and communication facilities to expand the business. Knowledge can be used to get a job, make money, buy the latest technology, travel, communicate or gain social status. Physical prowess or artistic talent can be used to earn money and fame.

Power of any one type can be transformed into any another.

12. Individuals and Networks

Those who think that social networking began with Orkut and improved with Facebook must be teenage or younger. Humans have always been socially networked. Relationships are hardwired in us. They have helped us survive as a species. They stimulate our mental and emotional development. All human accomplishment can be traced to relating to others constructively.

The World Wide Web shows how powerful interlinking can be. Even search engines rank a website higher if it is connected better to other sites. Great civilizations of the past flourished when they forged trade links with other civilizations. The English language assimilates some 4000 new words from other languages every year. The more it accepts foreign words, the more it grows and is accepted. The stronger the connections between the nodes, the greater the opportunities for success.

All that we use – language, numbers, education, employment, money, clothes, food, stationery, furniture, buildings, roads, gadgets, freedom, law – are products of society. Society offers these vast resources to each one. That Wikipedia is the work of 30 million people is conceivable to us, if not the actual magnitude, but at least in concept. But as we go through the day, do we realize how many people have contributed to making each act of ours possible?

Society offers vast resources to each one. Some go to school, and learn. Some do not. Some do just enough work to make the grade. This is what we all do on a larger scale with ourselves in society. Those who take the slightest effort to make use of these powers are carried on by the movement of progress in society. Those who refuse to participate in society and isolate themselves for whatever reason, fail to benefit from the collective resources. There are some who see what society has to offer, empower themselves, and go on to accomplish, both personally and for the collective. These are the formed individuals who go from being led by society, to leading society instead. They create change; they are at the forefront of social evolution.

“A small portion of society's powers are organized and channelized through systems and made productive. But not all social capacity expresses in action.”

13. Unutilized Potential, Infinite Potential

The earth receives enough solar energy in one hour to meet human needs for a full year. But solar power accounts for less than one tenth of one percent of global energy produced as the world struggles to meet the demand for energy. Most of the sun's rays are unutilized. Similarly, a small portion of society's powers are organized and channelized through systems and made productive. But not all social capacity expresses in action. A large part of our personal and collective lives are unorganized, and our capacities unutilized. Inequality in the distribution of wealth and freedom, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and scarcity of opportunities alongside unused human potential reveal the inefficiency of present social systems.

Human capital is the ultimate source of all resources, and it is inexhaustible in potential. It grows by giving, much as information grows when shared. Social power is not subject to any inherent limits. It has unlimited scope for development, organization and application. A complete knowledge of the process by which human and social capital develop and are converted into power can be utilized by any individual to rise to the highest level of accomplishment and by any society to become a leader of human social evolution. Such a knowledge is essential for establishing a new human-centered development paradigm.

Author Contact Information

Email: harish.janani@gmail.com

Notes

1. *World Agriculture 2030* Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, August 20, 2002 <http://www.fao.org/english/newsroom/news/2002/7833-en.html>
2. Georges Ifrah, *The Universal History of Numbers: From Prehistory to the Invention of the Computer* (New York: John Wiley, 2000), 577