



Knowing Beyond the Structure: Maximizing Social Power through a Synergistic, Values-based Approach on Diversity

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Abstract

In this article, a principal place is given to the question of how the ways we conceptualize the use of our mind influence the generation of social power. We define social power as the potency of socially integrated individuals to accomplish specific predetermined values. These values can be related to anything from concrete material prosperity to abstract social and cultural goals. How are the goals accomplished? Are there principles or laws that govern the process? What is the role of the individual in this process?

We argue that the development of social power requires an understanding not only of the heterogeneity of individual and social structure, but also of the subtle phenomena that give dynamism to the structure itself. We assume this intangible factor to be the container of social energy and consider that stimulating unique individual capacities to its maximum expression is crucial for the production of social power. Accordingly, we ask ourselves what progress in the way we think can bring us closer to the maximum expression of individual capacity. Maximum contribution of each individual in diverse aspects of social functioning is an applied form of unity in diversity—diversity referring to a unique capacity of each individual, and unity being a harmonious collective of unique individuals. As a case study, we choose the phenomenon of multicultural environment, as a context in which the highest variety of individual frameworks are brought into relationship with one another.

1. The Attainment of Maximum Social Potential through Social Structures: An overview

When we consider a society, our thought goes mostly to the structure that defines it: economy, politics, law, and material culture. We define structure as an organisation of heterogeneous elements making a whole that finds its purpose in realizing a particular concept. But what about the intangible and subtle aspect of the society that gives life and dynamism to its structure? Present forms of official education are among the examples of limited human conceptualisation which leave the unstructured potential ignored. So-called reforms in education mostly concern either the organisation of work and schedule or the adjusting of program content in relation to a standardized perspective on what needs to be known. The reforms forget about the potential of professors who transmit the knowledge and students who are actually the target. How much does a class depend on the mastered capacity

of a lecturer to communicate the knowledge and how much on a student to engage in the reception of knowledge? The standardized character of innovation seeking structure ends up covering uniformity over uniqueness, thus enclosing immense creative possibilities. Each individual is a unique source of this energy, while the medium of expression is the structure. Both need to be fitted adequately and complement each other, which means that the structure must stimulate the individual expression and that the individual must effectively use the structure as a ground for expression. The social structure is supposed to organize the social energy in a way that would facilitate and support its expression rather than retard and obstruct it. Education must not restrict the expression of students' potential, but promote its uniqueness and support its shaping for a socially functional form. How can we attain the highest level of social energy, i.e., the maximum of the potential expressed through the social structure?

Our hypothesis is that this subtle reservoir of social energy could be manifested to its fullness in a harmonious unity of individuals expressing their unique capacities. We consider that each individual capacity can contribute to the society in a productive way. By this the individual would not only attain self-satisfying accomplishment, as a result of realization of unique potential, but would also find his/her unique path to social contribution. This accomplishment is not only for the benefit of individual prosperity, but is the expression of maximum social potential. What better example than the artist completely devoted to his/her work which one day becomes exquisite cultural heritage of the world, inspiring new creations centuries thereafter? Finding passion in any kind of work means expressing our organic fullness through a structure. Some find maximum accomplishment in their work roles, some in their family roles, nevertheless, there is enough room in the society for each unique contribution. Even those who declare themselves out of society, like sages and ascetics, contribute immensely to the world knowledge with their profound experience.

2. The Synergistic Approach to Attaining Maximum Social Power

What are the values that could support and encourage this perspective and how do they relate to social advancement? It seems clear that here, our ideal could be defined as a united collective of individuality. The concept that we choose to pursue is one where the individual attains maximum accomplishment and freedom of expression of a unique potential, while at the same time contributing to the community that functions as a united harmony of individuals. The individual potential should be open to free exchange with the social environment through beneficial interaction and cooperation. We consider this synergistic approach to be a possible perspective for attaining maximum social power.

We consider collaboration/cooperation to be the key element that connects individuals into a harmonised unity, with the inclusion of a synergistic effect. Not only does the individual work for his/her own benefit and accomplishment, but the same expression of capacity contributes to the collective by returning the favour through the synergistic product of cooperation. Scientific and professional conferences, medical institutions, schools, libraries, banks, insurance societies, and even competitive market economies are built on this concept. Even though cooperation/collaboration is the basis of modern society, due to a minuscule expression and interrelation of human potential via the social system, we are far

from reaching the optimal level necessary for its prosperous and harmonious form. What would a musical orchestra or a theatre production express without conscious harmonious cooperation of individual performers? Our schools teach us how to learn and express common knowledge as single units, but they do not teach us how to be unique in using and developing the knowledge.

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Education must raise the individual’s consciousness of being a unique piece in a puzzle of collective evolution. How many government and non-governmental organisations across the world today are working on a limited number of social questions and how many actually consider each other as partners? The relations of supremacy justified by the necessity of competition for the limited number of places in the social system rule out a great amount of cooperative opportunities. How many collaborative interactions and exchanges are there between different intellectual spaces considering human values? Diverse organisations of people build concepts of universal global development, progress, peace and unity from different perspectives. How much more could we learn if we were to unify these perspectives in a wider framework through cooperation? These constructive relationships are the greatest creative source of all human achievement in knowledge, know-how, culture, governance, etc. However, cooperation is a conscious process that requires willing investment of individual energy.

3. Inertia as an Inhibitor of Human and Social Progress

What then opposes the expression of human potential? We choose to address all inhibitors of the manifestation of human capacity as the inert elements of human progress and social evolution. Inertia ties us to the known and the secure, opposes change and innovation, suspects the different, and, in general, stands firm against any dynamics. It slows down and impedes progress and can manifest itself through different phenomena, sometimes very appealing to the laws of reason (such as need for trust, security and stability). Inertia results in a great number of expressions entangled in our everyday life, which we are more or less conscious of. Some forms of its manifestation are: lack of openness and receptivity to new perspectives and opportunities, resentment of challenges, dependence on the past and socially acknowledged dogmas and the resistance to empowering transformation of our internal individual and external social structures due to an attachment to established forms of authority. Even students realizing the importance of education succumb to different forms of inertia, thus losing their way in academic progress. Using our knowledge about health and environment in every-day consumption is a real challenge for the human population, whether it is in the individual level of body health or collective level of environmental protection.

If progress is our aim, whatever its context and definition may be, then we must consider this inherent human characteristic manifested through the individual as well as through the collective. Progress can be defined from different frameworks, but all these perceptions have a common essence, corresponding to the fact that it requires energy directed towards what is unknown to the subject. Whatever our vision of the future is, there is always a risk—a struggle between fear and hope. Going for a job interview can make people tremble in anxiety of all the things that could go wrong; the same situation could be captured as a great opportunity for achievement.

How can new ways of thinking help us overcome the inertia that up till now constrained our minds from seeing beyond the social structure? When thinking about the society, the mind tends to concentrate on the tangible constructions. In this work, we put forward what is beyond, in other words, the intangible factor as a container of social potential. The uncertainty of the subtle usually results in a call for protection by a fixed structure. Our idea is to put forward the opportunity of uncertainty and to place trust in the vast potential it offers, rather than to succumb to the fear of the unknown.

We must go beyond the social structure, into the “subtle”. This widening of perspective appreciates change as an evolution, rather than destruction. It is a new framework. We have to take into account the fact that the human mind trusts what it already knows and that such a characteristic can result in closure and stagnation. Carl Rogers writes that most of the ways of behaving adopted by the individual are those that are consistent with the self-structure.

Another example of the result of tendency “to fix”, which acts as an inhibitor of free expression of human potential, is the all-pervasive tendency to impose and preserve the superficially determined axiological structure as grounds for a hierarchy of human capacities. Should the product of our current social situation impose a value distinction between diverse human capacities or should we try to think beyond our present social structure? Should we make judgments on the value of unique individual expression based on current tendencies of, to name one, material prosperity? Intellectual and academic work have an enormous impact on human progress today. Art is one of the capital media of expression of the subtle human knowledge and vitality. Physical capacities are responsible for all things man-made in the world today and make social expression possible. Cultivation and development of each of the human capacities require conscious human effort. The modern society tends to judge the value of different human capacities by the social expression they give birth to. Are we conscious of the standard by which we assign social value? We attribute dominant value to the emerging skills that seem crucial for the future world from the current standpoint, sometimes undermining the ideological fundamentals and the historical circumstances they were built on. Before running to any conclusions, we must first understand that for the society to function as a whole, it must embody an organisation of diverse capacities, just as the human body is an organisation of different vital functions. Each part plays its role, which is equally important for the generation and sustenance of the whole. We argue that every individual, by inborn potential, has his/her unique opportunity of expression in the society and an adequate place for accomplishment. The difference is in how much of this potential is realized in a social collective. Imposing value judgment on capacity rather than on the effort

invested for the constructive expression of the capacity is in our opinion a misplaced process of evaluation and an inhibitor of individual accomplishment. The latter is attainable only if adequately recognized by the social environment. Suppressing potential from childhood can not only result in individual dissatisfaction and frustration, but is a loss of opportunity for unique manifestation inherent to the individual. In India, a grand majority of children are directed towards higher education in medicine and engineering, their inborn capacities are not even considered in their mental, vital and physical development.

4. The Role of Multiculturalism in Social Development: A Case Study

Every contact is an opportunity for a constructive exchange. The wider the range of difference in the experience of a contact, the more there is to be learnt by the individuals and the collective. We consider multiculturalism to be an appropriate case study for the fundamental human phenomenon of the encounter between the different and the unknown. In order to grasp the importance of multiculturalism, we must conceive of its role in the development of humanity, without however forgetting its potency for conflict generation. Sparks and frictions in multicultural contact can result in beneficial exchange and progress on each side, but can also create conflict. Being aware of the process by which we evolve permits us to conceptualise more adequately our perspective on development.

Cultural intolerance is an attribute of human consciousness in certain stages of development. All societies have once embodied what we call barbarism today. The more educated, mentally developed and open to exposure of diverse contact, the more tolerant and receptive the collective tends to be. Taking into account historical facts such as crusades, colonisation and slavery, we can say that the destructive frictions are less present today than they were in the past.

Instead of looking for uniformity as an imperative for a harmonious collective, we must realize all the ways in which we benefit from the fundamental human characteristic of diversity. As genetic diversity has turned out to be crucial for human evolution, we consider cultural diversity to be a catalyst in social evolution. Our consciousness grows through contact with the different and the unknown.

Are we conscious of what multiculturalism has given us so far? The exchange of knowledge between cultures has existed since the very first intercultural contact. From the most basic material needs, such as shelter, food or clothing, through various technological innovations to abstract concepts, such as moral values or religious beliefs, humankind has always used this encounter of diversity in a positive way.

Multiculturalism gives us immense opportunity for interaction—seven billion unique individuals potentially capable of interacting with each other. What an immeasurable potential of knowledge exchange this is! All cultures played their role in what the world is today. Without India, we wouldn't have had Hindu numerals, decimals. How much do we owe to the English language, fertilized over years of spreading over the continents, as a mediator of conceptual exchange? No communication would be possible if science were not a multicultural field of interaction. Possibility of foreign trade made people discover new

continents. How much did we learn about ourselves from meeting with indigenous people from faraway islands? Even the concept of spirituality, growing over hundreds of years of diverse religious and non-religious cultural traditions, has come to encompass a grand number of unique definitions and interpretations. What would body practice in Europe be if it hadn't reached the Asian cultural heritage? This immense potential that lies in multicultural contact must be organized.

Today, this process is still evolving and we need to be conscious of it in order to maximize the realization of its potential. However, in our usual way of thinking, we still tend to hold on to the social structure and find difficulties in realizing the subtle possibilities for creativeness. One finds it difficult to look beyond the immediate, especially when it comes to urgent inconveniences. For example, instead of concentrating only on the threat that comes with the immigrant waves in Europe, why not develop the perspective for utilising this new social potential? This great amount of human energy is not the real concern, but its randomness and dispersion as a consequence of exclusiveness from the host-society are. There is a great need for social organization for channelling and directing this energy constructively. Environmental policies are an example of future-oriented programs of action which not only concentrate on minimizing the consequences of pollution, but also on developing new ways of thinking about consumption. Instead of perceiving predominantly opportunities for conflicts in multicultural environments, we must see the upside of intercultural communication. What we have achieved so far is the result of diverse contributing elements.

With our current thought, the first reaction in a new intercultural encounter is the tendency to secure and stabilize. When differences are encountered, we either choose the way of uniformity imposing a model determined by relations of superiority, or look for balance in connecting the diversities and recognizing their complementarities. Multicultural contact happens among individuals, who, facing an opportunity of transformation, cling to what defines them—identity and integrity. Therefore, for a multicultural contact to appear as an opportunity, rather than a threat, we must not jeopardize the concepts that ground the individual's collective existence. It must happen as an opportunity for free exchange of knowledge that offers a possibility of a higher unity than the individual culture—a higher structure encompassing harmoniously its elements and recognizing the subtlety of their connection. The process of exchange and construction of novel modes of knowledge and practice, however, requires conscious determination and energy. Here, we encounter the problem of inertia.

Multicultural environment is a field of opportunity for encounters between individuals and communities with different perspectives on values, knowledge, skills and ways of life. These differences provide rich potential for beneficial exchange, discoveries, growth, development and transformative experience. This encounter can result in a closure and refusal or an open exchange and acceptance, depending on our perception and reaction. Humanistic psychology tells us that one of the characteristics of a fully functioning person is openness to experience, without consciously preventing troubling stimuli from entering the consciousness. Carl Rogers, one of the founders of this discipline, writes that any experience inconsistent with

the self-structure may be perceived as a threat, and the more of these perceptions there are, the more rigidly the self-structure is organized to maintain itself. When the individuals accept into the self-structure all sensory and visceral experience, they understand others better. However, as they accept more organic experience, they find that they are replacing their own value systems with a continuing organismic valuing process. We argue that the outcome of a multicultural encounter depends very much on the level of consciousness of the individual and of the community in relation to the opportunity they are given.

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5. Internalized High Values as a Determinant of Individual and Social Progress

We consider that the recognition of equal values of diverse human capacities is a necessary step towards the individual accomplishment* acquired through the expression of a unique potential. We consider this to be a crucial step towards the harmony between the individual and the collective, characterized by synergistic cooperation. Carl Rogers writes that a rich life, with continual aiming at full potential fulfilment, is another important characteristic of a fully functioning person.

Apart from considering a possible inhibition of the individual capacity by the collective, we dedicate our attention to the individual as a potential catalyst of his/her own expression as well as of the transformation of the collective. The individual is shaped by the natural and social environment, but he/she also manifests inherent human characteristics. Collective values are crucial for shaping the individuals by their environment, but they can interact with the inborn characteristics only when they are internalized by the individual. We say that the survival instinct is an inherent character of every living being and that it puts the individual wellbeing before any other. Have we never experienced a situation where people renounce their own basic vital needs for another living being? This form of behaviour is most visible in times of crises and war. In the recent Paris attack at the Bataclan Concert Hall, a number of individuals put aside the opportunity to escape and voluntarily exposed their wellbeing to danger by saving other people. Internalized values are susceptible to transforming the individual as well as the collective.

Values involve two types of dynamic organization: the collective and the individual. The collective consists of individuals connected through diverse structural and subtle relations, and

* We would like to point out the distinction between the above addressed accomplishment—defined by growth in supporting the complementary progress of the wider collective and the individual benefit—recognized as progress by individual standards, unrelated to the collective.

the individual has his/her own internal structure. As a model, we can look at the individual's internal structure, responsible for the physical, vital, mental and spiritual processes, at the productive part, and at inertia as the inhibitor of transformation. The embodiment of values depends on the depth and the intensity of interaction between the values and the dynamic organization. In the case of the individual, the concept must become not only mental but also a physical and an emotional aspiration. In the example given above, we see that the lives of other human beings have an impact on our own wellbeing and thus we consciously act not as egoistic units, but as a part of the collective. From another perspective, determined by the level of his/her consciousness, he/she can wilfully and purposefully act towards accomplishing the transformation by sublimating lower values to higher values.

“The collective has to see the individual as a unique heterogeneous organization and the individual must function in a harmonious unity.”

The consciousness of a functioning whole determines the depth by which we internalize and embody values coming from the social environment. Our creative and dynamic aspirations struggle with inertia when it comes to developing this consciousness and applying it in life. There is always struggle when it comes to deep transformation. The embodiment of values is a transformation of the system of values which requires active individual engagement. In other words, the individual must wilfully invest his/her energy in what he/she perceives as progress.

One must be conscious of the importance of his/her contribution to the collective for his/her own accomplishment in order to freely engage himself/herself in open exchange and cooperation. Sincerely acting according to a certain value means to have embodied the particular concept to the level of physical and emotional needs. We argue that the embodiment becomes, with the raise in consciousness, not only mental but the embodiment of our functioning as an organic whole.

When freedom is given to individuals, they can use it as an opportunity to express a unique potential or misuse it in a way that turns out to be destructive to both themselves and the community. Giving small children absolute freedom of action before they develop a minimal level of consciousness related to their environment can result in causing inconvenience or material damage to other people and children themselves. To create an environment supportive of free expression does not mean to give infinite opportunity to individuals, but to provide as much as they can creatively and responsibly use. The latter depends on the depth of internalization and the capacity to apply collective values. Thus, if the individual strives for more opportunity for creative expression and freedom of action, he/she must first rise in consciousness relating to collective values.

How can the individual know “what is best for him/her?” How can we minimise the inertia that imposes struggle in each step of attaining consciousness? Besides the fact that

the individual needs to understand himself/herself to know what is best for him/her, he/she must also be aware that freedom and opportunity are as accessible as the individual's will to reach them. The will in the individual is the strongest when he/she functions as a unified organic whole taking into account his internal structural and subtle elements. When we pursue a goal that is highly ranked by our system of values, represents an emotional motivation and suits our physical capacity—either as a challenge or as a commodity, the grand individual energy is spontaneously expressed and directed towards the particular accomplishment. The collective has to see the individual as a unique heterogeneous organization and the individual must function in a harmonious unity. To understand a human being, we must take into account all its diversity. Only an interdisciplinary approach can help us understand the development of consciousness at all levels of human functioning.

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6. Conclusion

Multiculturalism, as a ground for the expression and interconnection of diverse individual potential, is an immense generator of social power. Taking into account its historical contribution to world progress, it is one of the greatest contributors to creative innovation and worldwide knowledge exchange. Each and every modern nation-state has grown through multicultural encounter. Diversity has two faces: offering infinite creative opportunity on the one hand and unreliability of the unknown on the other hand. Perspectives that aim beyond the structure allow our mind to reach the intangible. Today, we have the possibility of developing new ways of knowing and new mental frameworks characterised by recognition of the realm of subtle aspects of the society, which would help us identify the values that could maximise the expression of individual potential and, thus, the generation of social power.

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