

Paper Code: MPOLCC 9

Paper: Political Governance in India

Topic: Social Movements in India

Prepared By: Kanak Priya

INTRODUCTION

Social movement is a collective term used to describe all enterprises that establish a new style of life. They originate from a condition of unrest and derive their motive power from dissatisfaction, with the current form of life and from wishes and hopes for a new scheme or system of living. In its beginning, a social movement is shapeless, poorly organized and without any form. At this stage, the collective behaviour is at a primitive level and the mechanisms of interaction are elementary and spontaneous.

As a social movement gradually develops, it attains the form of an organization. On maturity, it has a body of customs and traditions, established leadership, an enduring division of labour, social rules and social values. In short, it has a culture, a social organization and a new scheme or style of life. Structural conduciveness and strain, creation of a generalized belief, circumstances, mobilization of participants and the application of social controls are six primary factors that act as determinants of a particular social movement. The study of social movements is very helpful as an integral part of social science/studies.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: CONCEPT, NATURE AND DEFINITIONS

The term 'social movements' was introduced in 1850 by the German sociologist Lorenz von Stein, in his book, History of the French Social Movement from 1789 to the Present(1850). Social movement is carrying out, resisting or undoing a social change. A social movement generally aims to bring in reforms or changes in the social structure. It is born out of conditions of deprivation and exploitation in a society. According to Graham Wallace, an English social psychologist and educator, who is remembered for his contribution to the development of political science, the psychology of politics and his pioneering work on human creativity, 'A social movement develops out of a deliberate, organized and conscious effort on the part of members of society to construct a more satisfying culture for themselves.' Social movements refer to a collective action or behaviour to achieve better conditions in society. Thus, they may be defined as a voluntary association of people engaged in a concerted effort to change behaviour and social relationships in a larger society. Many a time, they aim at bringing in radical changes against the unjust, unlawful and inhuman actions in society. Sometimes it is argued that the freedom of expression, education and relative economic independence that are prevalent in the modern western culture are responsible for the unprecedented number of social movements. Modern western social movements gathered momentum through education (the wider dissemination of literature) and increased mobility of labour, because of industrialization and urbanization of the 19th century societies.

Definitions of Social Movement

The concept of social movement gained momentum in the 19th century in Europe. During the period of European social chaos, a new momentum started for changes in the society, which later on came to be known as social movements. Politicians and sociologists of the time advocated the liberation of oppressed classes and the establishment of a new society by altering property rights and relationships according to the Marxist ideology. Their ideology is reflected in their definitions of social movement. Since the early 1950s, many sociologists have made attempts to give a specific definition of social movements. Some important definitions of social movements are as follows:

- **Herbert Blumer:** 'Social movements can be viewed as collective enterprises to establish a new order of life. They have their inception in the condition of unrest and derive their motive power on one hand from dissatisfaction with the current form of life and on the other hand, from wishes and hopes for a new scheme or system of living'.
- **M.S.A. Rao:** 'A social movement essentially involves sustained collective mobilization through either informal or formal organization, and is generally oriented towards bringing about change, either partial or total.'
- **T.K. Oommen:** 'A movement is a conscious effort on the part of a group to mitigate their deprivation and secure justice, a movement is conditioned by the factors in the social structure; a movement is perhaps the chief mechanism through which the deprived section demonstrates its power united by an ideology to redress the evils or grievances.'
- **Prof. Y. Singh:** 'Social movement is a process of collective mobilization of people in a society in an organized manner under an individual or collective leadership in order to realize an ideologically defined social purpose.'

Nature of Social Movement

A social movement is a consciously organized and planned activity of individuals having common interests. In the modern world, it largely depends upon the traits of different interest groups and their ideological make up for the pursuit of particular goals. Like social class and political representation, the term 'social movement' is used by various scholars idiosyncratically. First, a social movement is a group of people who endeavour to build a radically new social order. According to Craig Jenkins, Professor of Sociology, the Ohio State University: 'A social movement is "a series of collective actions conducted to bring about change in social structures", and is guided by "a vision, however dimly articulated, of the alternative order desired and of the basic measures necessary to put it into effect".' Participants in a social movement not only challenge decisions made by authorities, and make demands on authorities but also try to make lasting, large-scale and significant changes in the texture of the society. John Wilson, a renowned sociologist and a Professor at the Duke, views that participants see themselves as engaged 'in the building of new social worlds.'

Movements range widely in terms of proportion of participants who desire radical change. As Dennis Chong, Professor of Political Science at the NorthWestern University, Chicago, points out: 'In every social movement, some activists primarily seek immediate gratification and private benefits, such as an increase in local prestige, and are not deeply committed to long-term social change.' Cornel West, an American philosopher and civil rights, who is known for his combination of political and moral insight and criticism and his contribution to the post-1960s civil rights movement, is of the opinion that social movements have often

been 'culturally degraded, politically oppressed and economically exploited'.

According to Paul Wilkinson, Emeritus Professor of International Relations of the University of St Andrews Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence, 'Social movements are clearly different from historical movements, tendencies, or trends. It is important to note, however, that such tendencies and trends and the influence of the unconscious or irrational factors in human behaviour, may be of crucial importance in illuminating the problems of interpreting and explaining social movement.'

A social movement must demonstrate a minimal degree of organization. The organization of a social movement may be loose, informal, highly institutionalized, or bureaucratized. Much of the literature relating to social movements has been concerned with natural histories, models, or theories of movement development. Such models have tried to suggest changes in the structure and nature of social movements, ranging from the state of initial social unrest and excitement to a revolutionary movement.

A social movement's commitment to change and organization depends on the participants' aims, beliefs and intensity of involvement. According to Thomas A. Heberlein, Professor emeritus, Community and Environmental Sociology, University of Wisconsin-Madison, these aims and beliefs are an expression of the collective will of the adherents of the movement. Heberlein emphasizes that it is the element of wish that makes a belief socially valuable. It is the conscious will of individuals that provides the base of the ideology of a social movement.

A social movement can also be identified with the help of different criteria. For instance, a social movement can be designated as radical or reactionary on the basis of the change it desires to bring about in a society as a whole or in its segments only. This implies the need to understand the nature of a movement which requires the comprehension of its ideological base, i.e., its aims, objectives and goals which legitimize the movement as well as determine its character. The nature of change which the movement aims to bring about, whether total or partial, in fact, is determined by the nature of the ideology which it formulates. A social movement has no fixed life. It can be both of long and short duration. It can be both violent as well as peaceful but, for its coming into existence some efforts are needed. It does not come into being all of a sudden. It may or may not be organized but it also deals with some aspect of change i.e., it may try to bring or resist a change. Its ultimate objective is reforming of society.

A social movement has four basic elements, which are as follows:

1. **A social movement is a collective behaviour:** A considerable number of persons must be involved in an activity for it to be considered as a social movement.
2. **Social movements extend beyond a single event or community:** Only when local activities have spread across several communities and events do they become movements.
3. **Social movements involve systematic efforts:** they are coordinated activities rather than random ones.
4. **Social movements are change-oriented:** They have as their objective, some form of change in the way people think, in what they believe, and in their behaviour. Some movements, however, have as their objectives the protection of existing values and norms which appear to be threatened or of revivalist nature.

Distinction between Social and Political Movements

Political movements are different from social movements in the sense that the former are located in the state alone. The participants of a social movement strive for social justice. However, there are some serious flaws in this conclusion. It is obvious that the society and state, and hence, social and political power are two different things. But in the present society, trying to differentiate between social power and political power seems like a naïve attempt at ignoring the complexities of the processes in politics. Politics is not practiced only by the political parties. The sociologists oversimplify the situation by not taking into account the political significance of the movements revolving around the issues concerning justice or injustice. You cannot simply say that the classes have ceased to exist in the society. However, you can ignore the fact that almost all movements are marked by the dominance of a particular class in a movement. Consider the fact that although the environment is apparently a non-class issue, yet the class to one belongs is a major determinant of the perspective that one holds in such issues. For example, the perspective of the adivasi community in the environmental issue will be hugely different from that of an individual belonging to the middle class. Thus, it can be concluded that the difference between 'social' and 'political' movement is purely semantic and these are two overlapping categories.

State and the social movements The state does not react positively to any social movements. Its first action is to suppress any such movements as the state sees them as a challenge to its political authority. The state is the sovereign power that holds all power and seeks welfare of its subjects by managing the public sphere. So, by default, it tries to oppose any collective endeavour that seeks to break down its authority. Most social movements that are directed against the state seek to reform, implement or challenge a certain policy or decision of the state. In the eyes of the state, it is a defiance of the state's legitimacy of governance. It does not matter whether the state is socialist or not, or which class' interests it supposedly represents; no state wants to be confronted.

The state tries to bring down a social movement by applying different measures. These measures may range from inviting the participants of a social movement for a dialogue and peaceful negotiation to trying to stop the activists through force and fear of punishment. At the same time, the state also uses various tactics to pacify and weaken the participants. It tries to break down the unity of the group by offering doles and concessions to the participants. This is followed by offers of co-option given to the leaders. The attitude of the state is relatively softer towards movements seeking social reforms within the framework of the institution than towards movements which seek the overthrow of the state. All the same, when the application of brutal force does not work in the state's favour, then the state changes its strategies, such as co-option of the leaders, infiltration in the movement, evolution of counter ideology and use of all kinds of gimmicks to appease the movement's participants and supporters.

Characteristics of Social Movements

The characteristics of a social movement may be summarized as follows:

It is a collective behaviour of the people who share common traits completely or partially. It depicts some level of organization which may vary from a loose organizational structure, a club type, to the most highly organized structure like a party.

It is oriented towards the transformation of the state of affairs in the existing system. But, it

is not necessary that a movement would always try to bring about progressive changes in the existing social order; on the contrary, it may demand restoration of old values only.

A social movement, in order to justify itself, invariably adopts some kind of ideology which may range between the poles of radicalism and extreme conservatism. Majority of social movements are characterized by political activity and by people of a broad range of social backgrounds.

A social movement usually adopts confrontational and disruptive tactics, such as occupying buildings, boycotting businesses, and blockading streets. Movement activists, of course, also employ legal tactics scrupulously, such as lobbying and lawsuits. But the combination of socially disruptive and legal tactics differs based on permutation of interest groups and political parties. The activists endeavour to modify the existing legal code relating to public order and public safety. However, despite opponents' charges, it would be wrong to say that social movements are simply 'outlaw' organizations; some of their actions are legal, while others are illegal.

Differentiating Social Movements, Social Institutions and Social Associations

A social movement aims at reforming society, but it is different from both, a social institution and a social association, though it is concerned with both of them. A social institution is both stable and has some social status, whereas a social movement is temporary and has no social status. Similarly, a social movement is also different from a social association. A social movement is usually unorganized and wants to change established social norms. A social association, on the other hand, is an organized group of persons following the customs of society

Typologies of Social Movements

Social movements are of several types, such as:

1. **Migratory social movement:** It is a type of social movement in which participants favour the objectives of a social movement and are keen to achieve them, but do not find a favourable atmosphere in their homeland at that particular point of time, and migrate to some other place.
2. **Expressive social movement:** It is a type of social movement in which certain sizeable numbers of persons wish to start a social movement but due to legal restrictions and other problems find it difficult to do so and are forced to adjust themselves to the existing situation.
3. **Utopian social movement:** It is a type of social movement in which the object of those who launch a movement is to create an ideal social system or society.
4. **Reformatory social movement:** It is a type of social movement in which the goal of the movement is not to overhaul completely the existing social system but to reform that in some respects.
5. **Resistance social movement:** It is a type of social movement in which the aim is to change existing order totally

Classification of social movements on the basis of quality of change they try to attain

On the basis of the quality of change they try to attain Ghanshyam Shah classifies social movements into the following four categories:

1. **Revolt:** A revolt is a challenge to political authority, aimed at overthrowing the government.
2. **Rebellion:** A rebellion is an attack on existing authority without any intention to seize state power.
3. **Reform:** Reform does not challenge the political system per se. It attempts to bring about changes in relation between the parts of the system to make it more efficient, responsive and workable.
4. **Revolution:** In a revolution, a section or sections of society launch an organized movement to overthrow not only the established government and regime, but also the socioeconomic structure which sustains it, and it further replaces the structure by an alternative social order.

Classification of social movements on the basis of issues

Social movements are also classified on the basis of issues around which participants get mobilized. On this basis, social movements are classified into the following types:

1. **Forest Movement**
2. **Civil Rights Movement**
3. **Anti-untouchability Movement**
4. **Linguistic Movement**
5. **Nationalist Movement**

Classification of social movements on the basis of participants

On the basis of the participants, social movements are of the following types:

1. **Peasants Movement**
2. **Tribal Movement**
3. **Students' Movement**
4. **Women's Movement**
5. **Dalits' Movement**

All these typologies, though useful, do not explain the dynamics of the movements which undergo change in the course of time. They do not take into consideration those movements whose objectives change during the development of the movement. Some movements do

not have clear objectives in terms of the 'maintenance' or the 'transformation' of the system.

SUMMARY

- The term 'social movements' was introduced in 1850 by the German sociologist Lorenz von Stein, in his book, *History of the French Social Movement from 1789 to the Present* (1850). The concept of social movement gained momentum in the 19th century in Europe. During the period of European social chaos, a new momentum started for changes in the society, which later came to be known as social movements. Politicians and sociologists of the time advocated the liberation of oppressed classes and the establishment of a new society by altering property rights and relationships according to the Marxist ideology. Their ideology is reflected in their definitions of social movement.
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- A social movement's commitment to change and organization depends on the participants' aims, beliefs and intensity of involvement. Social movement has no fixed life. It can be both of long and short duration. It can be both violent as well as peaceful but, for its coming into existence some efforts are needed. It does not come into being suddenly. It may or may not be organized but it also deals with some aspect of change i.e., it may try to bring or resist a change. Its ultimate objective is reforming of a society.
- Political movements are different from social movements in the sense that the former is located in the state alone. The participants of a social movement strive for social justice. However, there are some serious flaws in this conclusion. It is obvious that the society and state, and hence, social, and political power are two different things. But in the present society, trying to differentiate between social power and political power seems like a naïve attempt at ignoring the complexities of the processes in politics.