

Origin and Life Cycle of Social Movements



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Introduction

Social movements are perceived as a trend of the contemporary industrialized society. They have challenged globalization and shaped international, politics thus influencing the norms and standard of the world.

Social movements develop because the social conditions create dissatisfaction with the existing arrangements in the society. People join specific social movements for different reasons including idealism, altruism, compassion, political considerations, frustration and religious vehemence. They are formed as a result of new components of the civil society as they not a part of the social order due to its unusual ways. And civil society is by and large kept on changing; however social structures have a tendency towards stability. As a result of this reason social movements quite often exist.

Sociologists have been characterizing and reclassifying social movements in response to the sorts of challenges they saw occurring around them. American sociologists in the mid twentieth century portrayed such movements as being on a continuum of ingenious collective behaviour, as the organized end of a continuum whose opposite pole was crowds and riots. As per such collective behaviourists, social movements were to a great degree organized yet non-routine entities where individuals act together to make new significance about politics and different subjects, and where they oppose power based on the making of these new significance.

Aims of Social Movements

Social movements most of the time expects to accomplish something better for their people who are by and large among the excluded and helpless in the society. Their objectives may perhaps be securing more unbiased control over assets, reasonable access to services and markets, better representation in provincial governmental issues or better conditions of workplace. They observe the nature and use of power in the society as the basic obstacles in accomplishing these objectives and have a tendency to sort out around thoughts that give the constituents of movements new forms of political and social character.

The goals of social movements are not consistent and may perhaps change after some time. For instance, the early worker's movements were primarily worried in ensuring the their rights but now, the social movements are fighting against financial control in business sectors and challenging institutional limitation of restricting economic prospects for poor people.

Causes of Social Movements

The social movements are caused by different factors. They are,

(i) Social Drift

The beliefs and actions of the people are changing in all civilized societies as the particular society is undergoing constant changes. Over the span of social drift, the majority of the general population get new thoughts and knowledge. So as to make these thoughts operational they organize a movement. The advancement of a democratic society, the freedom of women, the expansion of education, the removal of untouchability, equivalent opportunities for both the genders, are the case of social drift.

(ii) Social Disorganization

A society which is consistently changing is to some level disorganized since one part of the society changes more quickly than the other creating various lags. Industrialization has brought modernization and urbanization which has in its turn created various social issues and problems.

Social ineptitude brings uncertainty and weakness since the earlier traditions no longer form a reliable guide the citizens. They felt cut off from the general public. A kind of feeling develops among the citizens that their leaders are unconcerned with their requirements. The people feel restless, astounded and disappointed. Uncertainty and disappointment produce social movements.

(iii) Social Bias

Occasionally group of individuals feel that unfairness has been done to them and hence they become disappointed and disturbed. The sentiment of social disparity is not restricted to the miserable poor. Any individual or gathering, at any status level may encounter social bias. In this manner, social movements emerge wherever social conditions are favourable. Typically in a steady, integrated societies there are few social movements. In such society there are not very many social pressures or estranged groups. The general population are fulfilled and contented. But in a changing and constantly changing society, the general population experience anxiety and tension. These malcontent populaces for the most part construct social movements.

Nature of Social Movements

Social movements are most popular form of collective actions. Social movements have rose generally with no financial backing from outside benefactors. Instead, they depended on little contributions from members. In circumstance where legitimate channels for people to voice their grievance and demands don't work, these may perhaps be communicated through street agitations or by participation in nearby gatherings/affiliations. A social movement requires sustained collective activity over time with a specific end goal to be effective.

Such sort of action is frequently organized against the authority of the state and usually takes the form of challenging and demanding changes in state policy or practice. Collective action need to have some level of organization. Such organisation may incorporate a leader and a structure that orders how individuals connect to each other, settle on decisions and complete them. Those people taking part in a movement too have shared targets and ideology. A social movement more often do not have a typical method for approachment to achieve or to counteract change. These characterizing characters are not consistent. They may change throughout an existence of social.

Mobilization and disruption are the most critical fundamental qualities of Social movements.

It is also seen as a means for the introduction of new ideas into the political agenda.

Protesting is considered as the most noticeable type of any collective activity. However, a social movement also acts in other similarly critical ways. Social movement members and activists hold gatherings to assemble people around the issues that worry them. Such exercises help mutual understanding; furthermore build up a sentiment understanding or agreement about how to seek the collective agenda. Even though social movement bring unsteadiness, it must be stressed that their rise does not symbolize a disappointment of democracy, but rather is a basic part of it.

Origin Of Social Movements

After having described the main features of a social movement, let us move on to the question of emergence of a social movement. What are the social conditions or motivational forces that are both necessary and sufficient to the generation of a social movement? In this section we will discuss the origins of social movements by describing three factors which are associated with the emergence of social movements. But before doing so, let us specify the minimum conditions that are necessary for a social movement to emerge.

A social movement represents an effort by a large number of people to solve collectively a problem or problems that they feel they have in common. In doing so the people must first of all understand the problem. Therefore, the problem must be observable. Secondly, it must be objective. This means that it exists even if we are not aware of it. A low caste status or lack of realism in films is there even if people at a given point of time are not aware of its existence. When people become aware of the problem it means that their consciousness of the problem is real. Hence they are now subjectively aware of the objective situation. This would mean that problems are not created by people out of nothing. They exist in reality but it is only when people actually understand a problem that they try to find out means to overcome it.

All this may seem somewhat complicated but it actually is quite simple if we try to go into major details. First of all we must try to understand why there is a sudden need for collective action. We are using the word 'sudden' because if a problem exists in reality why is it that people react to it only at a given point of time and not earlier. In order to understand this mystery, or rather, understand the very existence of social movements, we must go into its origins. It is only then that we can understand the nature of any social movement.

M.S.A. Rao (1979) had done a great deal of research on social movements and he identified three factors relating to the origins of social movements. We shall attempt to explain these in this section.

Relative Deprivation

The first factor is relative deprivation. A social movement usually starts because the people are unhappy about certain things. They may feel that they are not getting enough. In other words, they feel that they are deprived of something. The Naxalite movement would have this as a cause. The peasants felt that they were being exploited and deprived of their rights and the fruits of their labour. They therefore decided to protest. Similarly, the movement for abolition of reservation of seats for backward classes in educational institutions, which

took place in Gujarat, was again a result of relative deprivation. The upper castes felt that their children were being deprived of seats in good schools because of the reservation policy. At the same time those pressing for more reservation are doing so because they too feel deprived.

We should keep in mind that deprivation is relative and not absolute. A movement against or for reservation does not mean that the concerned castes feel that they are totally deprived of educational facilities. They in fact feel that given their ability they are getting less. What we are trying to stress on here is that social movements do not arise only when there are extreme conditions, e.g. contradiction between the very rich and the very poor. Social movements can arise out of relative expectations and not necessarily out of extreme or absolute conditions.

Structural Strain

However, all social movements do not arise out of relative deprivation. They can also originate from structural strain. When the prevailing value system and the normative structure does not meet the aspirations of the people, the society faces strain. What happens at this time is that a new value system is sought so as to replace the old. This leads to conflicts and tension. Usually individuals in such a situation violate the social norms. For example where intercaste marriage is not permitted we may still find a few cases of such marriage, in violation of the norms. However only when individual actions are replaced by collective action does a social movement take place.

Let us take the example of the women's movement to illustrate the point. In a largely traditional society like India, women are usually assigned passive roles. A woman is expected to be subordinate to males. It is believed that as a daughter a female must obey her father; as a wife, her husband and as a widow, her sons. Such a value system would encourage women to be content as housewives and mothers. The duties outside the house, such as education, earning a livelihood etc. are the domain of males.

Over the years we can see that opportunities for both education and employment are being increasingly made available for women. As a result, the roles of women are changing. However the value system remains the same. Therefore, women may take up jobs but their household duties remain unchanged. This obviously results in greater burden of work on the working woman.

In employment too women are discriminated against. All jobs are not open to them. For example, though the employment of women as salaried workers has increased they are mainly employed as school teachers (that too in primary schools) or as office employees. In other jobs, such as factory work, the number of female employees has decreased. In technical education there is no legal discrimination against women, but we find that there are very few women engineers. In management institutes too the number of female students is very

few.

These disparities occur mainly because we have, in keeping with our value system, categorised certain types of employment as 'manly' or masculine. Factory work, engineering, flying planes, managing industries or offices are 'manly' jobs. Women are more suited to 'feminine' jobs such as teaching children, working as typists, receptionists, telephone operators, airhostesses etc. Parents and elders impress upon girls the type of jobs, which are suitable for them. If a girl has an aptitude for engineering her parent may dissuade her to take it up as a career and may possibly impress on her to read home science instead. Therefore even when there is no legal ban, the value system enforces women not to pursue certain careers.

Moreover, if a woman's place is in the home, a single woman working in the city and living alone is viewed as something unusual. Girls who go out to work or study are looked down upon in many places. People feel that if women educate themselves and take up jobs they will neglect their traditional duties and they will refuse to subordinate themselves to the men folk. Independent minded girls or those who are bold enough to venture out of their homes are regarded as easy prey to males. Such people are victims of eve teasing.

An accumulation of all these factors have made women challenge the existing values. This has resulted in the women's movement, which is also referred to as the feminist movement. Women who have become conscious of these prejudices and evils in society are now collectively trying to redefine the value system. This need has arisen because the traditional value system is causing strain to women who want to think and act as independent beings. As such this movement is not directed against males. It is only an assertion that a new value system based on equality of all human beings should replace the existing value system.

Revitalisation

We may quite often find that relative deprivation and structural strain are related to each other. They together form the basis of a social movement. In the case of the women's movement, relative deprivation is a cause for structural strain. Similarly an examination of social reform movements may reveal that both these causes exist. However we must keep in mind that social movements are not merely protest movements. Though social movements express dissatisfaction and dissent against the system, they may also offer a positive alternative. Indeed they may be started for revitalising the existing system which is undergoing structural strain. Revitalisation is therefore the third factor associated in the emergence of a social movement.

This urge for revitalisation can generate a movement, which promotes patriotism, and national pride could be caused by youth movements, which encourage

young people to help and organise the oppressed, or the literacy movements are other examples. These movements are started in order to solve a problem collectively. They do not merely protest against what they define as wrong but also try to provide an alternative.

Importance of Understanding the Origins

The three factors discussed above are not exclusive, in the sense that if one exists the other two cannot. They are, as we have seen, interrelated. In fact we may find that all three can be found in most social movements. At the same time we will find that normally in any movement one of these predominates over the other two. In examining the origins of a social movement we have to try to locate the one which predominates. This is important for determining the shape of the movement. What does the movement try to gain? Which interests does it represent? These are important questions for sociologists or for any one interested in studying changes in society. After all, if features of social movements are similar how does one distinguish one social movement from another? All social movements are not the same. They represent or fight for different sections of the population. At times two social movements may be contrary to one another. The pro- and anti-reservation stirs are such instances. In some parts of Bihar we find that the poor peasants are organised under the Naxalite movement while the landlords have organised themselves under the Bhoomi Sena Movement. Different caste groups or religious communities organise social movements for revitalisation but these may be counterposed to each other. An analysis of the genesis of a social movement will help us in understanding these issues.

Life Cycle of Social Movements

Stage one reflects the social unrest present in a society. Almost all social movements are rooted in social unrest and problem. Collective tension builds up as a result of this. This stage is followed by stage two in which collective excitement can be witnessed in the society, where people feel they have a problem in common. Certain social conditions are identified as the root cause of the misery and excitement sets in. The movement gains support and a guiding ideology. Agitations rise everywhere. This period is generally brief and leads quickly to action.

Stage three is the formalisation stage through some movements, like migratory movements, may be able to operate without formal organisation. In this stage, a chain of officers is drawn up. There is division of labour among leaders and the followers. Fund raising is systematised and ideology becomes clearer than

before. The leaders clarify the ideology in that they remind people of the discontent they share in common, identify their opponents and state the objectives of the movement. The strategy and tactics for protest and for action are drawn and a moral justification for having adopted a particular course of action is established.

The fourth stage is one of institutionalisation. The movement crystallises into a definite pattern. Efficient bureaucrats replace agitators; buildings, offices are established. The aims of the movement become accepted in that society. This period may last indefinitely. The fifth stage is one of dissolution. Different movements come to different ends at different points of time: some movements end early while some dissolve after the objective has been achieved. Sometimes differences of opinion among the leaders within a movement may lead to divisions within a movement, with each group having its own ideology and programme of action. Only some movements achieve full institutionalisation. It is not necessary that all movements pass through all these above mentioned stages. But what can be certainly said about all social movements are:

- a) they play a major part in social change,
- b) they help in quickening the pace of change, and
- c) they influence many aspects of the peoples lives: moral, political, social, and cultural.

In India social movements have tried to change certain aspects of the traditional value system though they have not always been successful in doing so.