

## **Unit-4**

### **HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENTS**

**Unit IV: Human Rights Movements:** Peasant Movements (Tebhaga and Telangana) – Scheduled Caste Movements (Mahar and Ad-Dharmi) – Scheduled Tribes Movements (Santhal and Munda) – Environmental Movements ( Chipko and Narmada Bachao Andolan) – Social Reform Movements (Vaikom and Self Respect).

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#### **Peasants' movements**

The peasants suffered from high rents, illegal levies, arbitrary evictions and unpaid labour in Zamindari areas. In Ryotwari areas, the Government itself levied heavy land revenue. The overburdened farmer, fearing loss of his only source of livelihood, often approached the local moneylender who made full use of the former's difficulties by extracting high rates of interests on the money lent. Often, the farmer had to mortgage his hand and cattle. Sometimes, the moneylender seized the mortgaged belongings. Gradually, over large areas, the actual cultivators were reduced to the status of tenants-at-will, share croppers and landless labourers. The tyranny of zamindars along with the exorbitant rates of British land revenues led to a series of spontaneous peasant uprisings in different parts of the country during this period. The periodic recurrence of famines coupled with the economic depression during the last decades of the 19th century further aggravated the situation in rural areas and consequently led to numerous peasant revolts. The peasants often resisted the exploitation, and soon they realised that their real enemy was the colonial state. Sometimes, the desperate peasants took to crime to come out of intolerable conditions. These crimes included robbery, dacoit and what has been called social banditry. Peasant Movements are a part of social movements against British atrocities in the 18th and 19th centuries of the British Colonial Period. These movements had the sole purpose of restoring the earlier forms of rule and social relations.

#### **TEBHAGA MOVEMENT**

**Tebhaga Movement** was an uprising against the oppressive British Raj. Tebhaga, simply put, meant that two-thirds of the crops tilled by the bargadars and adhiars would have to go to them. The idea was to enact a law to give recognition to this demand. 41% of the farmers, according to the Land and Revenue Commission in 1940 were bargadars and adhiars. In the same year, the Commission had agreed that this demand was only in order. A draft bill had been readied and circulated. But this had been swept under the carpet later on. Jyoti Basu, asked Suhrawarddi, Chief Minister of undivided Bengal of as to why this had been done? Suhrawarddi told him that he did not know that they had so many landlords in his party! In other words, he admitted that it

was these zamindars who had forced the Bill to be dropped. The farmers waited for years. When it was realized that the Bill was only a dream, it was then decided that the Tebhaga demand should be turned into an agitation.

Bargadar was a person who under the system generally known as adhi, barga or bhag cultivated the land of another person, on condition of delivering a share of the produce of such land to that person. The link between the zamindars and the British government was that zamindars would pay a yearly tax fixed by the government depending on the quantity and quality of the lands owned by the zamindars. How these lands would be cultivated, developed and what income would be generated was left to the zamindars. Below them was the class of jotedars to whom the zamindars distributed lands through a system called Pattani. The Pattani was achieved through negotiation on the basis of fixed taxes to be renewed and reviewed time to time. The jotedars class was directly connected with lands and cultivation. Although outside the jotedari system there were many land-owning individuals, small and big, who directly paid their land taxes to the zamindars through the nayebi tahsildari system of the zamindars, the jotedars in north Bengal used to own vast lands to the tune of hundreds and thousands of acres and they were the real class of people whose fortune and fate was directly and linked. Therefore, these people had to look after cultivation and development of lands so far its yield was concerned.

### **Jotedari system**

Thus, the fate of the farmers was linked intricately with the jotedari system. Now, jotedars used two systems of cultivation. As for instance, they would employ agricultural laborers to cultivate lands under the direct supervision of the jotedar himself or give lease of lands to individual farmers, a small land-owning class of people who directly cultivated lands of their own or had taken lease from a jotedar for a particular period of time which depended on the will of the jotedar. The terms and conditions of such an arrangement meant all cost of cultivation of leased land had to be borne by the farmer; the total yield of to be shared equally between the cultivator and the owner of the land i.e. jotedar. This system of cultivation of land was commonly known as Adhiary Pratha (half-half system), mostly prevalent in north Bengal. This class was known as adhiar (half sharer). According to the Land Revenue Commission, 26 per cent families were dependent on adhi cultivation in Jalpaiguri district in 1939. Through this mechanism, just because a jotedar owned a piece of land he used to derive benefit without investing anything in the land. Moreover, he used to exploit the labor of a cultivator in various forms, the poor bargadar becoming almost a slave of the landowner. There was always a constant threat that if he did not obey the jotedar he would take away the land and the bargadar would have to starve. This was a system of exploitation.

Thus zamindari-jotedari system used to be an instrument of exploitation. The grievances of peasants grew as the economic situation in the country worsened in the post War period that immediately followed a terrible famine (1942) throughout Bengal, at that time being governed by Muslim league with Shaheed Suhrawarddi as Chief Minister. The economic situation, political

unrest, and unbearable social conditions of the peasants led to the movement later known as Tebhaga Andolan (Movement). The Communist leaders and Krishak Samity leaders took full advantage of the unrest prevailing among the poor peasants and landless agricultural laborers. The movement sparked off in an area under PS Chirirbandar in the district of Dinajpur. The area had a local Communist leader, Rupnarayan Roy, a small landowning farmer and local organizer of Krishak Samity, first and only MLA (member of the legislative assembly) of Bengal assembly elected on CPI ticket in 1946 election. He, together with other peasant leaders of the locality, led a movement in and around his locality and organized the peasants, mostly Hindus, belonging to Kshatriya caste and some Muslim cultivators in a grand assembly on the day when jotedars' men would come to collect fifty percent share of the crops. The assembled farmers refused to give fifty per cent; instead, they offered thirty-three per cent out of the total yield. A serious quarrel flared up between the jotedars' armed men and the adamant peasants causing injuries to both parties. Police came to the rescue of the jotedars' men and a peasant was killed in police fire. The event took a serious turn, local villagers came to the rescue of the peasants and the police had to retreat. But a couple of days later, reinforced police force inaugurated a reign of terror in the village after village in Chirirbandar police station- the leaders were hunted out, even common villagers including women were not spared from physical torture and repressive action. Hundreds of villagers were arrested.

The jotedars exacted illegally many other privileges. The condition of peasants worsened further due to wartime inflationary situation and famine. After the Bengal famine in 1943, the Bengal Provincial Kishan Sabha, which was guided by the Communist Party, called for a mass movement among sharecroppers in September 1946 to keep tebhaga (two-thirds) of the harvested crops. This demand had figured since the thirties in the programmes of the Kishan Sabha, and had also been recognized as just by the Floud Commission which in 1939-1940 had reviewed the miserable state of Bengal's agriculture. The Floud Commission, a land revenue commission established by the Govt. of Bengal in 1938, had exposed the maladies in the prevailing system which obliged sharecroppers to relinquish half of their harvest as rent, and on top of that, they had to pay scores of illegal cesses. These sharecroppers were continuously drained of the wealth they produced. Communists went out to the countryside to organize peasants to take the harvested crop to their own threshing floor and make the two-thirds' share a reality. The slogan, adhi noy, tebhaga chai (we want two-thirds to share not 1/2) reverberated. They started taking harvested crops to their own yards. They offered only 1/3 crop share to jotedars. This led to innumerable clashes and subsequent arrest, lathi charges and firing.

In 1946, Krishak Sabhas began to be established in various parts of the district of Midnapur like Mahishadal, Sutahata, Nandigram, Kharagpur, Tamluk, Ghatal, Kanthi, Bhagabanpur, and Keshpur. In late 1946, the sharecroppers (bargadars, bhagchasis or adhiar) of Bengal began to assert that they would pay not a half share of their crop to the jotedars but only one-third and that before the division of the crop, it would be stored in their own khamars (godowns) and not that

of the jotedars. In September 1946, Bengal Provincial Kishan Sabha gave a call to implement through mass struggle the Floud Commission recommendation of tebhaga. In many places, peasants tried to remove the paddy already stored in the jotedars' khamars to their own and this resulted in innumerable clashes. Communist cadres, including many students from the urban areas, went out into the countryside to organize bargadars, who had become a major and growing section of the rural population. The poor peasants had lost land through depression and famine and were pushed down to the level of sharecroppers as they constituted sixty percent of villagers in some pockets which became tebhaga strongholds. The movement caught on from the harvest in November, with the central slogan nij-khamare dhan tolo; sharecroppers taking paddy to their own threshing floor and not to the jotedar's house. Langal jar Jamin tar, Jan dibo tabu dhan dibona were other battle cries.

The movement received a boost in late January 1947 when the Muslim League Ministry led by Suhrawarddi published the Bengal Bargadars Temporary Legislation Bill in the Calcutta Gazette on 22 January 1947. The jotedars appealed to the Government, and the police attempted to suppress the peasants. The main centers of the movement were Dinajpur (Thakurgaon sub-division), Rangpur, Jalpaiguri, Maldah, Mymensingh (Kishoreganj), Midnapur (Mahishadal, Sutahata, and Nandigram), and to a lesser extent 24 Parganas (Kakdwip) and Khulna. Jotedar and police violence was sought to be countered by volunteers with lathis. In Nandigram, Sutahata and Mahishadal of Midnapur District, Bhupal Panda, Ananta Majhi, Pandit Jana led the movement by cutting of crops and dumping it on the threshing ground of the bargadars. Many of these areas were converted into Sangram Anchal or Muktanchal (Free Zone) as the government machinery failed to function there.

The peasant women had no economic right on the property in spite of their involvement in the production process and were relegated to the drudgery of household chores. Though doubly subjugated, they underwent a silent revolution during this movement. The zamindar and the jotedar exerted their rights over the women of the family of the bargadars and exploitation was carried out hand in hand. At that time, the married women of bargadars would get wages for their agricultural work. Perhaps to defy such subjugation by the state and the patriarchal society, the women broke all norms of modesty and femininity prescribed for them and came to the forefront of the movement taking up whatever the domestic confines provided them - broomstick, sickle, chopper, sticks to protest against the repression of the police and save their menfolk and their crops which gave them the dignity to live. They themselves fought for their rights to be members of the Volunteer Bahini of the Krishak Sabhas and they formed the 'Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti' (Women's Self-defense Organization) after the famine of 1943.

The new mode of resistance and forms of participation of the peasant women of Muhammadpur and Nandigram spread like wildfire and was replicated in other areas. They helped establish communication surreptitiously, guarded secret meetings, protected crops in the fields, were appointed village guards and kept vigil on police action and alerted the peasant folk, barricaded police entry. The moment they caught sight of the police force, they blew conch shells and beat

kansar (the bell-metal gong), shouted Vande Mataram to warn all and sundry. They even sacrificed life while trying to prevent police from entering villages and arresting fellow activists in Dinajpore, Jalpaiguri, 24 Parganas, Hooghly, and Howrah. They formed Jhanta Bahini (A group wielding broom-stick) in Jessore district and Gayen Bahini (A group wielding rammer used for threshing) in Rangpur District. In Nandigram, Bimala Majhi organized the womenfolk. In every village along with the Volunteer Bahini existed a Nari Raksha Bahini. A jotedar of Kendumari brought in the armed police when the bargadars tried to remove crops from his field to the godown of the panchayat. With police camps being set up everywhere, the Communist leaders called for a meeting in Kendumari. Women displayed unprecedented courage and militancy as they were subject to a silent revolution- a mass socio-economic consciousness. Bimala Majhi, who was one of the participants in the Tebhaga Movement in Midnapur district, came forward with her Nari Raksha Bahini armed with sickle, banti (a sharp instrument used to cut vegetables), broom in their hands and dust, salt and chili powder tied to their clothes which they hurled at the police. Bhupal Panda, Ananta Majhi, Ramesh Jana along with eighty-eight others were arrested. The poor peasant women, the most unorganized participants of the Tebhaga Movement, put up resistance which was mostly spontaneous and autonomous but militant.

Peasant men and women, many of them Muslims, attacked the granaries of local landlords or jotedars, to recover stocks of paddy already stored there. The rural structure of oppression was truly crumbling, as many landlords fled the villages, some of them disguised in women's clothes. Coinciding with the partially spontaneous nature of the uprising was the principal role that women played in it. Even in areas such as the interior villages of Nandigram, where women were not supposed to participate in cultivation in the field and where their agricultural tasks were largely limited to processing the harvested paddy, it was apparent that women had definite stakes in the success of the Tebhaga campaign. Even more so than their husbands, rural poor women had suffered heavily, inhumanly, from the Bengal famine of 1943. For these women, the storing of paddy in their own houses, for the first time in their lives, was a revolutionary event. It evoked tremendous emotional response. It, therefore, was no accident that rural poor women in massive numbers came forward to defend the movement's gains.

When the colonial state befriending the landlords, unleashed terror and intimidation to crush the movement, women throughout Bengal put up fierce resistance with men against police raids. From the forested area of Sunderbans in the South through the Norail subdivision in Jessore to Dinajpur in the north, village women spontaneously set up their Nari Bahini or semi-militia groups, facing rifles with brooms, pestles, and knives. It is, therefore, no exaggeration to state that in this towering political event, rural poor women played a lead role.

## **TELANGANA MOVEMENT**

### **Peasant Movements: Telangana Peasant Struggle (1947-51)**

This movement was launched in the state of Andhra Pradesh against the former Nizam of Hyderabad. The agrarian social structure in the Nizam's Hyderabad was of a feudal order. It had two kinds of land tenure systems, namely, raiyatwari and jagirdari. Under the raiyatwari system, the peasants owned patta and were proprietors of the land; they were registered occupants.

The actual cultivators of the land were known as shikmidars. Khalsa lands were chieftain's land and out of revenue collected from these lands, personal expenses of the royalty were met out. The Deshmukhs and Deshpandes were the hereditary collectors of revenue for khalsa villages. In jagir villages, the tax was collected through jagirdars and their agents. Both the jagirdars and the Deshmukhs wielded immense power at the local level.

The region of Telangana was characterised by a feudal economy. The main commercial crops, viz., groundnut, tobacco and castor seed, were the monopoly of the landowning brahmins. The rise of Reddis and peasant proprietors further strengthened the high castes and prop-ertied class. The non-cultivating urban groups, mostly Brahmins, Marwaris, Komtis and Muslims, began to take interest in acquiring land. Consequently, the peasant proprietors slide down to the status of tenants-at-will, share-croppers and landless labourers.

**Following were the main causes of the movement:**

(1) The Nizam's former Hyderabad state had a feudal structure of ad-ministration. In the jagir area, the agents of the jagirdar who were the middlemen collected the land taxes. There was much of op-pression by the jagirdar and his agents. They were free to extort from the actual cultivators a variety of taxes. This condition of ex-ploitation remained in practice till the jagirdari system was abolished in 1949.

On the other hand the khalsa land or the raiyatwari system was also exploitative though the severity of exploitation in the khalsa system was a little lesser. In the khalsa villages, the Deshmukhs and Deshpandes worked as intermediaries.

They were not in the pay-roll of the jagir administration; they were only given a percentage of the total land collection made by them. The Deshmukhs and Deshpandes then developed a habit to cheat the peasants by creat-ing fraud in the land records. This, in countless instances they reduced the actual cultivator to the status of tenant-at-will or a landless labourer.

In both the systems of administration, i.e., jagir and khalsa, the peasants were exploited by the intermediaries appointed by Ni-zam. High taxes, fraud with the record and exploitation resulted in creating discontent among the poor peasants.

(2) Yet another cause of peasant movement in Telangana was the ex-ploitation of the big peasants. D.N. Dhanagare informs that the jagirdars and the Deshmukhs had thousands of acres of land in their possession. The families of these big peasants and their heads were called Durra or Dora.

It means, the master or lord of the village. Dhanagare says that the Dora exploited the small peasants and agricultural labourers. This exploitation, in course of time, became legitimised with the big farmers. It was considered to be the privilege of the Dora to exploit the masses of peasants. Dhanagare observes:

Such exaction had become somewhat legitimised by what was known as the vetti system under which a landlord or a Deshmukh could force a family from among his customary retainers to cultivate his land and to do one job or the other—whether domestic, agricultural or official, as an obligation to the master.

(3) In the whole former state of Nizam a system of slavery, quite like that of Hali of south Gujarat, was prevalent. This system was known as Bhagela. The Bhagela were drawn mostly from aboriginal tribes who were tied to the master by debt. According to Bhagela system, the tenant who had taken loan from the landlord was obliged to serve him till the debt is repaid. In most of the cases, the Bhagela was required to serve the landlord for generations.

(4) The Reddis and Kammars were notable castes who traditionally worked as traders and moneylenders. They exercised a great deal of influence in the countryside. They wanted to pull down the dominance of Brahmins as agriculturists in the state.

(5) The Telangana region was economically backward. The development of agriculture depended on the facilities of irrigation. The commercial crops could hardly be taken without irrigation facilities. Though, the lack of irrigation was realised by Nizam and he provided irrigation facilities to the peasants both in khalsa and jagir villages. But, these facilities were largely cornered by the big farmers.

(6) Land alienation was not new to the former Hyderabad state. Between 1910 to 1940 the frequency of land dispossession increased. On the one hand, the land possessed by the non cultivating urban people, mostly Brahmins, Marwaris, and Muslims increased and on the other hand the tribal peasants got reduced to the status of marginal farmers and landless labourers. Describing the impact of land alienation on the poorer peasants D.N. Dhanagare writes:

As a result of growing land alienation many actual occupants or cultivators were being reduced to tenants-at-will, sharecroppers or landless labourers ... in fact, where rich Pattadars held holdings too large to manage, they tended to keep a certain amount of irrigated land to be cultivated with the help of hired labour and turned over most of their dry lands either to Bhagela serfs or to tenant cultivators on very high produce rents.

The Telangana peasant unrest did not erupt over night. It looks about three to four decades. Actually, till 1930, the poor condition of the peasants had reached its culmination. Meanwhile, there had been much transformation in agricultural economy.

The Telangana economy, which was only subsistence economy, had grown into market economy by the 1940s. With the change in capitalistic agricultural economy, there was no change in the status of the tenants and share-croppers.

Actually, the modes of production and exchange remained pre-capitalist or semi-feudal and emerged as the major source of discontent among the poor peasantry in Telangana. On the other hand, with the termination of Second World War, there was a terrible fall in wholesale prices. The price trends strengthened the position of moneylenders and traders who tightened their grip on indebted small Pattadars and tenants.

One of the bitter consequences of the forces of change has been an increase in the number of agricultural labourers. It appears that there was enough discontent among the lower segments of peasantry. Peasants were only waiting for some opportunity to engineer some insurrection.

**The course of events that led to the Telangana peasant struggle can be described as under:**

1. The Telangana peasant movement was engineered by Communist Party of India (CPI). It is said to be a revolution committed by Communists. The Communist Party started working in Telangana in 1936. Professor N.G. Ranga had laid down the regional level peasant organisation in Telangana.

This regional organisation was affiliated to the All India Kisan Sabha an organ of CPI. Within a period of three or four years, say by 1940, the CPI had established its roots in the former Hyderabad state. During the period from 1944 to 1946, the Communist activities increased in several of the districts of Hyderabad. A proper framework was, therefore, prepared for launching a peasant movement in Telangana.

2. The next event which took place in Hyderabad and more actually in Telangana was the famine of 1946. All the crops failed and there was a crisis of the availability of fodder. The prices of food, fodder and other necessities of life increased.

This was a crisis for the tenants and the sharecroppers. Actually, the year 1946 provided all opportunities for engineering the peasant struggle. In the early July 1946, the peasants resisted the government orders. Militant action was taken by the CPI-led peasants.

3. The CPI made an objective to mobilise the peasants. It took up a campaign to propagate the demands of the lower peasants. By the middle of 1946, the Communist propaganda was fully intensified and covered about 300 to 400 villages under its influence.

The movement during this period was slow but the peasants showed enough resistance to the government dictates. However, it must be mentioned that in the mobilisation of peasantry, only Telangana local peasants participated.



4. The second conference of CPI was held in March 1948. It re-solved to give a revolutionary turn to the peasant movement in Telangana. The peasants later on were organised into an army and in-termittently fought guerrilla wars. Writing about this part of the course of events of Telangana peasant struggle Hamza Alavi observes:

Telangana movement had a Guerrilla army of about 5,000. The peasants killed or drove out the landlords and the local bureaucrats and seized and distributed the land. They established governments of peasant 'soviets' which were integrated regionally into a control or-ganisation. Peasant rule was established in an area of 15,000 sq. miles, with a population of four million. The government of the armed peasantry continued until 1950; it was not finally crushed until the following year. Today, the area remains one of the political strong-holds of the Communist Party.

5. Besides the peasant agitation, a parallel discontent was also tak-ing place in Hyderabad. A para-military voluntary force, organised by Kasim Rizvi, was taking its roots. The members of this voluntary or-ganisation were known as Razakars. This organisation was against the peasants. The peasants consolidated their movement in the face of the oppression of Nizam, activities of Razakars and the authority crisis in Hyderabad.

6. On September 13, 1948, the Indian army marched into Hyder-abad and within less than a week the Nizam's army, police and the Razakars surrendered without resistance. The police action, taken by the newly framed Central Government of independent India, was very quick to suppress the peasant movement. D.N. Dhanagare elabo-rates the police action as under:

On India's part the 'police action' was taken to stop the Razkar fren-zies as they not only created anarchic conditions within the state but also posed a serious threat to the internal security of neighbouring In-dian Territory. The police action was, therefore, unsavoury but essential ... once the Razakars were overpowered, and a military ad-ministration set up... the offensive was immediately directed at the peasant rebels in the troubled districts of Telangana. The superior In-dian army spared no measure to suppress the communist squads.

The peasant movement in Telangana had to be withdrawn. Actu-ally the police action gave a death blow to the Communist-led Telangana peasant movement. In this struggle, the movement had to suffer a lot. Fighting with the Indian army over 2,000 peasants and party workers were killed. By August 1949, nearly 25,000 Commu-nists and active participants were arrested; by July 1950 the total number of detainees had reached 10,000. This should suffice as an in-dex of the intensity of Telangana peasants struggle.

**The Telangana peasant movement continued for about five years. Its outcomes can be enumerated as below:**

(1) The struggle had the participation of a mixed class of peas-antry. Though the rich peasants, mainly the Brahmins, had their involvement in the struggle, the major achievement was that the

struggle for the first time brought together the tenants, sharecroppers and the landless labourers. This was by all means a very big achievement of the struggle. The Kammar and the Reddy castes who belonged to the rich class of peasants though gained enough but the movement consolidated the strength of poor peasants, particularly the tribals, who were the victims of vetti the bonded labour.

(2) Yet another benefit of this struggle was in the favour of the Communist Party. The Communist, for a long time to come, exercised their hegemony over the entire state of Hyderabad.

(3) Though the Communist Party, as a whole, benefited from the Telangana peasant struggle, it had its own losses also. Ideologically, the party got split from top to bottom. One group of Communists supported the struggle while other decried. The second group argued that the struggle was in no case less than terrorism. Writing about the division of Communist Party during the struggle, P. Sundarayya writes:

It is relevant to mention here that during the course of the struggle, particularly during the phase of its last two years, the Communist Party from top to bottom was sharply divided into two hostile camps, one defending the struggle and its achievements and the other denouncing and decrying it as terrorism, etc.

Those who opposed this struggle had even openly come out with the press, providing grist to the mill of the enemies in maligning the struggle and the Communist Party that was leading it. This sharp political ideological split, though enveloping the entire party in the country, was particularly sharp and acute in Telangana.

(4) So far the demands of the poor agricultural classes were concerned the movement was a failure. Surely, there were some gains to Kammar and Reddy—the rich peasant but the gains of the poor peasants such as sharecroppers were quite meagre.

The Telangana peasant struggle, it must be boldly said, was from above and not from the peasants themselves. No single agrarian stratum initiated the movement. It was all the handy work of the Communist Party. Despite the failure story of Telangana struggle it must be admitted that it was a source of inspiration for the Communists as a whole in the country. D.N. Dhanagare very rightly makes his conclusive statement about the outcome of the movement when he says:

Telangana insurrection was no more successful than other peasant resistance movements in India. Like all other movements, though, the Telangana struggle has become the source of legends and inspiration for the radical left in India. Recently, there has been a renewed interest, academic as well as political, in the study of the Telangana struggle, its silver jubilee celebrated

by all shades of Communist Party in India, became, however, an occasion for mutual mud-slinging; but that must be left out of this study.

## **SCHEDULED CASTE MOVEMENT**

Scheduled castes are those castes/races in the country that suffer from extreme social, educational and economic backwardness arising out of age-old practice of untouchability and certain others on account of lack of infrastructure facilities and geographical isolation, and who need special consideration for safeguarding their interests and for their accelerated socio-economic development. These communities were notified as Scheduled Castes as per provisions contained in Clause 1 of Article 341 of the Constitution.

Scheduled castes are sub-communities within the framework of the Hindu caste system who have historically faced deprivation, oppression, and extreme social isolation in India on account of their perceived 'low status'.

Only marginalised Hindu communities can be deemed Scheduled Castes in India, according to The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950.

### **Mahar Movement**

Mahars make up 9% of Maharashtra's total population and are the state's largest SC community. In Maharashtra and neighboring states, they are known as the untouchable castes. Marathi is their mother tongue and the official language. The Mahars were considered an untouchable community from the Gupta period onwards. Under the leadership of Ambedkar, the Mahars were converted to Buddhism in the twentieth century. The Mahar movement, which is considered a movement against upper caste dominance in Maharashtra, began in the same century.

**Meaning of Mahar:** Mahar is an official designation for Scheduled Castes in Maharashtra and neighboring states. Mahars are a caste that consists of many endogamous castes who speak Marathi. Mahars worked as a village watchman, messenger, wall mender, street sweeper, and carcass remover, among other jobs. They used to own agricultural lands and worked as agricultural labourers. However, they were not primarily thought of as farmers. They eventually changed careers. From the mid-twentieth century onwards, the Mahar began to migrate to urban areas (such as Mumbai [Bombay], Nagpur, Pune [Poona], and Sholapur), where they worked as masons, industrial labourers, railway workers, mechanics, and bus and truck drivers. They went through a lot of changes as a result of urban migration and occupational differences. The Mahars came together in the twentieth century under the leadership of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar and began to protest their situation. Hundreds of thousands of Mahars converted to Buddhism as a result of Ambedkar's influence.

### **Mahar Movement in Maharashtra (India)**

Mahar is an “untouchable” caste cluster, living chiefly in Maharashtra and in adjoining states. They mostly speak Marathi, the official language of Maharashtra. They make up around 9 per cent of the entire population of Maharashtra. The Mahars live in the villages’ outskirts. They were classified as “untouchables” during the Gupta age.

As a people, they are strong, hardy, and of fighting spirit. Traditionally considered lower the Hindu hierarchical system, a number of Mahars during the twentieth century converted to Buddhism, Ambedkar being one of them. They rose against the upper-caste domination in the early twentieth century and revolt was called the Mahar movement.

The Mahar movement brought the smaller and untouchable castes onto a single platform and also brought a degree of awareness and unity enabling them to create a separate political party; a system of education including schools and colleges, hostels; and an effective Buddhist conversion movement.

**Following are the essential factors in the processes by which the Mahar Movement grew:**

- i. They felt the need to have a leadership free from traditional service.
- ii. Concerns and grievances felt and understood by both the “elite” members of the caste and also the masses.
- iii. The desire of legitimization of the new non-traditional Mahar aimed at both. Inside the caste and among members of the elite in the larger society
- iv. “Brokers”, men who served as links between the caste and the institutions of power in society, and those who knew how to use modern channels of change.
- v. Rise in communication channels, both within the group and from the group to the masses.
- vi. Protection for protesters when they overstepped the traditional boundaries.

The Mahar Movement in Maharashtra was designed over the years with the ideology and program initiated by various leaders from time to time. Before Dr Ambedkar s rise as an emancipator of the “untouchables”, the Mahars tried to raise their social status within the Hindu religion. Many efforts made by various leaders give us a picture of the origin of Dalit Movement on the one hand and a clear perspective of this movement on the other.

G.B. Walangkar was the first to fight for the rights of the Mahars in Maharashtra. He retired from military service in 1886 and mobilized people and made them conscious about their human rights. He highlighted the grievances of the people through his writings in two Marathi newspapers, Dinbandhu and Sudharak, in which he argued that casteism and untouchability had no religious base and were creations of the Hindus. To prove his theory he wrote a booklet titled “Vital Vidhvansak”.

He established Anarya Doshpariharak Mandali at Dapoli in the localities of Ratnagiri district, where the untouchable castes such as Chambhar and Mahar pensioners lived. In 1890, recruitment of the Mahars, the Chambhars, etc., was stopped.

On top of it, those in service were also asked to leave. Upset with this, Walangkar petitioned the British government demanding that the so-called “untouchable” castes be taken back into the army. In his petition he claimed that “untouchables” were former Kshatriyas.

Anarya Doshpariharak Mandali was succeeded by the Oppressed India Association of Shivaram Kamble. Kamble founded this association in 1917. Kamble became the unanimous leader of the “untouchables” in Pune, and started a Marathi newspaper Somawanshi Mitra, in Pune in 1909 to educate the masses. He began the struggle from within the fold of “untouchables” to do away with the customs of devdasi and Potraj prevailing among the Mahars and the Mangs.

He taught at a night school and was a leader in the Parvati Temple Satyagraha, organized by the untouchables and a few caste Hindus in 1929. Kamble used such methods as forming an organization for action, sub-mitting petitions, opening schools and libraries, etc. He asked the British Government to provide employment opportunities to the Mahars in the military. He worked with Dr Ambedkar on several “untouchable-related” issues.

Another notable personality in pre-Ambedkar Mahar movement was Kisan Bansode from Nagpur. He started a press in 1900, in which he published various newspapers, brochures, and books concerned with the reform of untouchables. He set up a library. He published the biography of Chokhamela.

He published Muzdur Patrika in 1918 to educate and mobilize the mill laborers. He established a school for girls in 1907 and started a number of hostels for boys. He established “The Sanmarg Bodhak Nirashrit Samaj” in 1901 which urged “untouchables” to take education, fight for civil rights, create a feeling among Hindus that the downtrodden should be raised up.

Kalicharan Nandagavli, another Dalit activist set up a school for girls in 1901. He was a convenor of the Bhartiya Bahiskrit Parishad which was held in Nagpur in 1920 under the chairmanship of Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur.

He highlighted the problems of the “untouchables” to the Simon Commission and the Southborough Committee also. He fought injustice. He published many booklets in order to mobilize the people. When he got closer to National congress, differences appeared among the “untouchables” and he lost his popularity.

The pre-Ambedkar Mahar movement had limitations as their efforts were limited to calling upon occasional conventions, submitting memorandums and asking for some favor from the existing government, publishing and circulating newspapers and establishing hostels and libraries.

However, the leaders of the untouchables were focused on bringing about social reform in their respective communities.

Thus they had prepared a ground for the leaders to come to represent the untouchables in an organized way. It is obvious from the work of Gopal Baba Walangkar, Shivram Janba Kamble, Kisan Fagoji Bansode, and others that the social reform movement originated among the untouchables, especially among the Mahars, on their own. This prompted the Dalits to organize themselves and fight collectively against their social disabilities.

Dr B.R. Ambedkar came back to India after completing his studies abroad in 1923. After his arrival, he attended public meetings of the untouchables, but never took active part. He observed that awareness and the spirit of militancy were growing among the untouchables.

He decided to set up an organization with membership drawn from the Mahars, the Matangs, and the Chambhars called the Bahiskrit Hitkarini Sabha in 1924 in Bombay. With the rise of Ambedkar, the Mahar movement took a different turn.

Dr Ambedkar's leadership falls into three phases: the first, beginning in 1924 and ending in 1930; the second, beginning in 1930 with the emphasis on the acquisition of political power to improve the socioeconomic position; and the third, in which he embraced Buddhism and led a revolt against Hinduism. In the first phase, in 1924, he took part in the Sanskritization activity. After realizing that the Hindus would not concede religious rights to the untouchables on equal footing, he put forth a radical program.

He led the Satyagraha campaign at Mahad in 1927 against the ban on the use of water of a lake. Dr Ambedkar led a group of people and drank water. The largest Satyagraha took place in 1930 at Nasik. It was organized by Dr Ambedkar and local leaders.

It was called the Kala Ram Satyagraha involving untouchables making efforts to enter temples. He participated in another Satyagraha in 1955 to gain entry to the Parvati temple in Pune. The untouchables, led by Sivaram Kambla and Rajbhoj with some Maratha and Brahmin sympathizers, joined in a four-month effort to enter the gates of the Parvati hill temple.

In all the aforementioned mass movements, untouchables participated with great enthusiasm. For the first time the untouchables had themselves undergone the sufferings and humiliation along with the people of his community, and who had seen them suffer various kinds of disabilities. Given such a leadership, self-confidence rose among the untouchables regarding their ability to fight in an organized way and they started looking up to Ambedkar with a lot of respect.

## **AD DHARM**

Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia (14 January 1886 – 22 April 1980) was the founder of the Ad Dharm movement. He belonged to a family of leather workers from a village called Mugowal in Hoshiarpur district. His father wanted to educate him so that he could be of help in his leather

business – for instance, in reading the orders drafted in English. Despite hailing from a relatively well-off family, Mangu Ram faced social exclusion for his so-called low birth at his school in a nearby village called Bajwara and was forced to quit studies abruptly without completing his matriculation. Thereafter, in search of a comfortable life, like the early emigrants from Doaba, Mangu Ram also arrived in the United States of America in 1909. He worked in the lumber industry and farms to make a living. That was the time when Punjabi emigrants in North America were planning to form a radical organization for the liberation of colonial India. Mangu Ram became an active member of the Ghadar Lehar (movement) founded in 1913. He was one of the five members of a Ghadrute group who were assigned the herculean task of ferrying weapons to India for an armed rebellion against the British rule. But SS Maverick, the ship that was bought to transport weapons was caught en route and Mangu Ram ended up in the Philippines, where he spent the following 12 years incognito. When he finally returned to his native village in 1925, it took everyone by surprise because rumours of his alleged hanging had got there ahead of him.

Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia is to Punjab what Mahatma Jotirao Phule is to Maharashtra. Just as Maharashtra's Shudratishudra movement was conceived and initiated by Phule, Punjab Untouchables' movement was conceived and initiated by Mangu Ram. Phule considered Maharashtra's Shudratishudras to be indigenes or aborigines. Similarly, Mangu Ram saw Punjab's Untouchables as the indigenes or aborigines. If Phule was influenced by the writings of Thomas Paine (1737-1809), the English-born American political activist, theorist, philosopher and revolutionary, Mangu Ram learnt his lessons of equality and freedom from the proclaimed democratic and liberal values of the US where he came into contact, during his sojourn, with the revolutionary freedom fighters popularly known as Ghadari Babas of the historic Ghadar Lehar. This cemented his resolve to fight for a dignified life for the masses by liberating India from the clutches of the British Empire, and to establish in its place a democratic and egalitarian home rule that secured equality and freedom for all, irrespective of caste, class, creed, language, gender and regional differentiations.

On return to his native village, after spending 16 years abroad, Mangu Ram though was shocked to see that the practice of untouchability continued unhindered. In his own words: "While living abroad I had forgotten about the hierarchy of high and low, and untouchability, and under this delusion returned home in December 1925. The disease from which I had escaped started tormenting me again. I wrote about all this to my leader Lala Hardyal ji, saying that until and unless this disease is cured, Hindustan could not be liberated. Hence, in accordance with his orders, a programme was formulated in 1926 for the awakening and upliftment of the Achhut qaum [Untouchable community] of India" (Kaumi Udarian 1986: 23-24). Consequently, he decided to dedicate the rest of his life for the emancipation and empowerment of his fellow so-called low-caste people. He established an elementary school in his native village for the Untouchables, who later came to be designated Scheduled Castes under the Government of India (Scheduled Castes) order, 1936, which contained a list (or schedule) of castes throughout the

British-administered provinces. Following in the footsteps of his revolutionary Ghadarite leadership in the US, he aspired to both fight against the caste-based social evil of untouchability and to replace it with an all-encompassing social freedom, and for India's political freedom. Like Phule in Maharashtra, he faced stiff opposition from the so-called upper castes in his fierce struggle against oppressive structures of domination.

The Ad Dharm movement pioneered by Mangu Ram soon became a household name among the Untouchables of Punjab like the Satyashodak Samaj movement was in Maharashtra. Seth Kishan Das of Bootan Mandi – a well-known local leather merchant – helped build the headquarters of the movement, called “Ad Dharm Mandal”, in Jalandhar. Mangu Ram's untiring efforts took the movement to the doorsteps of all the Untouchables in the region and he soon emerged as their cult figure. Under the flag of Ad Dharm movement, he fought for the long-denied land rights of the SCs who were legally debarred, along with other non-agricultural castes, from owning agricultural land under the Land Alienation Act of 1900. Moreover, under the local customary law, popularly known as “rayit-nammas”, the lower castes were also deprived of ownership rights to the plots on which their houses stood in the segregated neighbourhoods. They were not allowed to build pucca houses. They would build mud/thatched houses and in return were supposed to perform some begar (forced labour without wages) in the farms of the legal owners of their residential plots.

### **Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia**

Another important campaign that the Ad Dharm movement undertook was for special legal provision of education and reservation in government employment for the Untouchables. It was for the first time that the Untouchables could come together to fight for a dignified life and to collectively press for their long-pending claim for a share in the local structures of power.

In the wake of the limited democratic political process prised from the British government in 1919 for the institutionalization of the electoral system, every community was busy in organizing its respective members into socio-political force (political party/social organization). As a young man who had returned from the US and the Philippines and who had been meticulously chiselled in the company of the Ghadarite Babas, Mangu Ram was able to bring together many of his fellow community members to build a separate social and political organization on a par with that of the upper-caste communities like the Hindu Mahasabha of the upper-caste Hindus, Muslim League of the Muslims and Singh Sabhas of the Sikhs. This limited election-based legislature-forming-process also led to the formation of similar Adi movements in other parts of the country, such as Adi-Andhra, Adi-Dravida and Adi-Karnataka in South India, and Adi-Hindu in Uttar Pradesh. Though these different Adi movements emerged almost at the same time in different regions of the country, there is no evidence to prove that one gave rise to another. Each Adi movement was influenced by the prevailing local situation.



In the poster announcing the first annual meeting of the Ad Dharm movement, Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia, along with Swami Shudranand and Babu Thakur Chand, devoted the entire space to the hardships faced by the Mulnivasis at the hands of the caste Hindus. He also made an appeal to the Mulnivasis to come together to chalk out a programme for their liberation and upliftment.

Keen readers of Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia have observed that he was conflicted on the issue of the British Raj. On the one hand, he feared even greater oppression under Hindu majoritarian rule than under the British – whom he also viewed as possible partners in facilitating a more equal Indian society – but on the other hand he aspired for the dignity of national independence, which necessitated the removal of the British. This remained a recurring paradox in his political approach till Indian Independence in 1947. In the meantime, he, along with other leaders of the Ad Dharm movement, chose to restore the lost dignity and freedom of the Untouchables by detaching them completely from Hinduism and reconsolidating them into their own ancient religion (Ad Dharm). The long domination by the Aryans, they alleged, made them oblivious of their native religion.

Thus, what made the Ad Dharm movement the most politically noticeable and popular of its time was the farsightedness of its visionary leaders in setting the goal of bringing diverse Untouchable communities under a single flag and to transform them into a distinct single community that was part of the Punjabi qaum. This was the most crucial political move on the part of Mangu Ram, the master strategist, who intervened at the vital moment when limited direct elections were scheduled to be held in the state. He pressed for a separate religion for the Untouchables of Punjab to be recorded in the 1931 Census, who in his opinion weren't Hindus, Sikhs, Muhammadans or Christians. Mangu Ram would reiterate that the Untouchables were the original inhabitants – Mulnivasis (indigenes/aborigines) – of this nation. He would say that the alien Aryan invaders deprived them of their kingdom, looted them, and finally enslaved them. In his brilliant article entitled Achhut da Swaal (The Question of Untouchability), published in the Kirti monthly of the Kirti Kisan party in 1929, Shaheed Bhagat Singh, writing under the pseudonym of Vidrohi, supported the Ad Dharm leadership in its tirade against the caste system and for a separate religion, but at the same time also cautioned them to keep their distance from the British.

Mangu Ram would say that the Mulnivasis, the natives of this region, had forgotten their gurus and other religious symbols during their long period of persecution under the rule of the outsiders. They had been condemned as impure and declared unfit to have their own theology. In order to establish and legitimize their hegemony over the enslaved Mulnivasis, the Aryan invaders declared themselves the top three Varnas (Brahmans, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas) in the fourfold Chatur-Varnavyavastha. The natives of the conquered land were pushed into the fourth Varna of Shudras – consisting of the artisan castes – and still others were reduced into lowest of the low castes, contemptuously dubbed as Varna-less and untouchable.

The assertion by Mangu Ram that the Untouchables were the original inhabitants of this land had an enormous psychological impact on them. It instilled in them pride and self-esteem and provided a theological basis for their new identity. The Ad Dharm was based on the teachings of the saint-poets of the Bhakti movement, particularly Ravidas, Valmiki, Kabir and Namdev. In fact, the leaders of the Ad Dharm movement placed Guru Ravidas at the centre of their discourse around which the entire socio-political and spiritual paraphernalia of the movement and separate religion was woven. In this way, Mangu Ram played the dominant role in defining the markers of a distinct identity and restoring lost heroes, gurus, and rich cultural heritage to the natives. He imbued them with the yearning to become rulers themselves.

Mangu Ram's efforts paid off when the British government caved in to the Ad Dharmis demand and granted Ad Dharm the status of a separate religion. During the Census of 1931, around half a million Scheduled Castes in Punjab declared themselves as followers of their newly recognized religion Ad Dharm, or Ad Dharmis. Another equally great achievement of the Ad Dharm movement was that it swept the reserved provincial assembly seats of Punjab in the 1937 and 1946 elections, which made it an important stakeholder in the legislature, perhaps for the first time in the history of the Untouchables in colonial India.

Moreover, the Ad Dharm movement proved to be the fertile ground for the sowing of seeds of the mission of Babasaheb Dr B.R. Ambedkar in Punjab. During Dr Ambedkar's struggle for a separate electorate for the Depressed Classes at the London Round Table conferences, Mangu Ram supported him. He sent many telegrams supporting Ambedkar during his confrontation with Mahatma Gandhi over the question of the leadership of the Depressed Classes in India.

Eminent American social scientist Mark Juergensmeyer has documented in his classic *Religious Rebels in the Punjab: The Ad Dharm Challenge to Caste*, the incredible contribution made by Ad Dharm movement in generating social and political consciousness among the lowest of the low to help them rise against the centuries-old discriminatory caste system and to establish an egalitarian socio-political order modelled on Guru Ravidas' Begampura.

Both Jotirao Phule and Babu Mangu Ram were moved by the plight of a large oppressed population in their respective regions, the Shudras and Atishudras in Maharashtra and the Untouchables in Punjab, which they themselves were part of, and mobilized them against the oppression. Both Phule and Mangu Ram traced the oppression to the invasion of their land by Aryans who had arrived from Central Asia and to the perpetuation of the subjugation of the natives (Mulnivasis) through the myths propagated in the form of scriptures written by the invaders. In the brilliantly articulated alternative sociopolitical narratives of Phule and Mangu Ram, we thus have the foundation for an alternative politics for an egalitarian social order across the various spatial-cultural regions of India. We have in them the foundation to build the Ambedkarian discourse of social democracy and eventually bring about the "annihilation of caste".

## **SCHEDULED TRIBAL MOVEMENTS**

The tribal movement in India was of two kinds. First kind of movement challenged their dictators like landowners, money-lenders, merchants, contractors), government administrators and Christian missionaries. The second movement was associated with the Indian, national movement. As per reports there were over 70 tribal rebellions over a time frame of 70 years ranging from 1778 to 1948. These uprisings were anti-colonial in varying gradations. Some of the noteworthy tribal revolts took place in:

- Chotanagpur region-Tamar revolt (1789-1832)
- Kherwar movement of Santhals (1833)
- Santhal revolt of 1855
- Munda's movement (1895-1901)
- Tribals and National Movement in Orissa (1921-.36)
- Tribal movements in Assam in the late 19th century

The tribal groups lived in comparative isolation for centuries and despite their acquaintances with the non-tribal people, they continued to maintain their separate identity. Every tribal group preserved its identifiable socio-religious and traditional life along with political and economic institutions.

### **The Santhal Insurrection (1855-1857)**

The santhal rebellion was the most serious challenge faced by the british east india company. the santhals were a peace loving community of bihar region. The permanent settlement act of 1875 brought their land under the jurisdiction of british. Many government officials were appointed to divide and distribute the land. The santhals fled the area and shifted to rajmahal hills. But the acquisition soon reached up to the hills as well. The officials set up their base there and used santhal labor for the railway project started in the area. With the british came the zamindars, traders and moneylenders. Santhals' trade worked on barter system but with the new economy, they felt the need of money. The moneylenders gave out loans with very high interest rates. And santhals were forced to give away their possessions in return of the money. Sometimes, the women were taken away forcefully by british officials or zamindars. This led to great dissatisfaction among them. Two brothers, sindhu and kanhu, rose against these dreadful activities. On 30 june 1855, 10,000 santals assembled at the bhagnadihi fields and pledged to establish a free santal state. Common people like blacksmiths, potters, carpenters and weavers supported them. Other leaders were brothers chand and bhairav, bir singh and pramanik. The number of rebels rose up to 50,000.

They targeted railway stations, post offices, police stations, European bungalows and Zamindars' houses. They bravely fought with only bows and arrows with the armed British soldiers and nearly brought British rule down from Bhagalpur to Munghyr. Trouble spread to Birbhum and

Murshidabad as well. Postal and rail services were thoroughly disrupted. Several British armies were dispatched to quell the rebellion. At last in February 1856 the uprising was suppressed and 23,000 rebels were slaughtered. Sindhu, Kanhu and other leaders were hanged, prisoners got jail terms of seven to 14 years and 36 Santal villages were destroyed.

The Santal Revolt was essentially a peasant revolt. People from all professions and communities such as potters, blacksmiths, weavers, leather workers and doms joined in. It was distinctly anti-British in nature.

Due to the Santhal rebellion, the Santhal areas began to be considered as Santhal Paragana. Due to the insurrection, the British recognized the tribal status of the Santhals and now they came under the uniform administration.

### **Munda Revolt (1895-1901)**

The movement of Birsa Munda is the most popular movement of the Munda tribes of Singhbhum and Ranchi districts of the Chotanagpur region of Bihar. Before the introduction of the British policies in the areas inhabited by Oraon and Munda, their traditional land and social systems had existed. Their land system was known as 'Khuntkari system'. The land was distributed through customary rights and there were no landlords. The tribals worked on their land and paid tributes to their chiefs. By 1874, the British replaced the traditional khuntkari system by the Zamindaris system. The introduction of Zamindaris system created the classes of Zamindars (landlords) and ryots (tenants). The tribals now had to pay rent to the landlords and failure to do so resulted in their eviction from land. The landlords exploited the tribals in the many ways. Even the social system of the tribals did not remain unaffected by the British policies. Their clan councils which provided them justice without any fees were replaced by the modern courts. Apart from the exploitation and oppression of the Mundas caused by the outsiders and the disruption caused to their traditional social and political systems: natural calamities also worsened their conditions. Two famines in 1896-97 and 1890-1900 made them suffer from starvation. The mundas held the dikus and the missionaries responsible for their miseries.

The movement was led by Birsa Munda. He felt that this freedom could be achieved by ending the oppression of the dikus and by driving the British out of their territory or by killing them. He announced the establishment of the Birsa Raj, in which nobody but only Birsa could be obeyed. He asked the Mundas not to pay rent. The government arrested Birsa on 22 August 1895. He was convicted along with others on 19 November 1895. The arrest of Birsa increased the anti-government bias of the movement. He was later released. The movement took a violent form. It broke out on 24 December 1899. The tribals attacked the outsiders with traditional weapons i.e. arrows and burnt their houses. On 28 January, two leading Munda Sardars and 32 others surrendered following the attachment of their property. Police arrested Birsa on 3 February 1900. He died of chronic dysentery on 9 January 1900. The result of the trial weakened the Munda movement.

The movement had its impact on the government attitude towards their problems. It decided to abolish the compulsory begar system and passed the Tenancy Act of 1903 which recognised the Mundari Khuntkatti system. The 'Government' also passed the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act in 1908. Birsa became a legend for the coming generations.

The tribal movements in the North-East region of India were also politico-religious in nature. Due to the majority of the tribes in the region, and their economic and social position, the movements were hardly socioeconomic in character.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS**

Environmental movements are generally understood as those movements that are taken up against the development projects as the latter depend on vast amounts of natural resources and their injudicious use and exploitation. The concept of development is usually prevalent in a market economy, where 'development' is associated with the material progress of the individual and the maximum extent to which he/she can enjoy the fruits of materialistic progress. It promotes a thorough consumerist lifestyle, even projecting the lavishness of the lifestyle as a basic necessity. This brings in with it the concept of 'resource exploitation' through 'conquest over nature', which is highly mistaken as available in abundance. It overlooks the fact that nature provides only to a certain extent and that resource depletion poses major threat to human survival. Therefore the movements are often organised to protest against the exploitation of the nature thus bringing in the concept of ecological and environmental sustainability.

### **Chipko Movement**

The Chipko movement in the central Himalayan region in the early 1970s is credited with establishing modern environmentalism and environmental movements in India. The Chipko movement, which was started to defend Himalayan forests from destruction before independence, has its origins in the pre-independence era. During the early decades of the twentieth century, many protests against colonial forest policies were organised. People's main demand during these rallies was that the forest's benefits, particularly the right to fodder, be distributed to locals. These fights have continued in the post-independence era, as independent India's forest laws are identical to those of colonial India.

During the year 1973, 'Chipko' [chipak jayenge – to hug] was born. The forest department declined to give ash trees to the Dasholi Gram Swarajya Sangha (DGSS), a local cooperative centred in the Chamoli regions, to create agricultural tools in early 1973. The forest department, on the other hand, assigned ash trees to Symonds Co., a private firm. The DGSS was prompted by this occurrence to protest the injustice by lying down in front of lumber trucks and burning resin and timber warehouses, as was done during the Quit India movement. When these tactics proved inadequate, one of the leaders, Chandi Prasad Bhat, recommended hugging the trees, and thus 'Chipko' was born. This type of protest was crucial in convincing the private enterprise not to cut down the ash trees. As a result of its success, the movement extended to other nearby

communities, and the movement came to be known as the Chipko movement internationally. From its inception, the Chipko movement focused on environmental issues such as forest depletion and soil erosion.

### **The Chipko movement's success was due to three main factors:**

First is the intimate relationship between local people's livelihoods and the nature of the movement. Chipko is seen by the locals as a war for fundamental survival, which has been denied to them by the state's institutions and policies (Guha, 1989). Furthermore, the uniqueness of the Chipko movement is due to the peculiarity of the locality where it took place, the engagement of women in household sustenance, and the overwhelming support for anti-alcohol campaigns.

Second, the nature of agitation in this regard is to be considered. Chipko, unlike other environmental initiatives, has completely adhered to Gandhi's nonviolent freedom struggle tradition.

Third, the simplicity and sincerity of leaders such as Sunderlal Bahuguna, as well as their connections to national leaders such as Mrs Indira Gandhi, other politicians, and officials, contributed significantly to the movement's success.

### **The Chipko movement's demands were as follows:**

Complete stoppage on commercial tree cutting;

Traditional rights should be recognised based on people's basic needs

Making the arid forest green by increasing people's participation in tree cultivation

Formation of village committees to manage forests

Development of forest-related home-based industries and making raw materials available as well as money and technique for it

Priority to be given to afforestation considering local conditions, varieties and requirements.

What makes the Chipko movement unique is that it served as a predecessor and direct inspiration for several subsequent popular movements in defence of community rights to natural resources. These conflicts sometimes centred around woods, and other times they evolved around the control and the usage of pasture, mineral, or fish resources.

### **Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA)**

The Narmada River Project spans three western Indian states. Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra. No other development project in India has pushed the scale and severity of eco-development issues to such a high level of informed debate, political mobilisation, and grassroots

activity like this one. The controversy surrounding this project has posed several challenges to the government at all levels, while also allowing it to establish and strengthen ties with civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on both a national and international level. This project influenced India's political debate on alternative development.

The Sardar Sarovar Project, an interstate multi-purpose project with a huge dam at its end in Gujarat, was being developed on the Narmada River, India's fifth longest river with a length of 1312 kilometres.

With its two megaprojects, the Sardar Sarovar Project and the Narmada Sagar Project in Madhya Pradesh, the Narmada Valley Project is the world's largest single river valley project to create the world's largest man-made lake.

The project's repercussions, on the other hand, are fairly obvious and disturbing. The reservoir would engulf 37,000 hectares of land, including 11,000 hectares of forest. Around one lakh people will be displaced from 248 villages in Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh. The project was started by the state government because Gujarat was one of India's most water-scarce regions, with a severe lack of water for domestic, commercial, agricultural, and industrial requirements. Furthermore, between 1985 and 1988, the state had one of the greatest droughts in its history, bolstering the need for this endeavour.

Critics, on the other hand, see it as "the world's worst man-made ecological disaster" and believe it is unsustainable. It should be noted that the Narmada project was initially intended to be an irrigation project with a 161-foot-high dam. It was later discovered that if the dam's level was raised to 455 feet, water could be technologically harnessed, making it a multipurpose dam. As a result, state governments began asking for funds not only from the federal government but also from the World Bank.

In 1946, plans for damming the river Gora in Gujarat arose. In 1961, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru laid the foundation for the construction of a 49.8-meter-high dam. The dam planners thought that a much larger dam would be more profitable after analysing the new maps. The only issue was reaching an agreement with Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, two adjacent states.

In 1969, the Indian government established the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal, after years of negotiations attempting to agree on a feasible water-sharing formula. Ten years later, it announced its award – the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal Award. The award envisaged that land should be made available to the ousters at least a year before submergence.

The World Bank approved a \$450 million financing for the largest dam, the Sardar Sarovar, in 1985, before the Ministry of Environment even cleared the Narmada Valley Development Projects in 1987. In reality, work on the Sardar Sarovar dam site has been going on in bits and pieces since 1961, but it got serious in 1988. 154 questions were raised about the government's promises of a relocation and rehabilitation programme. As a result, each state established a

people's organisation to handle these issues. Soon after, these disparate groups merged to create the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), or Save the Narmada Movement, led by social activist Medha Patkar.

It should be noted that the NBA began as a campaign for knowledge on the Narmada Valley Development Projects, but has since evolved into a fight for just rehabilitation for the tens of thousands of people who would be displaced by the Sardar Sarovar Dam and other huge dams along the Narmada River. When it became evident that the project's size made proper damage and loss assessments impossible, and that restoration was impossible, the movement challenged the project's entire foundation and called into doubt its claim to development.

The NBA demanded that all development on the Narmada Valley Development Projects be formally halted in 1988. More than 50,000 people from all over India gathered in the valley in September 1989 to promise to combat "destructive development." Thousands of villagers marched and paddled to a small town in Madhya Pradesh a year later to renew their vow to drown rather than agree to be relocated. Under pressure, the World Bank was obliged to establish the Morse Commission, an independent assessment commission. Its report, the Morse Report, was published in 1992. The report "endorsed all the main concerns raised by the Andolan (NBA).

The Pamela Cox Committee was appointed by the Bank two months later. It was also referred to as "a sort of patchwork remedy to try and salvage the operation" that was exactly what the Morse Report cautioned against. The World Bank eventually withdrew from the Sardar Sarovar Project due to the international controversy caused by the Report. The Gujarat government decided to raise \$200 million and move on with the project.

Many of the project's concerns have yet to be resolved. What is more essential, though, is that the Movement has been successful to a considerable extent.

### **The achievements of the movements are:**

In 1993, the World Bank left Sardar Sarovar.

Construction of the Sardar Sarovar was halted between 1994 and 1999.

Foreign investors have pulled out of the Maheshwar dam project. 1999-2001.

The NBA is unique in that it emphasised the significance of people's right to inform themselves, which the authorities eventually forced them to accept under media and public pressure. It was successful not only in mobilising hundreds of thousands of people from many walks of life to put pressure on the State government for its anti-people policies, which impacted and displaced thousands of tribals from their homes and livelihoods. It also drew a lot of support from around the world.



## **SOCIAL REFORM MOVEMENTS**

The Indian society in the first half of the 19th century was caste-ridden, decadent and rigid. The conquest of India by the British during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, exposed some serious weaknesses and drawbacks of Indian social institutions. When the British came to India, they introduced the English language as well as certain modern ideas. These ideas were those of liberty, social and economic equality, fraternity, democracy and justice which had a tremendous impact on Indian society. As a consequence, several individuals and movements sought to bring about changes in social and religious practices with a view to reforming and revitalizing society.

These efforts, collectively known as the Renaissance, were complex social phenomena. It is important to note that this phenomenon occurred when India was under the colonial domination of the British. There were some enlightened Indians like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chand Vidyasagar, Dayanand Saraswati and many others who were willing to fight and bring reforms to society so that it could face the challenges of the West.

### **Vaikom Satyagraha**

The Vaikom Satyagraha in Travancore is today known as Kerala is the first anti-caste movement. This movement was against the caste system as the pupil of the depressed class and untouchables were restricted from entering the temple. The movement originated and took its place at Vaikom, then part of the princely state Travancore in the vicinity of Mahadev temple in Kottayam district of Kerala during the period of 1924-1925.

### **Background:**

In AICC (All India Congress Committee) meeting in Kakinada 1923, T. K Madhavan along with Sardar Panikkar and K. P. Kesava Menon submitted a petition to the Travancore legislative council appealing to grant the right to temple entry and worship of gods for all sections of the society irrespective of caste, creed, and community while giving continuous memorandums to the Royal Government for abolishing and the ban for marginalized and depressed castes to access Vaikom's temple and roads.

The efforts of T.K Madhavan were heard and the Congress party considered the eradication of untouchability in their forthcoming constructive programs and owed to lend full support to the Vaikom Movement. The charges for this constructive program were passed to Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC). Thus as per the Kakinada Congress resolution and considering its importance and need the KPCC held a meeting on 24 January 1924, at Ernakulam to give the initial shape and thus form an Untouchability Abolition Committee (UAC) with leading heads namely T. K. Madhavan, Kurur Neelakandan Namboodiripad, K. Kelappan (convener), T R Krishnaswamy Iyer, and K. Velayudha Menon. Five other members including T. K. Madhavan were core members of A Publicity Committee to propagate the movement.

## **Vaikom Movement:**

The Vaikom Satyagraha was launched on 30th March 1924. The first chosen place for the initiation of the Satyagraha was the four public roads proceeding to the Shiva Shrine in Vaikom where 'marginalized, depressed caste and untouchables were imposed with restrictions upon entry.

The leading Satyagrahis namely Kunjappu, Venniyil Govinda Panicker, and Bahuleyan lead the procession walking hand in hand towards the Shiva shrine where a message was displayed that Ezhavas and other lower caste including the marginalized sections of the society are restricted to make use of the pavement (road) for any of its utilities. The policemen guarding the road hindered their walk and ask them their caste. Kunjappu would declare his Pulayan caste, Bahuleyan would say his Ezhava caste, and Venniyil Govinda Panicker would assert as Nair. They would be denied entry as they belong to a 'lower caste'. The three men would, however, be firm on their stand and would be arrested. As the group of three would be arrested, more Satyagrahis will come for their replacement, marking the commencement of the Vaikom Satyagraha

On 7th April 1924, TK Madhavan and KP Kesava Menon were also arrested which ignited more volunteers to come from Tamil areas and join the movement.

The Travancore's jails got protestors rising in number, however, the temple authorities used cunning tactics of barricading the roads stalling police patrols.

The satyagrahis owing to their peaceful protest tactics just stationed themselves outside the barricade and went on hunger strike for days. Many satyagrahis were witnessed standing in waist-deep water to symbolize their strong willingness to protest.

The Akali society of Punjab also extended their support to the Vaikom Satyagraha and set up a kitchen to provide food to the satyagrahis.

One of the prominent figures Periyar E.V Ramaswamy, a man who could now be called as 'Father of Modern Tamil Nadu' was known for arousing the 'Self-Respect Movement' against Brahmanical orthodoxy and superiority and highlighted how marginalized castes are being subjected to exploitation. He also join the struggle and is popularly known as the only Satyagrahi who was arrested twice, thus earning him the title of Vaikom Virar (the fearless hero of Vaikom).

Non-Hindus gave their support, like barrister George Joseph in Kerala, Bhajematharam Mathunni, and Abdul Rahman, the Editor-in-Chief of Young India extended their support to Satyagraha.

Sree Narayana Guru also extended his support and co-operation to the Vaikom Satyagraha. Guru was against the caste system and orthodox discrimination prevalent in Hindu society. He has

given Vellore Mutt near Vaikom to set the head office for the Satyagrahis. He ordered two of his favourite disciples Swami Sathyavathan and Kottukoikal Velayudhan to look after the work of Satyagraha.

The Vaikom Satyagraha witnessed Women's Empowerment as a large number of women seem to be actively participating in the movement on such a large scale for the first time. This active participation opened a pathway for women in Sociopolitical affairs and to be an integral part of it. Women such as Meenakshi Amma, Narayani Amma, Nagammai Amma, and Thirumalai Amma, were leading women warriors of the Satyagraha, inspiring women from across the country to participate in the movement and fight.

### **Role of Gandhiji in Vaikom Satyagraha:**

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi felt that the support of the Savarnas (forward castes) was needed at this time for the peak point of the Vaikom Movement. Thus, he suggested that a procession consisting of only Savarnas should march to Trivandrum to show their support. As a result on 1st October 1924, a troop of Savarnas marched and lead the procession to submit an appealing petition to the Regent Maharani Sethu Lakshmi Bai of Travancore consisting of 25000 signatures to open the gates temple for everyone caste. Gandhiji also confronted the Regent Maharani. This procession of Savarnas was Mannath Padmanabhan Nair led the savannas procession. The procession started with a small number of 500 people at Vaikom ended with 5000 when the procession arrived at Thiruvananthapuram in November 1924.

The memorandum of appeal was given to the Maharani Sethulakshmi Bai of Travancore for opening the Vaikom temple roads for all castes. The petition was overviewed in the legislative council as it was passed by Maharani, but it lost to win by a narrow margin of votes. This defeat lowered the morale of the satyagrahis, and elated the escalating atrocities of Brahmin orthodoxy.

### **Self-Respect Movement**

E.V. Ramaswami Naicker gave a concrete shape to his ideas on social reform by founding the Suyamariyati iyakkam otherwise known as the Self-Respect Movement. It was a reform movement dedicated to the goal of giving non-Brahmins a sense of pride based on their Dravidianist past. The movement denied the superiority of the Brahmins and their implicit faith in the present system. The movement sought to turn the present social system topsy-turvy and establish a living bond of union among all the people irrespective of caste or creed, including the untouchables. One of the essential points was a denial of the mythology of Hinduism by which, it contended that, the unsuspecting were made victims of the Brahmins. Since the Brahmin was seen as a leader of the social and religious life of Tamil Nadu, he became the target of 'Self-Respect' attacks.

The tone of the movement was determined by EVR, who represented a new type of leader in Tamil Nadu. He was uneducated in English and able to. Speak only in Tamil in the popular

idiom. The self-movement concentrated almost entirely on the Tamil Districts. It covered primarily the groups low in the social hierarchy: like the Vanniya Kula Kshatriyas and the untouchables. Special efforts were also directed at women and young people. Because of the directness and simplicity of its message, the illiterate and semi-educated in the rural areas turned to the movement. This was a new development in Tamil Nadu politics.

The Justice Party, Which claimed to be the sole representative of the non-Brahmins did not bother to cover these groups. In fact the leadership of the Justice Party was drawn from the landowning groups and attempted its cover the middle classes and landowning classes.

Even before the Self-Respect Movement was founded in 1925, EVR started expressing his views on the evil in the society. The Tamil language weekly Kudi Arasu (People's Government) founded in May 1924 became the organ of the Self-Respect Movement. It was specially directed at certain non-Brahmin groups that had not been reached by the Justice Party's Dravidian. Shortly after 1930, Ramaswami Naicker began a Tamil daily called Viduthalai (Freedom) and in 1935 he started a Tamil monthly called Pakkuthariuu (commonsense). But in the late 20's Kudi Arasu was the movement's propaganda weapon.

Since the Self-Respect Movement had as its target the Brahminical tradition, its symbol came under attack. On a number of occasions, the manuscript was burned. Certain characters in the puranas were changed. For instance, Ravana in the Valmiki's Ramayana was held up as the hero and be an ideal of good Dravidian conduct. Rama was seen as a wicked and unjust Aryan.

Attack of this kind on Hindu scriptures and its symbols however were. Criticized even by non-Brahmin leaders apart from Brahmins. But their criticisms did not have any impact on the Self-Respect Movement's tone. The propaganda of the Self-Respect Movement continued and even grew sharper. Songs about self-respect leaders were printed and distributed and pamphlets were issued to explain the movement's aims. Some of these caricatured the characters of the Hindu pantheon. One of them was Vasittira tevarkal kortu (wonderful court of Deities) published in 1919.

The most important of the early activities of the Self-Respect Movement was the convening of the first Provincial Self-Respect Conference at Chingleput on February 17, 1929. The conference proceedings reflected its strong egalitarian bias and its determination to boycott Brahmin priests, its desire to attract young - people and women and above all its commitment to what it considered to be Dravidian civilization.

At this conference many resolutions were passed. One called on members to 'refuse money for the construction of temples or for the employment of priests or intermediaries. Another condemned Varnashrama dharma and arbitrary division of society into Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras, and Panchamans, and repudiated belief in superiority based on the "accident of birth". Another resolution condemned the use of all suffixes and terminations connotative of

caste. And as for women, a resolution was passed claiming for them the same rights of inheritance as men and advocating that marriage should be terminable at the will of either party. True to their spirit, self-respecters uphold a total disbelief in the religious validity of Brahmins. "Self-Respect weddings" without the use of Brahmin priests became common.

Though some Congress leader like P. Vardarajulu Naidu opposed resolutions, like refusal to give 'fund to temples for renovation purpose, these resolutions remained the main plank of the Self-Respect Movement. But anti-religious tone of the management was moderated by EVR after his visit to the Soviet Union. He toured the Soviet Union for three months as the leader of the Rationalistic; Association of South India, a new name given to the Self-Respect Movement, when he was on tour in Russia, he visited other parts of Europe as well.

The visit to the Soviet Union had a deeper impact on EVR. He was inspired by the "Phenomenal progress" the Russians had made in agriculture and industry and attributed this to Russian systems. He, therefore, maintained that unless / India also made radical changes on the lines of the Soviet system, there would not be any meaningful system in the country.

Soon after the return from the Soviet Union, EVR sought the assistance of Singaravelu Chetti who was a prominent communist in South India to frame a new programme. The new programme envisaged the formation of two wings within the body of Self-Respect League Samadharma (Communist) Party of South India. Both aimed at achieving political independence for the country through constitutional methods, distribution and public transport, amelioration of the condition of the industrial and the agricultural labourers and working with redoubled vigour for the original aims of the Self-Respect Movement. These aims of the two wings of the movement were termed as the Erode Programme.

He carried on his propaganda on Socialism and Social reform through his Kudi Arasu and other organs. But his editorial in Kudi Arasu 'Why today's Government should be overthrown, forced the Government to arrest him and charge' him with inciting the people to overthrow the constituted authority by force." EVR did not challenge the charge but sent a written statement to the court to this effect: "For the last 7 or 8 years I have been propagating the principles of Socialism and in a democratic way with the aim of bringing about social and economic equality among the people. This is in no way an offence. Followers should be prepared to face such repressive measures that might be let loose by the government."

But after his release, he did not stick to political programme of the Self-Respect Movement. He increasingly came to concentrate on the social reform question. Side by side, he carried on a political propaganda as well against the Justice Party for ignoring the interests of the non-Brahmins to defeat the Congress candidates in the municipal and legislative elections. But defeat of the Justice Party candidates in the Legislative elections in 1936 showed that the Justice Party was no longer a political force. But EVR moved closer to the Justice Party rather than to the Congress which won the elections.

The self-respect movement sowed its seed during the Indian freedom struggle. At the earlier stage Backward Class movement meant the non-Brahmin movement. The non -Brahmin movement had two aims

Demanding the sanction of more concessions and privileges (which would cause discrimination against the Brahmins) to surpass Brahmins in education and social status.

### **Achieving "Swayam Maryada or self-respect.**

This movement formed a part of the many social reforms occurred during that period. Periyar E.V Ramaswami was the leader of this movement. It was a popular movement, which occurred in Tamil Nadu in 1925. Its main aim was to improve upon the socio-economic conditions of the low castes Tamils. Later it had profound implications. The main objectives of this movement were inculcation and dissemination of knowledge of political education. Right to lead life with dignity and self-respect and do away with the exploitative system based on superstitions and beliefs. Abolition of the evil social practices and protection of women rights. Establishment and maintenance of homes for orphans and widow and opening of educational institutions for them. This movement gained popularity in no time and became a political platform.

Ramaswami Naicker founded the Dravida Kazhagam in 1945. In 1949 C. Annadurai founded the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam-DMK which completely wiped out the domination of the Brahmins in Tamil Nadu. The D.K under the leadership of Naicker continue to pursue anti-Brahmanism in social and cultural fields. Thus the aim of the Backward Class Movement at this stage was to limit the Brahmin monopoly in the two fields of education and appointment to government posts. This movement was by no means a mass movement. The opposition to Brahmin dominance did not come from the low and the oppressed castes but from the leaders of the powerful rural dominant castes such as Reddy and Kammas in Andhra, Vokkaligas and Lingayats in Karnataka etc. These were high caste groups with a social position next to the Brahmins. They included not only the Hindus but also the Muslims, Christians and other communities who also suffered from the same social disabilities.